

SERMONS ON PENANCE,

AND ON

EVERYTHING REQUIRED FOR CHRISTIAN REPENTANCE AND
AMENDMENT OF LIFE.

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

BY THE

REV. FATHER FRANCIS HUNOLT,

Priest of the Society of Jesus, and Preacher in the Cathedral of Treves.

VOLUME I.

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✝ JAMES D. RICARDS, D.D.,

*Bishop of Retimo and Vicar-Apostolic of the
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FIRST SERMON.

ON HEARING THE WORD OF GOD FOR SINNERS WHO ARE THINKING OF DOING PENANCE.

Subject.

The frequent hearing of the word of God in sermons is especially necessary for those sinners who are actually in the state of sin, and who are thinking of repenting. For if they do not hear the word of God, they must, humanly speaking, continue in their unhappy state, and be lost forever.—*Preached on the sixth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Si dimisero eos jejunos in domum suam, deficient in via.—
Mark viii. 3.

“And if I shall send them away fasting to their homes, they will faint in the way.”

Introduction.

Mark, my dear brethren, the wonderful zeal of those pious people; so anxious were they to follow Jesus Christ, and to hear His divine words, that they forgot to provide themselves with food and drink, and had to suffer the pangs of hunger. But at last our merciful Saviour said, “I have compassion on the multitude; for behold, they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat;” if I do not provide them with food, they will perish with hunger: “If I shall send them away fasting to their home, they will faint in the way.” Ah, my dear brethren, would that all Christians nowadays were as anxious and eager to hear the word of God, as some pious souls are, who are wont to say that they would rather go without their meals than miss their usual sermon! Would to God, I say, that all were so disposed! Nor would they therefore have to suffer

hunger; they would rather receive a spiritual strength to keep them from perishing. But, alas! I may well say with Christ, "I have compassion on the multitude;" I pity the numbers of Christians in a city or community, who for three weeks, three months, three years, and even longer, receive no food for their souls, because, through their own culpable negligence, they seldom or never hear the word of God in sermons. I have a heart-felt pity for them; for what will become of their souls? "They will faint in the way;" there is nothing else for them; they will perish on the way to eternity, and be lost forever. I have elsewhere shown that the frequent, and, if possible, constant hearing the word of God in sermons is necessary and most useful to all sorts and conditions of men, that they may work out their salvation properly. To-day I shall prove that the same is true in a special sense for those actually in the state of sin, and I say:

Plan of Discourse.

The frequent hearing of the word of God in sermons is specially necessary for those sinners who are actually in the state of sin, and who are thinking of repenting some time or other; for, if they do not hear the word of God, they must, humanly speaking, continue in their unhappy state, and be lost forever. Such is the whole subject.

A constant hunger to receive food for our souls in sermons, and the speedy repentance and conversion of sinners, are the end and object of this discourse. Help us thereto, O Almighty God, by Thy powerful grace, which we ask of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angel.

If the sinner wishes to save his soul he must repent and be converted to God.

Without losing time in further preamble, I say to every sinner who is actually in the state of sin, if any such are here present, and I sincerely hope that there are none: Either you wish sooner or later to save your soul and go to heaven, or else you have given up all right to heaven, and are determined to be lost forever. One of these alternatives you must choose; there is no third way for you. Have you chosen the latter? Have you made up your mind to burn in the fire of hell amongst the demons? Alas! if such is the case, you are already in a despairing state, and I do not wonder that you have no desire to hear the word of God, to come to a sermon. But I can hardly believe that any Catholic who is in his right senses can form such a desperate resolution as that. Do you then expect some day or

other to save your soul, and to be happy forever with God in heaven? If so, I wish from my heart that your expectation may be fully realized! But if you are really in earnest about it, you must be converted to God by repentance, for that is the one, indispensably necessary means which you must adopt in order to save your soul. And your sorrow and repentance must be sincere, they must come from the very depths of your heart, they must be supernatural, and they must embrace all the sins you have committed. It will not do for you to be like the traitor Judas, who, driven to despair by the intolerable torment that his conscience caused him for having betrayed Jesus Christ, gave back to the high priests the money he had received from them; nor like the wicked king Antiochus, who, influenced by natural fear and dread of the death that was impending over him during his last illness, asked pardon of God, and promised to repent; your repentance must be founded on faith, you must hate and detest all your sins without a single exception, because they have offended God, and you must earnestly purpose never more to commit any sin whatever.

But this repentance and conversion you can never undertake with your natural strength alone; you require thereto the preventing and helping grace of God, and that, too, a special, extraordinary, powerful, and mighty grace, which God is not bound to give to any sinner, since He has the most indisputable right to condemn at once to hell him who has committed a mortal sin; and that grace must be one that enlightens your understanding so that you may see all the malice, gravity, and deformity of your sins, while, at the same time, it moves and impels your will to be sorry for and detest all your sins above all imaginable evils in the world. Now, when and where do you expect this extraordinary grace, which comes solely from the great mercy of God, this sudden change and conversion of your whole heart? Perhaps in your bed, where you waste the morning in unnecessary sleep? Or at home, where your mind is filled to distraction with worldly cares and business? Or at the parties and entertainments at which you spend your time in amusement? Or at table, while you are enjoying yourself eating and drinking and indulging your sensuality? Or even in the house of God, where the precept of the Church compels you to present yourself on Sundays and holydays, if you have still so much fear of the Lord left, and where you hear holy Mass with a cold and distracted heart? No; these are neither the places

This he cannot do without a special preventing grace from God.

nor the occupations in which the holy Spirit of God will find your heart ready for the influence of this great grace.

A grace that God is not wont to give, unless when the heart is disposed for it.

It is true that the Almighty God, in whose hand are the hearts of all men, can give you that grace in any place at any time, under any circumstances, and can at once excite you to true repentance and conversion; but, as theologians teach, He does not generally act in that way; He bestows His grace at a fitting time and in such places and circumstances in which the heart of man is disposed to receive it. I acknowledge that sinners have sometimes been converted suddenly, and, as it were, in a moment, when they were least thinking of such a thing, as was the case with Paul when he was struck blind by a light from heaven, while on his way to imprison and persecute the Christians. Sinners have been converted by being terror-stricken at seeing some dismal phantoms during the night, or because they were frightened by a terrible thunderstorm, or at the sudden death of some friend; or else they have been moved to repent and amend their lives by some great losses or misfortunes, or by having been put to shame before the world, or by having had some grievous illness to suffer. But a conversion of this kind is a rare, unusual, and, so to speak, miraculous event, which you cannot reasonably hope for, and certainly would not wish for. Still another means of repentance and conversion for the sinner is for him to devote his serious attention in the spirit of recollection to the meditation of heavenly things, according to the words of God to the Prophet Osee: "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and will lead her into the wilderness; and I will speak to her heart."¹ That is to say, I will speak to the soul, and represent vividly to her her unhappy state, so as to excite her to repentance and contrition. But a means of this kind is not apt to be adopted by a man of the world, who, being occupied the whole day with worldly cares, hardly knows what to meditate on, and still less by one who, being actually in the state of sin, has closed his heart to the voice and invitation of God. Besides, what inclination or desire could you have to practise meditation in that way? For that desire or inclination is already the first preventing grace that God gives you for your conversion, and according to the usual course of divine Providence, it is bestowed in a fitting time and place on a heart that is more or less disposed to receive it.

¹ Propter hoc, ecce, ego lactabo eam, et ducam eam in solitudinem, et loquar ad eam ejus.
—Osee ii. 14.

Hence there is no other means for you but to hear frequently the word of God in sermons; for the Holy Ghost speaks to the hearts of men by the living voice of His servants, whom He has commissioned to announce His word in His name. And this is the ordinary and at the same time the most powerful means of moving the sinner to true repentance and conversion; this is the two-edged sword, as St. Paul calls it, which penetrates the heart and pierces it with sorrow for sin: "For the word of God is living and effectual, and more piercing than any two-edged sword; and reaching unto the division of the soul and the spirit."¹ This is the burning fire, as God Himself calls it by the Prophet Jeremias, which consumes all earthly and wicked desires and inclinations: "Are not My words as a fire? saith the Lord; and as a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?"² that is to say, have they not the power to move to contrition the heart of a sinner, even when it is hardened in guilt? This is that wonderful light which, as I have already said, displays before the eyes of the sinner the truths of eternity, and wakens him suddenly, by remorse of conscience, out of the deep sleep of sin, so that at last he surrenders to the irresistible influence of the known truth.

The ordinary means is to hear the word of God.

And such has been the experience of many who, through idle curiosity, and while their hearts were still hardened in evil, happened to hear a single sermon, and went away from it filled with true contrition by an unexpected ray of light from heaven. Palladius writes of a certain man named Moses, who, having been deprived of the office he held at court on account of some great crimes he committed, instead of acknowledging his guilt and trying to amend his life, plunged still deeper into the most enormous crimes, until he became at last the chief of a band of robbers. He happened once to enter a church, not out of piety, but probably with the intention of committing a robbery. Fortunately for him, the sermon had just begun, and the preacher was describing the strict account we shall have to render at the judgment seat, the terrible sentence that shall be passed on the wicked, and the joyful invitation that the children of God shall receive to eternal happiness. After hearing this sermon Moses became quite another man; filled with sorrow and weeping bitterly, he left the church and went to an adjacent monastery, where, having got rid of the heavy burden of his

As many have experienced; shown by examples.

¹ *Vivus est enim sermo Dei, et efficax et penetrabilior omni gladio ancipiti et pertingens usque ad divisionem animæ ac spiritus.*—Hebr. iv. 12.

² *Numquid non verba mea sunt quasi ignis, dicit Dominus, et quasi malleus conterens patram?*—Jerem. xxiii. 29.

sins, and having received permission to enter the order, he spent the remainder of his life in the greatest mortification and sanctity. In the *Life of Father Jerome Lopez of our Society*¹ I find a similar account of one who, having been insulted, swore that he would not rest until he had killed his enemy. Determined to glut his vengeance, he armed himself with six loaded pistols, and went into a forest, through which, he knew, his enemy was to pass. Through the mercy of God it happened that he met some peasants and shepherds who were running at full speed. "Where are you going in such a hurry?" he asked. "To the church in the village yonder," was the answer; "some preachers have just arrived there, and we wish to be in time for the sermon." The man at once felt curious to see what the strange preachers were like; he went with the peasants, and arrived in time to hear a sermon on the last judgment. But, long before it was over, he had to surrender to the grace of God; full of sorrow and repentance, he could hardly wait till the sermon was finished, when he fell on his knees before the preacher, and begged to be allowed to make his confession. For twenty-six years his conscience had been burdened by a grievous sin that he had wilfully concealed in confession, and during all that time he had been making bad confessions and Communions, but now, to the priest's great consolation, he laid bare all the wickedness of his life with every sign of sincere sorrow, he accused himself of the revenge he had been meditating, he forgave his enemy from his heart, and left his weapons in the hands of the priest. Such power and might has the word of God over the human heart.

Confirmed
by another
example.

There is another most remarkable example that I cannot help relating. Heroldus in his "*Promptuarium*" tells us of a certain father, a man of great wealth and position, who (as is unfortunately but too often the case nowadays) was rather careless of the religious training of his children. He had two sons and a daughter; the youngest son was so wicked as to commit a horrid crime with his sister, whereat the other son became enraged, and having bitterly reproached his guilty brother, threatened to make known the whole thing to his father. The wicked young man, impatient of reproof and maddened at the thought of his guilt being known, plunged his sword into his brother's side and took to flight immediately. The unhappy father, acknowledging too late the fault he had been guilty of in training his children,

¹ *Vita*, l. ii., c. 5.

disinherited his wicked son. The latter, hearing of this, stole into the house one night and killed his father, while he was asleep, with the same sword with which he had taken away his brother's life. Burdened with those fearful crimes, he despaired of finding mercy from God, and wandered away under an assumed name into foreign countries, where he abandoned himself to all kinds of vice, so that he never thought of receiving the sacraments, or even of hearing Mass, since he looked on himself as already lost. While in this miserable condition he heard of a certain preacher, who spoke so eloquently that people flocked in crowds to hear him. Urged by curiosity, the despairing sinner determined that he, too, would go to hear the great preacher. (O good God, how wonderful is Thy mercy!) And he went to the sermon, which happened to be on the great patience that God displays in bearing with the sinner, and in receiving him again into his favor when he repents. Every word he heard pierced his heart like a sharp arrow, so that, when the sermon was over, he fell on his knees before the priest, and with many tears confessed all his sins. Before giving him absolution the priest told him to go and bewail his sins at the foot of the crucifix; the repentant man obeyed, but he was so overwhelmed with sorrow and contrition that he fell dead on the ground. Oh, happy soul and most desirable death! you may well say, my dear brethren. But wait till you hear the end of it. On the following day, as the preacher was recommending the soul of the deceased man to the prayers of the congregation, a snow-white dove was seen to fly about the church and to drop from its beak a note, which fell at the preacher's feet; the latter picked up the note and read it out for the congregation. It stated that, in spite of the enormity of his sins, the extraordinary contrition of the deceased man and the copious tears he had shed had completely freed his soul from all guilt and all punishment, so that he went to heaven immediately after his death. What do you think of that, my dear brethren? You wonder, do you not, at the power of perfect contrition and sorrow? And true it is that it can in a moment change the worst sinner into a friend of God, even without absolution, when there is no opportunity of receiving it; but how was that guilty man excited to such perfect sorrow and contrition? It was that sermon in which he heard the word of God, a word that can penetrate and pierce a heart as hard as a rock: "For the word of God is living and effectual, and more piercing than any two-edged sword."

Therefore
the devil
tries to keep
sinners
away from
sermons.

Now, if effects of this kind are produced on sinners who go to hear a sermon merely by chance, or through curiosity, and with evil actually in their hearts, and are produced, too, by a single sermon, what may we not expect the word of God to do for those sinners who frequently and regularly hear sermons with a sincere desire to learn something good, and to be moved to repentance? Must they not be softened at last and brought to acknowledge their guilt and to return to God? Oh, well does the envious demon know that it is, humanly speaking, impossible for him to subject for any length of time to his yoke those who still have a desire to hear the word of God! And therefore he spares no effort to keep men away from sermons, lest they should become pious and escape out of his clutches. Thus, when the time comes for the sermon, he fills their minds with all kinds of business, which, he persuades them, is of the greatest importance and must be attended to at once; he gets them into talk with others, so that they may be kept at home; he excites wicked people to make fun of the preacher, so that they may not care to hear him; he persuades them that the hour appointed for the sermon is too early and inconvenient; that the weather is too warm or too cold, too damp, too windy, too harsh, and that they would injure their health if they ventured out of doors; he even suggests certain peculiar devotions, of which I have spoken on another occasion, and persuades them that it is better for them to practise those devotions than to hear a sermon. But if he cannot keep them away altogether, he at least tries to prevent them from coming in time, so that they cannot derive proper fruit from the sermon.

Therefore
they must
not allow
themselves
to be de-
ceived by
the devil in
this partic-
ular.

Woe to you, O Christian, if you allow the lying spirit to deceive you in any way, so as to prevent you from hearing the word of God! "Never trust thy enemy," is the warning that the Holy Ghost gives us all by the wise Ecclesiasticus; and still less should you trust the enemy of your soul, "for as a brass pot his wickedness rusteth."¹ But you especially, O sinner, who are still in the state of sin, do not, for God's sake, allow the tempter to befool you, if you have any hope of saving your soul and going to heaven! I tell you distinctly that if you do not hear the word of God, there is no other means of conversion and repentance left for you. And further, you may be perfectly convinced that, if you are not moved to repent and amend your life

¹ Non credas inimico tuo in æternum; sicut enim ærumentum æruginat nequitia illius.
—Eccius. xii. 10.

by hearing the word of God, you will never be moved to repentance by any other means, even if God were to work a miracle in your favor, which He will not do. "Yes," says St. John Chrysostom, "even if one were to rise from the dead, or an angel to descend from heaven,"¹ to exhort you to repentance and contrition for your sins; not even then would you be induced to do sincere penance, or to be really converted, if the word of God, which is far more impressive and powerful than other means, cannot influence you.

This is what Our Lord wishes us to understand by the parable in the Gospel of St. Luke. When the rich glutton, in the midst of the fearful torments he was suffering in hell, raised his eyes and beheld Lazarus, whom during life he had looked upon as if of less account than a dog, reposing in glory in Abraham's bosom, "Ah!" said he, "Father, I beseech thee that thou wouldst send him to my father's house, for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torments."² And what answer did Abraham make? "They have Moses and the Prophets," he said, "let them hear them;"³ they will preach to them. But, "no," said the other; "No, Father Abraham; but if one went to them from the dead, they will do penance;"⁴ it would have such an effect on them, that they would amend their lives. No, said Abraham, you are grievously mistaken; if the word of God, which the prophets preach to them, cannot convert them, much less could a dead man help them; and if your brothers do not care to listen to the prophets, they will have still less inclination to hear one from the dead. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe if one rise again from the dead."⁵

As a proof of this, my dear brethren, listen to a well-known and most remarkable instance that occurred in England. There was a certain young man, who, to the great scandal of the neighborhood, lived on terms of improper intimacy with a person of the opposite sex. His friends, both lay and clerical, frequently exhorted him to put away this person and to amend his life, lest he should lose his soul; but all their exhortations were of no avail: he remained obstinate in his wickedness. God, in His mercy, see-

Proved from
Sacred
Scripture.

Confirmed
by an ex-
ample.

¹ Etsi resurgat mortuus, etsi cœlitus descenderit angelus.

² Rogo ergo te, pater, ut mittas eum in domum patris mei; habeo enim quinque fratres ut testetur illis, ne et ipsi veniant in hunc locum tormentorum.—Luke xvi. 27, 28.

³ Habent Moysen et prophetas; audiant illos.—Ibid. 29.

⁴ Non, Pater Abraham: sed si quis ex mortuis ierit ad eos, penitentiam agent.—Ibid. 30.

⁵ Si Moysen et prophetas non audiunt, neque, si quis ex mortuis resurrexerit, credent.—Ibid. 31.

ing that the living could not, with all their representations, induce him to repent, or make any impression on his heart, entrusted this office to the dead. His father, who had died some years previous, appeared to him one night. "Son," he said, in a terrible and impressive voice, "Son, give up your wicked ways! you are not acting on the instruction I gave you during my life. Be converted to God, and banish the object of your impure passion from your house, out of your sight and out of your heart, or else, woe to you!" Having spoken thus, he disappeared. The son was somewhat frightened at first, but he did not make the least effort to repent. The father appeared to him a second time, and repeated his former warning, adding that there was still time for grace, but that, if he deferred his conversion, an unhappy death was appointed for him by the divine justice; he should die suddenly on St. Martin's day and go at once into eternal torments. Who would not think that this threat, at all events, would induce the young man to open his eyes? But no such thing; he paid not the least attention to it, and continued on in sin as before. Nay, to show how little he thought of the threat, he prepared a grand entertainment for St. Martin's feast, and spent the day in feasting, carousing, and indulging his impure passion. On the following morning he was laughing with his boon companions at what he called his idle dreams. "See," he said, "I was to die on St. Martin's day, and here I am as well as ever I was in my life!" Hardly had he said those words, and as he was on the point of going to his paramour, he fell dead on the ground and that, too, on the feast of the holy Pope and Martyr, St. Martin, which immediately follows that of St. Martin, Confessor and Pontiff. Thus his father's threat was literally fulfilled. From this we can clearly see that, if one who is in the state of sin is so blinded by his passions and evil inclinations that he will not hear the word of God, or be moved by it to repentance, neither will he be induced to amend even if one were to rise from the grave to warn him. "Neither will they believe, if one rise again from the dead."

The very neglect of the word of God is a divine punishment.

Sinner, if, in spite of your wicked life, you do not perhaps fear a sudden and unprovided death, yet you have reason to shudder when you think of another punishment that an angry God may have already inflicted on you for your sins. And what is that? your very negligence and carelessness about hearing sermons, or the fact that you hear them without amending your life; that is one of the severest punishments that can be

inflicted on your sins. Hear the threat that God utters by the Prophet Jeremias: "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts: Behold I will send upon them the sword, and the famine, and I will persecute them with the sword and with famine; and I will give them up unto affliction to all the kingdoms of the earth; to be a curse, and an astonishment, and a hissing, and a reproach to all the nations." And why? what have they done? "Because they have not hearkened to My words, saith the Lord, which I sent to them by My servants, the prophets."¹ And what kind of a famine was God to inflict on them? He explains it by the Prophet Amos: "Behold the days come, saith the Lord; and I will send forth a famine into the land; not a famine of bread, nor a thirst of water, but of hearing the word of the Lord."² They do not care for my word; they hardly deign to hear it, and therefore their punishment shall be that I will deprive them of all inclination and desire to hear it; they are not worthy of that spiritual food, and therefore they shall perish with hunger, and shall live and die in the unhappy state of sin. Certainly a most fearful punishment! exclaims the holy Pope, St. Gregory; "thus, by a hidden decree of God's Providence, His holy word is withdrawn from those who do not deserve to be aroused by grace to amend their lives."³

It is a punishment which presages eternal punishment hereafter in hell. Remarkable is the well-known simile in which Jesus Christ distinguishes between the elect and the reprobate: "And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on His left."⁴ Thus the sheep are a figure of the elect, and the goats of the reprobate. But the Prophet David, speaking of sinners, says: "They are laid in hell like sheep; death shall feed upon them."⁵ And how can that be? If, according to the words of Our Lord, the sheep shall be on His right hand at the last day, how can the expression, "They are laid in hell like sheep," be justified? Yet, says St. Augustine, both those texts are true; all who belong to the true Church are sheep of

And a sign
of the sin-
ner's eternal
damnation.

¹ Hæc dicit Dominus exercituum: Ecce mittam in eos gladium et famem . . . et persequar eos in gladio et in fame, et dabo eos in vexationem universis regnis terræ: in maledictionem, et in stuporem, et in sibilum, et in opprobrium cunctis gentibus. Eo quod non audierint verba mea, dicit Dominus, quæ misi ad eos per servos meos prophetas.—Jerem. xxix. 17-19.

² Ecce dies veniunt, dicit Dominus; et mittam famem in terram, non famem panis neque sitim aquæ, sed audiendi verbum Domini.—Amos viii. 11.

³ Subtili ergo, occultoque iudicio a quorundam auribus prædicatio sancta subtrahitur, qui suscitari per gratiam non merentur.—St. Greg. hom. 4 in cap. 10 Matt.

⁴ Statuet oves quidem a dextris suis, hædos autem a sinistris.—Matt. xxv. 33.

⁵ Sicut oves in inferno positi sunt; mors depascet eos.—Ps. xlviii. 15

the fold of Jesus Christ, who says of Himself, "I am the good Shepherd;"¹ all who belong to My fold, are sheep; but all are not elect sheep. But how can we distinguish those who are chosen for heaven from those who are doomed to hell? They who acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Shepherd, are the elect; "I know mine, and mine know me."² They on the other hand, that do not acknowledge Him, are reprobate sheep. But who are they that acknowledge Christ as their Shepherd? Our Lord Himself answers this question: "My sheep hear My voice,"³ He says; and they will be placed on My right hand; they are the elect. Those who do not hear My voice, My word, are sheep indeed; but they are not My sheep; "they are laid in hell like sheep."

Shown by
an example.

Amongst the number of the latter was that unhappy man of whom James de Vitry writes; he could never be persuaded to go to a sermon; what do I want with sermons? he would say; I can preach well enough for myself. At last he died, and his body was brought to the church to be buried. During the funeral office that, according to the custom of the Catholic Church, was held for the soul of the deceased man, all who were present suddenly saw to their great consternation the crucifix, that was placed at the head of the coffin, tear its hands out of the nails and stop both its ears with them. The priest, seeing this, turned to the people and said to them: you know well what this means; during his life this man neglected the word of God, and never went to a sermon, "and therefore God now closes His ears, so as not to hear the prayers we are offering for his soul."⁴ It is clear enough, therefore, that his soul is in hell; there is no use in praying for him any more, nor shall his body be buried in consecrated ground; let it be buried out in the field. And so it was done.

Conclusion
and resolu-
tion to hear
the Word of
God con-
stantly.

"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear,"⁵ said Christ, speaking of the seed of the word of God. I conclude with the same words, my dear brethren, "he that hath ears to hear," let him be diligent in hearing the word of God; for it is necessary for all men frequently to hear it, if they wish to save their souls. It is necessary for the innocent and the just, that they may be encouraged and strengthened to continue in the divine service,

¹ Ego sum pastor bonus.—John x. 14.

² Cognosco meas, et cognoscunt me meæ.—Ibid.

³ Oves meæ vocem meam audiunt.—Ibid. 27.

⁴ Propter quod Deus obduravit aures suas, ne audiat preces quas pro eo fundimus.

⁵ Qui habet aures audiendi, audiat.—Matt. xiii. 9.

to abstain from sin, and always to belong to the number of those chosen sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd. It is especially necessary for those who are actually in the state of sin, that they may be moved to repentance and amendment, unless they wish to be numbered among the reprobate sheep, who are rejected by the Shepherd and doomed to hell. Merciful God, save us from that terrible fate! We all who are here present declare that we desire to be together at Thy right hand, among Thy chosen sheep; and therefore we have met to-day to hear Thy voice, to learn Thy law, and to fulfil Thy holy will. We thank Thee, O God of goodness, that Thou hast given to us such frequent opportunities of hearing Thy word, in preference to so many people to whom the bread of life is broken but sparingly. We receive that word with the most heartfelt gratitude, and we shall be always ready to follow the light that Thou sheddest on us so abundantly. Nothing but absolute necessity shall prevent us from hearing Thy warning voice, so that we may one day, to our great joy, hear Thy sweet invitation to eternal bliss: Come, ye blessed of My Father, and follow Me into the eternal kingdom. Amen.

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

Text.

Invenerunt illum in templo, sedentem in medio doctorum, audientem illos, et interrogantem eos.—Luke ii. 46.

“They found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions.”

Introduction.

Mark those words, my dear brethren. He who, to show His unheard of love to men, could not wait for the time of His bitter passion and death, when He was to shed the last drop of His Blood, but already as an Infant eight days old poured out the first drops of His precious Blood in the Circumcision; He would not wait for the time of His public mission to instruct and convert men, but commenced that office already in the twelfth year of His age, when He was found amongst the doctors in the temple, explaining the law to them by question and answer. Ah! dearest Saviour, if we had only the happiness of hearing Thy sermons and instructions but once; what an effect

would they not have on our hearts! But what am I saying? Although it is now nearly two thousand years since Thou didst appear in the world in visible form, yet Thou still preachest Thy divine word, and explainest Thy law by the mouths of Thy preachers and priests. Alas! I should rather exclaim, would that all Thy Christians were diligent enough in hearing Thy word! How much would not the just profit thereby for their salvation, as well as sinners for their conversion! I have elsewhere proved, my dear brethren—*continues as above.*

Several Sermons on the Necessity and Advantage of hearing the Word of God are contained in the preceding First and Second Parts, as well as in the following Fourth and Fifth Parts.

ON THE MOTIVES THAT SHOULD EXCITE THE SINNER TO SPEEDY REPENTANCE.

SECOND SERMON.

ON THE VAIN LABOR OF THOSE WHO ARE IN THE STATE OF SIN.

Subject.

He who labors during the night, that is to say, while he is in the state of mortal sin, gains nothing by all the good works he performs, by all the trials he endures; therefore the state of sin is an unhappy and a miserable one, and he who is in that state should free himself from it as soon as possible, by true penance, while every one should be on his guard against falling into it.—*Preached on the fourth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Per totam noctem laborantes, nihil cepimus.—Luke v. 5.

“We have labored all the night and have taken nothing.”

Introduction.

Fruitless labor is always painful. No matter what trouble one takes, one never regrets it as long as it is successful; but when all one's toil and labor come to nothing, then there is a bitter sense of disappointment. We see an example of that in the disciples in to-day's Gospel. “Let down your nets for a draught,” said Our Lord to Simon. What is the use? answered the latter; “Master, we have labored all the night, and have taken nothing;” we are tired of it. How many there are in the world now, my dear brethren, who resemble those disappointed fishermen, who labor and take nothing! How many there are who, at the hour of death, looking back on their past lives, must give vent

to this fruitless complaint; I have lived now for thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, or seventy years; I have troubled myself about a great many things; I have had a great deal to suffer, and many difficulties to contend with, and now I see that it is all of little or no use to my soul; "We have taken nothing!" And how is that? Most people are like Martha; they are careful about many things; during their whole lives they are busied about temporal concerns, while they forget that one important business, of which Our Lord said to Martha, "But one thing is necessary,"¹ the last thing they think of is their immortal souls and eternal happiness. These people will have to say, "We have taken nothing." There are others, too, who, according to their own idea, labor for the kingdom of heaven, and perform many good works, but not those which their state of life binds them to perform; they too will have to say, "We have taken nothing." Again, there are numbers who try to do what God wishes them to do according to their state, but they have not a pure intention, they forget to labor for God. Ah, poor people that you are! when you go to rest at night, you may well cry out, "we have taken nothing." Finally, there are some who perform many good works, but they labor during the night, that is to say, in the state of mortal sin; their lot is deserving of the greatest commiseration, for they take absolutely nothing; their labor is utterly useless. I shall speak to-day of those latter alone, since they are represented in the Gospel, and I say,

Plan of Discourse.

He who labors during the night, that is to say, while he is in the state of mortal sin, gains nothing by all the good works he performs, by all the trials he endures; therefore the state of sin is an unhappy and a miserable one, and he who is in that state should free himself from it as soon as possible by true penance, while all of us should be constantly on our guard against falling into it. Such is the whole subject of this sermon.

May the great God enlighten our understandings to acknowledge the truth now proposed for our consideration, and excite our wills to follow and adhere strictly to the conclusion to be derived from it; this we ask through the intercession of Mary and the holy guardian angels, that we may not hereafter have to complain that we have labored all the night, and have taken nothing.

¹ Porro unum est necessarium.—Luke x. 42.

Vain Labor of those who are in the State of Sin. 23

It does not require much argument to show that by the night, in a moral sense, is meant the time during which a soul is in the state of sin. No comparison is more frequently used than this by the Holy Scripture, and by the fathers of the Church, when they speak of sin and sinners. "What is the life of a sinner," asks St. Gregory, "but a night,"¹ from which, as soon as sin is consented to, the sun of justice is withdrawn, even in the day-time, and the light of the soul, sanctifying grace, disappears? "Let us therefore," is the exhortation of St. Paul to the Romans, "cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light;"² the "night is past, and the day is at hand."³ "For you were heretofore darkness;" he writes to his Ephesian converts, "but now light in the Lord. Walk then as children of the light; and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness."⁴ And just as during the night, when no light is shining, and when all things are hidden from the eyes of men, no matter what signs or gestures one makes, no one can pay any attention to them, so that it is the time for thieves and robbers to ply their trade, which courts the darkness; so, if your soul is in the spiritual night of sin, all your good works, no matter how excellent they may be in themselves, will be passed over unnoticed by God, although He is present everywhere.

And is there, then, a night so dark that the eye of God cannot penetrate it, or that it can conceal anything from Him? No! says the Prophet David; be on your guard, O sinners, for even in the dark, in the gloomiest corner, the omnipresent God sees all the abominations you commit: "Darkness shall not be dark to Thee, and night shall be light as the day."⁵ If I were to hide myself in the bowels of the earth, or in the darkest corner of hell, even there Thou art present, O my God; even there Thy all-seeing eye would behold me! "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? 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."⁶ But God does not regard the good works of the sinner, because, since they are performed by one who is unworthy, on account of the state in which he is, they do not deserve to be

God does not regard good works that are performed in the state of sin.

Because they are performed by one who is unworthy.

¹ Quid est peccatoris vita, nisi nox?
² Abjiciamus ergo opera tenebrarum, et induamur arma lucis.—Rom. xiii. 12.
³ Nox præcessit, dies autem appropinquavit.—Ibid.
⁴ Eratis enim aliquando tenebræ, nunc autem lux in Domino; ut filii lucis ambulate. et nolite communicare operibus infructuosis tenebrarum.—Ephes. v. 8, 11.
⁵ Tenebræ non obscurabuntur a te, et nox sicut dies illuminabitur.—Ps. cxxxviii. 12.
⁶ Quo ibo a spiritu tuo, et quo a facie tua fugiam? Si ascendero in cælum, tu illic es, si descendero in infernum, ades.—Ibid. 7, 8.

24 *Vain Labor of those who are in the State of Sin.*

looked on favorably by the Lord of holiness. For God does not regard the work itself so much as the disposition of him who performs it; He does not value the gift, but rather the hand that bestows it. We have an example of this in the Book of Genesis, in the two brothers Cain and Abel. Cain offered sacrifice to God, and Abel did the same; but how differently their offerings were received! "The Lord had respect to Abel and to his offerings," says the Holy Scripture; but to "Cain and his offerings he had no respect;"¹ if as they did not concern Him in the least. What was the reason of the difference? Abel was just and innocent; Cain was unjust and wicked; the one offered with a good, the other with a bad intention. "Abel," says St. Gregory, "was not made pleasing by his gifts, but Abel himself made the gift pleasing in the sight of God."² And on the other hand, God did not reject Cain on account of his gifts, but the gifts on account of Cain.

Who is altogether hateful in the sight of God.

Nor is this to be wondered at, my dear brethren, for men act on the same principle every day. Let the most dainty food be served up in a dirty dish, and you would turn away from it in disgust. And why? the food is very good? Yes; but it ought to be served in cleaner fashion. If there is one whom you dislike, either naturally, or because he has insulted you and given you just cause for anger, no matter what he does, he will never please you; you put a bad construction on his best acts, and you cannot even bear to hear him well spoken of. But who can adequately describe the bitter hatred, the aversion and disgust, with which the God of all holiness looks on the accursed and odious person of one who is in the state of sin? It is true that of Himself He is a God of infinite goodness and love, who looks upon with fervor and loves even the meanest things He has created. "For Thou lovest all things that are, and hatest none of the things which Thou hast made."³ But the sinner alone He has excluded from His work, He cannot bear the sight of him, but pursues him with the bitterest hatred, although in His infinite mercy He leaves him still in life, in the hope that he will repent. "Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity," says the prophet David to God, and that so bitterly that they dare not appear before Thee: "Neither

¹ *Respexit Dominus ad Abel et ad munera ejus; ad Cain vero et ad munera illius non respexit.*—Gen. iv. 4-5.

² *Non Abel ex muneribus, sed ex Abel munera placuerunt.*—St. Greg. in Job, l. 22, c. 8.

³ *Diligis enim omnia quæ sunt, et nihil odisti eorum quæ fecisti.*—Sap. xi. 25.

shall the wicked dwell near Thee; nor shall the unjust abide before Thy eyes.”¹

Do you wish, my dear brethren, to see a proof of the intensity of this hatred from its effects? Then imagine a soul that has lived for hundreds of years in the greatest innocence and sanctity; if it consents but in thought to a single mortal sin, in a moment the God of infinite goodness, in spite of that soul's long-continued service, and of the painful death by which He so superabundantly atoned for that same sin, will forget all its former good works and all the treasures of merit it had accumulated. Hear what He says Himself by the prophet Ezechiel: “But if the just man turn himself away from his justice, and do iniquity,” what shall befall him? “all his justices, which he had done, shall not be remembered.”² Is not this a mark of bitter hatred and displeasure against the sinner? To understand this still more clearly, descend in thought into the fiery prison of hell, and see there a soul condemned to burn in eternal flames, without hope of alleviation or release, for having consented to a single sinful thought. Who has condemned that soul to such a punishment? The God of infinite mercy and justice. Through all eternity He will see that soul, which He created to His own image and redeemed by His precious Blood, tortured by demons. He will hear its howlings and lamentings without being in the least moved to pity. Oh, certainly a most implacable hatred! Terrible it is to read what Louis of Blois says (but before I quote him, I must crave thy permission, O holiest of all creatures, dearest Mother Mary! I know well that thou hast never been guilty of the least fault. I rejoice and congratulate thee from my heart that, humanly speaking, it was impossible for thee to consent to a sin): “If the Mother of God, the most Blessed Virgin, had committed a mortal sin and had died without being truly very sorrow for it, she would never have gone to heaven, but would be tortured eternally amongst the demons in hell.”³ O just God, is Thy hatred of the sinner so great that Thou wouldst have cursed and cast off from Thee, into eternal fire, Thy own beloved Mother, on account of one mortal sin, if it had been possible for her to com-

The intensity of the hatred with which God regards the sinner appears from its effects

¹ *Odisti omnes, qui operantur iniquitatem. Neque habitabit juxta te malignus; neque permanebunt injusti ante oculos tuos.*—Ps. v. 7, 6.

² *Si autem averterit se justus a justitia sua, et fecerit iniquitatem, omnes justitiæ ejus, quas fecerat, non recordabuntur.*—Ezech. xviii. 24.

³ *Si Mater Christi Domini Virgo Beatissima peccasset mortaliter, et sine contritione mortua esset: cælum nunquam obtinisset, sed cum dæmonibus in inferno cruciaretur.*

26 *Vain Labor of those who are in the State of Sin.*

mit it? How great, then, must it not be towards me and others, if we are actually in the deplorable state of sin! Consider now, my dear brethren, whether one who is so hateful to God can do anything pleasing to Him or can have any merit in His sight, whatever good works he performs. No; no matter what good is done, as long as it is done in the night, that is, in the state of sin, it will be of no value; and they who are in that state will ever have reason to say, "we have labored all the night, and have taken nothing."

Because such works are unworthy in themselves.

But supposing even that the person of the sinner were not so hateful and displeasing in the sight of God, and, as a matter of fact, the good God in His endless mercy and, so to speak, in spite of His anger and displeasure, often displays the greatest patience in bearing with the most wicked sinners for years, and in waiting for them to repent, while He never ceases showering down upon them temporal blessings, and visiting them with His inspirations and graces, as if He could not help loving them still; yet the works of those sinners, no matter how praiseworthy they may be in themselves, have not the least supernatural merit in the sight of God, because they are performed "in the night." On a dark night, when you have no light, place on one side of you a piece of precious gold, and on the other a lump of clay; or put on one side a beautiful statue, on the other the image of a hideous demon, and tell me which of the two you prefer, which you consider the more beautiful. If you consult your eyes alone, you cannot distinguish either the value or the beauty of the different objects, because it is night, and everything seems black to you.

As the least good works done in the state of grace are precious in the sight of God.

Oh, how precious, how indescribably beautiful in the sight of God, are the good works of him who is in the clear day, that is in the state of sanctifying grace! what great treasures they amass! A single sigh sent forth to God by such a man, a bit of bread, a drink of cold water that he gives to the poor, each step he takes, every movement of his hands, every blow of his hammer, every use that he makes of the different implements of his trade, nay every mouthful of food he takes, although he enjoys it, provided all this is done with a supernatural intention for God's sake, how valuable is it not in Thy sight, O Lord! No matter how trivial and worthless each of those actions is in itself, yet it merits an eternity of glory in heaven, which the just Judge will give him who performs it, if he dies in the state of grace. Amen, I say to you, such is the solemn asseveration of

Vain Labor of those who are in the State of Sin. 27

Our Lord Himself : “ 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 If in one side of the balance would be placed all the great and heroic deeds of the greatest generals, kings, and emperors, as they have been handed down to us in history, from the beginning of the world, would they not make a great weight indeed? What wonder and admiration they still excite in us, when we hear or read of them! But place in the other scale a single “ Our Father,” said by some poor woman with proper devotion, or a five minutes’ work that the ignorant ploughman offers to God, or the little trouble that the housemaid has in sweeping out a room; oh, how quickly will it not weigh down, in the sight of God, all the greatest deeds of the most illustrious men! All those great exploits which excite the wonder of the world, when compared to a single good work of one who is in the state of grace, resemble the labor of a fly in comparison to the celebrated tower of Babel; because, great as those exploits are, they do not exceed the limits of nature, while the good works of the just man are supernatural and, being united with the works of Jesus Christ, are pleasing to the God of infinite greatness, and deserve an eternity of happiness. O truly happy state of the just soul! what treasures and riches it can accumulate in a day, an hour, nay at every moment! O ye poor peasants, laborers, and servants, and all ye to whom Divine Providence has allotted either hard work, or trials and crosses, ah, see above all that you are in the state of grace, and do not forget the good intention! How rich you are! What an exceeding great reward is in store for that seemingly worthless labor of yours!

But miserable, indeed, is your soul, O sinner, since you labor in the night! All your undertakings are black, and useless, and unprofitable! Suppose that to-day or yesterday you have committed a grievous sin in thought; say that you remain in that sin for the next six months without confession and without true sorrow for it, although you have the intention of confessing it hereafter, and you commit no other sin during that time, while you live in other respects a Christian life: you go to church and hear Mass every day devoutly; you observe the appointed fasts; you give alms to the poor; you labor and work according to your condition with a good intention, because God requires you

So the greatest works performed in the state of sin are worth nothing before God.

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.

to do so; you bear many a cross, and difficulty, and contradiction with Christian patience, contentment, and resignation to the divine will; nay more, suppose that you give all you have to the poor, that you practise every imaginable work of Christian charity, that you fast continually and scourge yourself daily even to blood, that you beat your breast with a stone, like St. Jerome, that you go through India and Japan like St. Francis Xavier and convert 1,200,000 souls, that you bear with the greatest patience and meekness all kinds of persecutions, sickness, poverty, hunger, and the most fearful torments, like the martyrs of Christ; when you have done all that, look back upon it in thought, and see what you have gained, what you have merited by it. Perhaps you will think that you have done wonders, and will say, like him whom St. John reproves in the Apocalypse, "I am rich and made wealthy, and have need of nothing," but I am sorry for you, because "thou knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;"¹ you are just as badly off as you were when you began.

Thus the
sinner
labors in
vain with-
out merit.

Hear what St. Paul says: "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."² That is to say, without sanctifying grace all these gifts and good works are of no avail. You have certainly made great strides with those good works of yours, but not on the right road; you have tired yourself running in a circle, but you have approached no nearer to the goal. "Your soul," as St. Basil says, "is like a bee hive, in which there is no honey, and in which none can be made." By your good works, you have gained no more for heaven, than one who pays a large sum of money in a lottery, hoping to win something, and draws nothing but blanks. You have borne with many trials and contradictions, but not otherwise than a heavily laden beast of burden, that is urged on during the day with blows, and, in the evening, is turned into a comfortless stable. "They are not in the labor of men,"³ says the Prophet David. They labor like the dumb animal; they bear their cross, they suffer hunger, and

¹ Dicit, quod dives sum et locupletatus, et nullius egeo, et nescis quia tu es miser et miserabilis, et pauper, et cæcus, et nudus.—Apoc. iii. 17.

² 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. 2, 3.

³ In labore hominum non sunt.—Ps. lxxii. 5.

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want, and misery, caused by themselves or by others : whether they bear them patiently or not, they have no consolation from God, no merit for eternity, and at night they retire to rest with their miserable souls crushed under the yoke of the devil. In a word, you have nothing left, but to sigh like the disciples: "We have labored all the night and have taken nothing," because you have not sanctifying grace, which is necessary to give good works their life, their beauty, and their value. Such is the general teaching of theologians, taken from Holy Scripture.

Oh ! truly unhappy is the state of the sinner ! He labors and gains nothing ! The bare thought of this is enough to make me weep burning tears of pity ! When I see a man working hard for his daily bread, or a beggar stretching out his hands for an alms, a sick man lying on a bed of suffering, a destitute man bewailing his misery, or an unfortunate man oppressed with crosses and trials ; oh ! I think, if he is only in the state of grace, he enjoys consolation from God, he has the peace of a good conscience, and he can expect a reward in heaven for all his sufferings ; at least he need only offer them to God with a pure intention, in order to gain the reward, But if he is in the night, if he has lost sanctifying grace by one mortal sin, alas for his poor soul ! All his labors and trouble are fruitless. "Write this man barren," I say of him, as God said of King Jechonias to the Prophet Jeremias. But why ? Jechonias had still eight sons living ; how could he then be looked on as barren ? God Himself gives the reason : "For there shall not be a man of his seed that shall sit upon the throne of David, and have power any more in Juda."¹ Therefore write him barren. The same is true of the sinner ; in spite of the superabundance of his good works and all his labor and trouble, he remains barren, because not one of his works will ever reach the throne of God. You may see from this, my dear brethren, in what a gloomy and horrible night sin encamps the human soul, by taking away from the holiest and most praiseworthy acts of virtue, and from the otherwise most meritorious trials, all their beauty, worth, and reward.

What a miserable and deplorable state !

And there is another circumstance which makes this night far more terrible than our natural night. For although the latter hides the beauty and value of objects from the eye, yet, no matter how black the darkness, it cannot interfere with the essential

And all the more so because such good works can never revive, so as to become meritorious

¹ Scribe virum istum sterilem ; nec enim erit de semine ejus vir, qui sedeat super solum David, et potestatem habeat ultra in Juda. — Jerem. xxii. 30.

value or splendor of anything; it leaves everything unaltered, so that, when the day comes, objects are seen in their proper colors, the gold glitters as usual, beauty shows itself in its splendor as before. But it is far worse with the night of sin; for even after it is driven away and sanctifying grace restored to the soul by penance, the good works performed in the state of sin remain just as black as before, without merit and without reward, which they can never expect for all eternity.

Shown by a
figure from
Holy Scrip-
ture.

I find in the Old Testament a striking figure of what occurs in the soul of a sinner. According to divine command, if a Hebrew were bought as a slave, his purchaser was bound to give him his freedom after seven years: "If thou buy a Hebrew servant, six years shall he serve thee; in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing."¹ And, besides that, if he had a wife and children when he became a slave, they too were to be freed with him at the appointed time, and he was to receive the same kind of clothing as that he originally had. "With what raiment he came in, with the like let him go out; if having a wife, his wife also shall go out with him."² But if he had married and had children during the first six years of his slavery, he, indeed, was to be freed in the seventh year, but his wife and children had to remain in slavery. "But if his master gave him a wife, and she hath borne sons and daughters, the woman and her children shall be her master's; but he himself shall go out with his raiment."³ Do you see what is meant by this figure, my dear brethren? By baptism man is endowed with the freedom of the children of God; but when he commits mortal sin, he sells himself of his own accord as a slave to the devil, and God says by the prophet Isaias: "Behold, you are sold for your iniquities."⁴ Now the good God has given him a means of freeing himself from this slavery; not merely after six years, but in any year, at any moment that he wishes, as soon as he truly repents, he will be set at liberty, as the Apostle says: she "shall be delivered from the servitude of corruption, into the liberty of the glory of the children of God."⁵ But how? What will he take back with him when he is restored to freedom? His children, that is

¹ Si emeris servum Hebræum, sex annis serviet tibi, in septimo egredietur liber gratis.—Exod. xxi. 2.

² Cum quali veste intraverit, cum tali exeat; si habens uxorem, et uxor egredietur simul.—Ibid. 3.

³ Sin autem dominus dederit illi uxorem, et pepererit filios et filias; mulier et liberi ejus erunt domini sui. ipse vero exibat cum vestitu suo.—Ibid. 4.

⁴ Ecce in iniquitatibus vestris venditi estis.—Isa. i. 1.

⁵ Liberabitur a servitute corruptionis, in libertatem gloriæ filiorum Dei.—Rom. viii. 21.

to say, the good works he performed before he lost the state of grace, and which were brought by him into slavery, so that during that time he could receive no reward for them; but, according to the general teaching of theologians, when he has truly repented, those works revive and are freed with him, clad in their former garment of sanctifying grace, like the children that the Hebrew slave had before losing his liberty. On the other hand, all the works performed in the state of sin remain behind; they do not revive; they are and must remain without merit or hope of reward. The labor they entailed is profitless, because they were performed in slavery, in the night of sin; and therefore it still remains true of them, "we have labored all the night and have taken nothing."

What are we to infer from this, my dear brethren? That there is no use in doing good when we are in the state of sin? Oh, if that is so, one might say: as I have a mortal sin on my conscience, which I intend to repent of and confess hereafter, I can meanwhile give up praying, hearing Mass, giving alms, and visiting the church. If I cannot merit anything by those works of devotion, why should I trouble myself with them? I do not see the good of working to no purpose. Your argument, O sinner, is a very bad one; you say that, since you cannot do anything deserving of heaven, you will cease doing good altogether. But for that very reason you should be all the more diligent in doing good works. Suppose you have a piece of money that is broken into two parts, would you throw the pieces away? Not by any means! But what are they good for? they are no longer current coin. True, but the pieces are still worth something, and if I bring them to a silversmith he will give me a price for them. And so it is, due proportion being observed, with the good works you perform in the night of sin. They are not indeed current coin with which you can purchase heaven; they are broken and destroyed; but still they are good for something. And for what?

The sinner must not therefore cease doing good.

St. Thomas of Aquin tells us. "Works of this kind," he says, "have a threefold utility: they accustom us to do good, they are a means of obtaining temporal blessings, and they dispose the soul to receive grace."¹ I will say nothing now of the temporal blessings, for they are of the least importance. They serve, then, first, to accustom one to good works. Why do sol-

That he may be accustomed to do good.

¹ Opera ista ad triplex bonum valent: scilicet ad assuefactionem bonorum operum, ad temporalium consecutionem, et ad dispositionem ad gratiam.—St. Thom. in addit., q. 14, a. 4.

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diers in time of peace, when there is not an enemy near them, have to practise military exercises so often, to engage in sham fights, and to practise shooting and the management of their weapons, not otherwise than if they were engaged in real warfare? Why do hunters so often shoot at a target, although they know that they will not kill any game by the shot, and that at best they can hit only a piece of paper? Is not the labor fruitless in both those cases? By no means; practice of that kind serves to make the soldier expert in war, and the hunter in the chase; it enables the former to grapple with his enemy as soon as he sees him, and the latter to make sure of his aim, so as to secure the spoils of the chase. In the same way, O sinner, the practice of good works will be of use to you, although you are actually in the state of sin. In so far your labor is fruitless, that you will never attain your end thereby; but it gives you a good habit, a certain expertness in doing the same virtuous actions afterwards, when you are reconciled with God, and when they will be really meritorious of eternal life.

To avoid the divine vengeance, and to obtain the grace of repentance more speedily.

In the second place, works of this kind dispose your soul to receive the grace of God, and avert the divine anger from you for a time, so that you are not, as you deserve, punished with a sudden death and condemned at once to eternal torments. Do you know what that Roman general did when, having lost a great number of his men, he was again attacked by the enemy? He made a rampart of the dead bodies, and was thus enabled to fight with the remainder of his army so as to avoid a total defeat. So should you also act, O sinner! The good works that you perform in the state of sin are but the dead bodies of virtues; yet they can serve as a rampart to shield you from the wrath of God, and to preserve you from a fresh attack of Satan, until you are enabled to take to flight by true penance. And in virtue of this humble acknowledgment of His claims on you, God in His mercy will keep you from further temptations, that you may not fall into greater sins, and finally become obdurate, and He will give you more powerful inspirations, illuminations, impulses, and better opportunities for conversion, so that you may recover His grace.

Shown by an example.

As an instance of this, listen to the following example taken from the Annals of the Capuchin Order. When the celebrated preacher, Father Matthew de Pascio, Founder of that Order in the city of Venice, was at the height of his fame for sanctity, a certain learned man, wishing to make the acquaintance of the

servant of God, invited him to table. There was in the house an ape that could wait at table, and clean the plates and glasses so well, that there were few servants who could excel it. When its master came home the ape would open the door for him, take charge of his hat and cloak, pull off his shoes, and, in a word, serve him with the utmost diligence. When Father Matthew heard of the wonderful ape, he asked to see it, but the ape, when it heard the Father coming, crept under a bed, and could not be induced to come out, either by blows or coaxing. Then the servant of God took by the hand the man who had invited him. "Do you know," said he, "what kind of an ape you have in your house? Come with me, and you will hear it out of its own mouth." He then commanded the supposed ape in the name of Jesus Christ to declare who he was, and why he consented to perform such abject services. "I am the devil," answered the ape in an angry tone, "and my only object in coming here is to carry off the soul of that man, which is already mine on several titles." "And why," asked the holy man, "have you not done so during the many years that you have performed menial offices for him?" "Because," was the answer, "he was accustomed to say a few devout prayers to God and to the Blessed Virgin every night, and if he had omitted doing so but once, I had power from the Creator to strangle him, and carry him off with me to hell." The Father then banished the evil spirit and persuaded the man, who was more dead than alive through fright, to repent at once and to make restitution of some property he had unjustly acquired. See from this, O sinner, whether the good works performed in the state of sin are altogether useless. What would have become of that man's soul if he had used the same foolish reasoning as you do, and said: Why should I trouble myself about prayer? as long as I am in this state I can do nothing for heaven; I will give up praying and all other good works.

You should change your way of thinking, therefore, and if you wish to be reasonable, say rather: In the state in which I now am I cannot merit heaven by any good works; I must be mad and foolish, then, wilfully to bury my soul in this hideous darkness for the sake of a bad thought, a scandalous word, an impure look, a mere animal pleasure, that lasts but a moment; like the spendthrift tradesman that sells all the implements of his craft, so that he cannot work at his trade to support himself. Do I not act far more foolishly when I commit sin? For I have

Therefore
the sinner
must see
how foolish
it is to com-
mit sin.

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thereby lost all the spiritual treasures that I had accumulated, and at the same time have deprived myself of all means of meriting.

And free
himself at
once from
that state by
repentance.

I am now laboring during the night and to no purpose. I must, then, at once free myself from my sins, and regain the clear light of grace. I will sincerely repent of and confess my sins. I will not defer repentance any longer, nor wait till next Easter, or the next feast of the Blessed Virgin, nay, not even till this evening. For why should I hear Mass so often on Sundays and holydays, mortify myself so frequently by fasting, and bear with so many crosses and trials, and yet gain no reward by it all? Since I can merit eternal glory in heaven every moment of this very day, will I neglect doing so, determined as I am some time or other to do penance? No, I will at once get rid of the heavy burden of my sins, and come forth out of this terrible darkness.

And never
fall into it
again.

And when you have once freed yourself from your sins, rejoice with all your heart, thank the divine mercy, and make this irrevocable resolution (hear all ye pious and just souls! this does not concern you): In future I will be on my guard against nothing so much as sin, which envelops the soul in such a gloomy night; I will avoid the occasions that may lead me into it; I will not go near that house, that person, that company, which has hitherto been a proximate occasion of sin to me; I will destroy that book, that picture, which has been a stumbling-block to me; I will keep a guard on my heart, my eyes, ears, tongue, and all my senses, by which I have so often sinned; every morning I will renew my resolution, and will earnestly and humbly beg of God to help me in temptations, and to keep me from sin. I will be diligent in looking after my children and servants, so as to keep them from the danger of sin, and I will perform all my works with a good intention for God's sake, in order that, as I am now in the state of grace, not the least of them may be unrewarded. Let this, then, my dear brethren, be your final resolution; be faithful to it until death. Rather death than sin! According to the advice of the wise Ecclesiastics, "Have pity on thy own soul, pleasing God."¹ If you have no reverence for the great God, who is present everywhere, who sees everything you do, and whom you insult and offend; if the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, which you trample underfoot, can make no impression on your heart; if you feel no compassion for your loving Saviour, whose death, as the Apostle says, you renew by every mortal sin

¹ Miserere animæ tuæ placens Deo.—Eccius. xxx. 24.

you commit; if you have no regard for your guardian angel, whom you sadden, and, as it were, drive away from you whenever you offend God; then at least have pity on your own soul, which you injure so grievously, so irretrievably, and for eternity, by bringing it into the night of sin. Be faithful, then, to your resolution; rather death than sin! O Almighty God of infinite goodness, give to me and all present the powerful help of Thy grace, that we may keep this resolution to the end of our lives. Amen.

THIRD SERMON.

ON THE INJURIOUS TREATMENT OF WHICH THE SINNER WHO DEFERS REPENTANCE IS GUILTY TOWARDS GOD.

Subject.

To intend to do penance and be converted, not now, but later on, is to treat most injuriously the good God who invites us again to return to Him.—*Preached on the second Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Cœperunt simul omnes excusare.—Luke XIV. 18.
“And they began all at once to make excuse.”

Introduction.

They must have been very unmannerly and uncourteous people who, being invited in such a friendly way to a magnificent banquet, paid no attention to the invitation. Enraged at their conduct, he who invited them excluded them forever from his table. “But I say unto you, that none of those men that were invited shall taste of my supper.” Do not most men, my dear brethren, act in the same way towards their Lord and God? He invites us to His Supper, in which He gives us His own Flesh and Blood as our food and drink; and yet, how many there are who make excuses and despise that Precious Banquet, by going but seldom to holy Communion? He invites us to the heavenly marriage-feast, that we may share in all imaginable joys with Him forever; but how many there are who excuse themselves and refuse to come, because they prefer to indulge in forbidden

pleasures and to satisfy themselves with the husks of swine, and thus renounce all right to heaven. He still daily invites sinners, his hated and sworn enemies, to His grace and friendship. He calls upon them to be converted and do penance, and promises that He will readily forgive them everything, so that they may not be excluded from His heavenly marriage-feast; but how many there are who make excuses, and reject the proffered grace by constantly deferring repentance and conversion, by putting off, to some indefinite time, the Lord who invites them in such a friendly manner, and by saying always, by way of answer, I will come, but not now: later on; I will do penance and be converted, but not immediately; at some other time! An insulting and injurious treatment, than which none worse can be imagined. This I undertake to prove to-day; and I say:

Plan of Discourse.

To intend to do penance and be converted, not now, but later on, is a great injustice towards the good God, who invites us again to return to Him. Such is the whole subject of this sermon.

Christ Jesus! who hast said that Thou camest, not to call the just, but sinners, call out to-day with Thy powerful and penetrating voice to my heart and to the hearts of all sinners, that we may be attentive to Thy invitation, and may be converted to Thee at once! Prostrate at Thy feet, we beg this of Thee through the merit of Thy dearest Mother Mary, and the intercession of our holy guardian angels, that none of us may be amongst the number of those uncourteous guests who, “began all at once to make excuse.”

Not to receive at once the grace and pardon offered by a great lord whom you have offended, is to treat him most injuriously.

If one of your equals, nay, one of inferior condition to you, who has offended and insulted you, were to come to you, and earnestly and humbly to implore your pardon; would you refuse to listen to him, turn your back on him, and shut the door in his face? If you did so, you would act very wrongly, and in direct opposition to the Christian law. For Christ our Saviour most earnestly and emphatically commands us to return good for evil, and instead of seeking revenge, to behave towards our worst enemies with meekness, friendliness, and charity, nay, even, as He says in the Gospel of St. Matthew, to be the first to ask pardon: “If therefore thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there thou remember that thy brother hath anything against thee; leave there thy offering before the altar, and go first to be

reconciled to thy brother.”¹ Mark those words; you must go to him yourself, and at once, and leave your offering until you are reconciled to your brother. And would it not be far worse for you to refuse to lay aside your hatred and enmity against one whom you have grossly offended, and who now humbly begs to be restored to your friendship? But if a great lord or prince, who is not at all in need of you, who has little to gain from your friendship, and nothing to fear from your enmity, and on whose favor you depend for your very livelihood; if he, I say, after having been offended by you, should, through sheer goodness and pity, either in his own person, or by an authorized ambassador, offer you full pardon and forgiveness, begging you at the same time to accept his offer at once; would you obstinately turn your back on him, and say that it does not suit you now to regain his friendship, that you do not want it yet, and that he must come some other time? Where is the child, with the least glimmer of reason, who will not condemn such conduct as most injurious?

Now, O sinner, look at the matter reasonably! Who is He who comes to you, calls and invites you, wishing to be reconciled to you and to be your friend again? Is He your prince and sovereign? Oh, if He were, how you would bow and scrape before Him! you certainly would not remain seated in His presence if He came to you; you would not even wait His coming, but would run out to meet Him, and in every possible way try to ingratiate yourself into His favor. But He is an infinitely greater Lord than your prince; before Him all the kings and emperors of earth, as well as the poorest beggar and simplest peasant, must bend the knee, and humbly beg of Him their daily bread. In a word, since we are unable to express His might and magnificence, He is the infinitely great God Himself, before whose Majesty the angels in heaven, the devils in hell, and all creatures on and under the earth tremble with reverence; whose calls and invitations even lifeless elements must obey; who makes a sign to the stars, and they are ready to do His bidding, as the Prophet Baruch says: “He that sendeth forth light, and it goeth; and hath called it, and it obeyeth Him with trembling. And the stars have given light in their watches, and rejoiced; they were called, and they said, here

He who invites the sinner to His friendship is God.

¹ Si ergo offers munus tuum ad altare, et ibi recordatus fueris, quia frater tuus habet aliquid adversum te: relinque ibi munus tuum ante altare, et vade prius reconciliari fratri tuo.—Matt. v. 23, 24.

we are; and with cheerfulness they have shined forth to Him that made them. This is our God, and there shall no other be accounted of in comparison of Him;”¹ who says to the raging sea: “Hitherto thou shalt come, and shalt go no further, and here thou shalt break thy swelling waves;”² nor dare it in the least disobey the voice of its Creator, who ever, according to St. Paul, calls to the things that are not. He “calletH those things that are not, as those that are;”³ and at the sound of His voice creatures come forth out of nothing. This great Lord and God deigns to speak to you, O man, O miserable worm of the earth! He offers you His favor, grace, and friendship, which you have forfeited forever, and do you still hesitate to accept His offer? Is it not yet convenient for you to hearken to His invitation? Do you still say to Him: “Go and come again, and to-morrow I will give to Thee,”⁴ I do not wish to be your friend to-day?

Who has
been first
offended by
the sinner.

And what has He then done to you? Has He perhaps hurt or injured you, so that you think you have just reason for rejecting His proffered friendship, and deferring to be reconciled to Him? What harm has He done you? Harm! What good things do you possess that this generous God has not freely given you? Are you not, from the crown of your head to the sole of your foot, a proof of His liberality and bounty? Consider everything you have; from whom have you received it, if not from God? That you are, that you live, that you see, hear, feel, walk, stand, sit; for all that you have to thank Him most humbly. What reason, then, have you to be angry with Him any longer? But what am I saying? Angry with Him! It is God who has first been offended by you! “Behold,” cries out St. Gregory in astonishment, “Behold, He Whom we have despised, calls us.”⁵ He it is whose commands you have neglected, whose blood you have trampled under foot, whom you have time after time offended, insulted, despised, for such a miserable thing as your worthless vanity, for a breath of honor, for a wretched piece of money, for a brutal lust, for the sake of grat

¹ Qui emittit lumen, et vadit; et vocavit illud, et obedivit illi in tremore. Stellæ autem dederunt lumen in custodiis suis, et lætatae sunt; vocatae sunt, et dixerunt, adsumus; et luxerunt ei cum jucunditate, qui fecit illas. Hic est Deus noster, et non aestimabitur abus adversus eum.—Baruch iii. 33-36.

² Usque huc venies, et non procedes amplius, et hic confringes tumentes fluctus tuos.—Job xxxviii. 11.

³ Vocat ea, quæ non sunt, tamquam ea, quæ sunt.—Rom. iv. 17.

⁴ Vade et revertere; cras dabo tibi.—Prov. iii. 23.

⁵ Ecce ipse quem despeximus vocat nos.—St. Greg. hom. 43 in Evang.

ifying your anger and vindictiveness, or of indulging in gluttony and drunkenness, or for fear of displeasing, or for the sake of pleasing men through human respect: "He it is whom we have despised!" And He whom you have treated so insultingly, and who, therefore, has just cause to reject you, to call out to you in a far different voice, to send down fire from heaven on you, to smite you with His thunderbolts, and to call upon the demons of hell and all the creatures on earth to take vengeance on you at this very moment, He it is Who calls you to repentance! He, the great God, who was first offended by you, (O ye angels, what did you think of me, when I dared even to deliberate with myself as to whether I should offend this great God?) He who has been so often offended by you, calls you! (O angels, still more reason have you to wonder at this!) He is the first to come to you and to invite you to return to Him! And for what object? What will he do with you? If you saw at a distance a man whom you have treated as shamefully as you have your God you would tremble with fear, and try to avoid him, and with reason, too, for you would have just cause to fear his vengeance.

But your God, whom you have thus offended, comes to you, (do not fear, O sinner; do not run away from Him!) not to punish and condemn you as you deserve, but to invite you to return to His grace and friendship, and that He does with as much earnestness and patience, nay, even humility, as if He were in need of your favor. He seeks you out in His own person; He begs of you to return to Him by His servants, whom He has commissioned for that purpose, as St. Paul says: "For Christ, therefore, we are ambassadors, God, as it were, exhorting by us. For Christ we beseech you, be reconciled to God."¹ We beg and implore of you, oh, be converted now to God! He comes Himself and makes the same request of you. What else is the meaning of those good inspirations, those salutary thoughts? Why else is this life a vale of tears? Why does death await you, O sinner, and you know not when it will come? Why must you appear before a most strict judge at the very moment after death? Why is your conscience torn by remorse day and night, knowing, as you do, that you are in such a miserable state that, if death surprised you, you would be hurled into hell? What is the meaning of those inefficacious desires by which you

And this too He does, as it were, suppliantly.

¹ Pro Christo ergo legatione fungimur, tanquam Deo exhortante per nos. Obsecramus pro Christo, reconciliamini Deo.— II. Cor. v. 20.

wish to be like the good and pious, and to enjoy peace of conscience? What is all this, but the voice of God calling on you to repent? "Behold I stand at the gate, and knock; if any man shall hear My voice, and open to Me the door, I will come in to him." ¹ As Rupert remarks on those words, is not that to stand at the door, like a beggar who asks an alms of a rich man? ² You know, my dear brethren, how a poor man acts at the door of a rich miser. He knocks and begs for a piece of bread; but he has to ask two or three times before he gets an answer. Does the poor man go away then? Oh, no; he remains at the door, and cries out, in more imploring tones, "give me a piece of bread, for God's sake!" And at last he gets the usual pitiless answer: "I have nothing for you." What does he do then? He does not yet despair; he repeats his request, and although he has been told that there is nothing for him, he still waits and hopes that his very importunity will gain for him what he could not get through Christian charity. In the same way does the merciful God act at the door of the sinner's heart. He knocks over and over again, and although He gets no answer, He does not turn away. "I called, I stretched out My hand;" ³ I am still calling and entreating you! And what wilt Thou have, O my God? Be reconciled to Me; give Me back your heart, which you have withdrawn from Me, and fixed upon creatures; lay aside the hatred and anger with which you have hitherto persecuted Me, although I have never done anything to injure you. I am quite ready to forgive all you have done against Me, if you will only cease despising Me. Even if your sins outnumber the hairs of your head. "return to Me, and I will receive thee." ⁴ Do not let shame or fear of the deformity of your sins keep you back; I know well what you have done. "Thou hast prostituted thyself to many lovers." ⁵ "Nevertheless, return to Me, and I will receive thee;" I will forget all the insults you have offered Me, and will no longer remember your sins. "Therefore, at the least from this time, call to Me, "Thou art my father," ⁶ and you shall be My dearest child, and I shall be to you as before, full of fatherly love and kindness, for I wish to have you with

¹ Ecce, sto ad ostium et pulso; si quis audierit vocem meam, et aperuerit mihi januam, intrabo ad illum.—Apoc. iii. 20.

² Illud simile est stanti ad ostium cujusdam divitis, et roganti.—Rupert l. 2, in Apoc.

³ Vocavi, extendi manum meam.—Prov. i. 24.

⁴ Revertere ad me, et ego suscipiam te.—Jerem. iii. 1.

⁵ Fornicata es cum amatoribus multis.—Ibid.

⁶ Ergo saltem amodo voca me, Pater meus.—Ibid. 4.

Me in heaven. "Wilt thou be angry forever, or wilt thou continue unto the end?"'

O my Lord and my God! what dost Thou say? Would it not satisfy Thy goodness, would it not be even too great a favor to me, wicked sinner that I am, if Thou wert graciously to permit me to approach Thee in all humility, in order to implore Thy pardon? I have sinned, not Thou! I have offended Thee, not Thou me! And yet Thou art the first to come and ask me for my friendship! Yes, my dear brethren, so great is His love, so burning His desire to pardon sinners; and therefore, in the Parables, He represents Himself to us sometimes as a shepherd who seeks the lost sheep over mountain and valley, through thistles and thorns, running after it with bleeding feet, and when He has found it, enticing it in the most loving manner to come to Him, and then bringing it back to the fold of His elect sheep with great rejoicing; and again, as a father, running out to meet his returning prodigal son, who has squandered away all his spiritual graces and gifts by leading a sensual and wicked life, and when He sees him afar off, naked and hungry, falling on his neck, embracing him as if he were his dearest child, and celebrating his return by inviting all his friends and neighbors to a feast.

A goodness
and mercy
on the part
of God!

Wonderful goodness and mercy of my God! Thou, O Lord, art wonderful in all Thy works! The seraphim and all the heavenly spirits stand before Thy throne and veil their faces, because they cannot bear the splendor of Thy divine Majesty, nor fathom the depth of Thy infinite perfections; but there is nothing surprises me so much as this goodness and mercy of Thine! When I have once understood that Thou art necessarily the true God, that Thou art not subject to change, and that Thy greatness is incapable of increase, it is not difficult for me to see that Thou must be present in all places; when I have learned by faith that Thy wisdom is infinite. I am not surprised that in one glance Thou seest all things, present, past, and future; when I have been taught to adore Thy infinite power, that nothing can withstand, I am not astonished to hear that, by a mere act of Thy will, the mere breath of Thy lips, Thou hast created out of nothing the heavens and the earth, with all they contain. I tremble with fear at Thy strict justice, according to which Thou hast not spared even the angels, and hurlest into a lake of fire among the demons, to burn there forever, away from Thy face,

Which cannot be sufficiently
admired.

¹ Numquid irasceris in perpetuum, aut perseverabis in finem?—Jerem. iii. 5.

the soul purchased by the Blood of Thy only Son, on account of its having consented to a single, momentary thought against Thy law; yet even that I can easily understand, when I consider the infinite greatness of Thy Majesty, worthy of all honor and love, which is insulted most grossly by every sin, and the obstinacy and inconceivable wickedness of the sinner who, in spite of Thee, wilfully and deliberately transgresses Thy well-known law for some worthless thing. But the more I know of Thy greatness, the more vividly faith represents to me Thy infinite perfections, the more, too, does my astonishment increase when I hear, read, and experience that Thou, O God, goest after a mere mortal; that Thou, a God of such greatness, so patiently, so forgivingly, so humbly goest in search of, and callest out after, and offerest pardon to, and most earnestly implorest to return to Thee, a poor miserable worm of the earth, of whom Thou art not at all in need, whose everlasting damnation would not in the least interfere with Thy infinite happiness, and by whom Thou hast first been offended; and this Thou askest of him as if it were a great and necessary favor to Thyself! The more I admire and praise this goodness and mercy of Thine, the more I, a poor miserable sinner, am in need of them, the less can I understand or fathom them. In this matter I must surrender my understanding, and confess with Thy servaut, St. Lawrence Justinian, that, "he who tries to investigate the ineffable wealth of the divine mercy, must be overwhelmed by the very effort."¹

Hence it is an inconceivable discourtesy on the part of the sinner to defer accepting the divine invitation.

And yet there is another thing, which possibly is still more to be wondered at; to me, indeed, it would seem incredible, nay, impossible, if experience did not prove it to be true, and that is, that the man whom Thou, O great God, seekest, invitest, and implorest to return to Thee, will not come at once, disdains to hear Thy loving invitation, turns his back on Thee, and shuts the door in Thy face. Come some other time, he says to Thee, as if he were speaking to a beggar; I have nothing for Thee now; I know well, O God, what Thou wishest me to do; Thy desire is that I should abstain from sin; but it does not suit me to gratify Thy desire now; some other time, perhaps, I may do so, after having committed still more sin. Thy desire is that I should do penance and repent of my sins; but I will not do it now; later on I will see what I can do in that way. Thou implorest and entrest me to grant Thy request; but I prefer not to listen to

¹ Quisquis dominicæ miseratiōnis ineffabilis voluerit investigare divitias, omnino in ipsa inquisitione succumbet.

Thee now; at some future time I may do so. Thou offerest me pardon, grace and favor, fatherly love, and Thy eternal kingdom of heaven; but I do not desire Thy favors now; come some other time. O insolence! what words can I find to express thy malice! O patience of my God, who bears to be thus ill-treated by a lump of earth, and bears it in silence, Thy goodness surpasses my understanding! O sinner, how can you turn away your God so discourteously? Do you not (and if you have a spark of decency left, you ought to consider this attentively) act with the greatest discourtesy towards your sovereign Lord? Do you not treat Him as you would some worthless man, who has neither power nor authority, and who is dependent on your favor for the very means of livelihood? And yet it is for your own interest, and not for His, that you should at once be freed from the miserable state of sin, from the imminent danger of eternal damnation. Have you any reason for continuing to offend your Lord and your God? Is it right and just for you to do so? Will you still sing the same old tune: I will do penance, but not now, some other time; I will be converted, but not at once; I will abandon sin and amend my life, but not immediately? Do you, I ask again, do you intend to give no other answer to your God when He calls you?

Then, if so, listen to what I am now going to say, and learn from it how grossly unjust your conduct is: I use the argument of St. Bernard. If you are determined to go on sinning, you either believe that God will forgive you later on, or you do not believe it. In the latter case, what madness it is for you, if you have any hope for escaping hell and going to heaven, not to be converted at once, since God now so generously offers to forgive you! What folly, to defer penance to a time when, as you maintain, you will have no grace to expect! But if you believe, as you pretend, and I know not on what grounds, that, in spite of your having offended Him for such a long time, God will yet pardon you, what an injustice it is, what unpardonable insolence, what diabolical malice on your part, to find an occasion for further sin in the very fact that should make you at once begin to love God above all things with your whole heart! Will you then continue to offend Him who has borne with you so long and so patiently, who is so mercifully willing to receive you again into His friendship, and to make you eternally happy with Himself in heaven?

And to continue to offend Him from whom he expects forgiveness afterwards.

And besides, is it not most unjust for you to steal away from Although he

is not sure
of the
future.

God the present time, which is the only time you are certain of, and which you are bound by countless titles to devote to His service, and to put Him off with the promise of a future, of which you are not certain of having a single moment at your disposal? You say that you will serve God hereafter; but who has told you that you will be alive then? And if you are not sure of the years, months, weeks, and days that are to come, why do you reserve them for the service of God, to whom you are bound to devote every moment of your life? Are you not simply trying to deceive the Almighty? does not your conduct show that you have not an earnest desire of heaven? In fact, you are paying with ready money the devil, who should not have the least claim on you, while you put off to an indefinite period the payment of the debt you owe to God, to whom everything you have belongs.

And even if
the future
were cer-
tain, he will
not leave off
sinning till
he is tired of
it.

But even supposing you were certain of the future, you still act most unjustly to God by intending to give Him only the remnant of a vicious life. You will do penance, be converted, amend your life, and serve God; but not until you have satisfied to the full your evil inclinations and sensual appetites. Then you give to God the time that you have left after having served the devil. Your soul was consecrated in holy Baptism as the temple and dwelling place of God, and you will allow Him to enter it only after the devil has occupied it for many years, and defiled it with all sorts of abominations? Your whole life should be spent in praising and blessing God, and you give the best part of it to the devil, while God must be satisfied with the miserable remnant, when you have neither desire, nor power, nor opportunity to sin any more? In that way you do not so much abandon sin as sin abandons you, as St. Augustine says: "your sins have left you; not you, your sins." Suppose that two people are sitting gambling at night by the light of a candle; suddenly the candle goes out and they are obliged to give up their game, do they give it up because they do not care to play any longer? Not at all, but because they have no light; if they had another candle they would play away. O sinner, amend your life; cease offending God, you have insulted Him long enough! What is your answer? Oh, I will amend by and by, when my appetites are sated, when my youth is passed, when old age comes on, when that person is dead or gone away from me, when the occasion is removed, when sickness comes on and

¹ Peccata te dimiserunt, non tu illa.—S. Aug. Hom. 41.

death is at hand; then I will give up sinning and will be converted and serve God. That is to say, that you will allow the torch of your life to be burnt out, and not amend your ways until you are on your death bed, when you will have neither power nor desire to sin any more; and you will not begin to serve God until you are wearied and worn out in the service of the devil.

If Cain was cursed because he selected the worst of his fruits to offer as a sacrifice to God, what sort of a curse will you then deserve, O man, since you offer to God the worst part of your life? What would you think of a man who would offer a prince nothing to eat but soiled bread crumbs, the refuse of meat and vegetables, and things of the kind that are given only to the dogs? Ah, my Lord and my God, there are many men who treat Thee, if I dare say so, like a dog! They eat the kernel themselves and give Thee the shell; the young and tender flesh they keep to satisfy their own greed, while the old worthless bones are thrown to Thee! The sweet wine of youth is poured out as a libation to the devil, while Thou must be satisfied with the sour dregs! Ah, far different, O Lord, is Thy treatment of us! There was not a moment of Thy long eternity in which Thou didst not think of us and love us! Thy whole life, O Jesus, was spent for our salvation; all Thy thoughts, words, and actions, Thy passion and death, were for our welfare, and Thou hast already prepared an eternal banquet of joys in heaven, as a reward for the small service we can render Thee here! And how do we act towards Thee? If we had an eternity to live on earth, we should in strict justice spend every moment of it in loving Thee, nor could we even then make a sufficient return for the love Thou hast shown us; and yet, though our lives are so short, and so uncertain that we are not sure of even a quarter of an hour, we are unwilling to spend any part of them in Thy service, except some future years, or it may be days or hours!

O sinners, do you not yet see how unjustly you act when you refuse to hearken to the voice of God, Who now calls and invites you, and put off your repentance and conversion? Oh, how I fear lest His goodness and mercy may soon be turned into stern vengeance! He has fixed a certain limit to all our works, as well as to His own inspirations and graces; perhaps He is calling to-day for the last time; perhaps He has determined, if you still continue to despise Him after this exhortation, to deal with you as you deal with Him. Hear the threat He utters by the Psal-

What fearful injustice on the part of the sinner!

He has therefore reason to fear that God will reject him hereafter.

mist David: "They shall return at evening, and shall suffer hunger like dogs;"¹ you have treated Me like a dog, you have given Me the very worst part of your lives, and have turned Me away from your doors like a poor beggar; but the time will come when I too shall treat you like dogs; when the evening approaches I shall see you chained up like dogs; I shall hear your moans and howls and shrieks when the dread of death shall be upon you; and what will you have to expect from Me then? My special grace and assistance to free you from the state of sin? No, they are not for such as you! I will give you the same answer that you so often gave Me; go away, I will say, I do not wish to give you My grace now, I will behold you suffering the pangs of hunger in hell like dogs, and I will rejoice thereat. "Because I called, and you refused; I stretched out My hand, and there was none that regarded;"² "I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock."³ I have so frequently offered you My grace, but you refused it then; I offered you pardon of your sins, but you did not accept it; my eternal kingdom, but you had no desire for it; and now I, whom you have so despised and ill-treated; I, who have before now wept over your miseries; I, who have shed My Blood for you; I, who have given My life for you; I, who have so often fruitlessly entreated and exhorted you, "I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock," when the demons, to whom you are now giving your lives, will carry you, body and soul, into hell; I will laugh, when you are howling in exterior darkness; I will laugh, when you are burning in the lake of fire; I will laugh, when you are tortured with an unsupportable stench; I will laugh, when you are calling upon death, that will not come to you for all eternity; I will laugh and will mock. O merciful Saviour, who didst come to call not the just, but sinners, what a bitter laugh is that for Thee! And wilt Thou then rejoice at our eternal destruction? Certainly, I will laugh at it, "because I called, and you refused."

Conclusion
and res-
olution to
repent at
once.

But, O my good God, I will come to Thee! Behold me prostrate at Thy feet, not so much through fear of Thy just anger and displeasure, as through love of the goodness and mercy with which Thou hast waited for me so long, and called me so often! It would be a most shameful thing for me to turn Thee again away from my door, and to despise Thy proffered grace! Thou,

¹ Convertentur ad vesperam, et famem patientur ut canes.—Ps. lviii. 15.

² Quia vocavi et renuistis; extendi manum meam, et non fuit qui aspiceret.—Prov. i. 24.

³ Ego quoque in interitu vestro ridebo et subsannabo. —Ibid. 26.

O great God, holdest out Thy hand to me, a poor mortal; shall I still refuse to take it? Thou, Whom I have so often offended, desirest reconciliation, shall I then still continue to hate and persecute Thee? I have given so few hours of my life to Thy service, but Thou art ready to forget all my ill treatment of Thee; shall I not then begin at once to love Thee? Or shall I still defer repentance and amendment? Oh, no, my most merciful God, I will follow the advice of Thy handmaid Judith, "For as much as the Lord is patient, let us be penitent for this same thing, and with many tears let us beg His pardon;"¹ yes, O Lord, even because Thou art good, and callest me, will I do penance, and I will do it at once. Now I will begin what I should have done long ago, to serve Thee with all my strength! I am sincerely sorry that I have acted so unjustly to Thee hitherto, that I have so grossly offended Thee, my merciful God, that I have so often closed my ears to Thy invitations. Never again, O Lord, will I treat Thee so vilely! From this moment forward I bid adieu to all those people, to all those worldly goods and pleasures, that have hitherto kept me from serving Thee! And Thou, O Jesus, who receivest sinners, receive me too in Thy mercy, now that I am filled with sorrow and repentance. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the time of a Jubilee.

Text.

Pro Christo legatione fungimur, tanquam Deo exhortante per nos. Obsecramus pro Christo, reconciliamini Deo.—II. Cor. v. 20.

"For Christ therefore we are ambassadors, God, as it were, exhorting by us. For Christ we beseech you, be reconciled to God."

When the great God speaks, then certainly must man be ready to listen. When the sovereign Lord desires and asks for anything by His inspirations, then, indeed, should man at once obey and grant His request, especially when what He asks is for our own good. My dear brethren, "for Christ we are ambassadors, God as it were exhorting you" by our voice, and we beg and implore of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, "be reconciled to God." Sinners should make peace with the God whom they have offended; that most desirable peace, in which our own conscience gives us testimony that we are children of God, now

¹ Quia patiens Dominus est, in hoc ipso pœniteamus, et indulgentiam ejus fuis lacrymis postulemus.—Judith viii. 14.

especially, since, by making peace with heaven, we wish to obtain that peace among Christian potentates which is so ardently and so generally desired, and to be freed from the greatest of all temporal calamities, the scourge of war. The conditions of this peace that we are to make with God are very favorable and advantageous to us; and therefore any Christian who does not profit by them, and sincerely repent of his sins, must indeed be an obdurate and a hopeless sinner. “For Christ we are ambassadors,” God exhorting you by our words, and in His name we beg of you, “be reconciled to God;” make peace with Him at once! Mark those words; it is God who exhorts you by us; it is God who offers to make peace with you; He is the first to implore you, as it were suppliantly, to be reconciled to Him. To refuse Him, to say to Him, as some do, I will repent, but not now, later on, would be a gross and intolerable injury, as I shall now show. My Plan of Discourse then is: To desire to make peace with God, not now, but at some future time, is most unjust towards the good God, who is the first to offer to make peace with us. Such is the whole subject of the present exhortation. O God of mercy, grant that there be no sinner so hard-hearted, so discourteous, as not to hearken to Thee at once, and to do penance! This we beg of Thee, etc.

FOURTH SERMON.

ON THE LITTLE HOPE OF SALVATION THERE IS FOR THE SINNER WHO DEFERS REPENTANCE.

Subject.

The sinner's hope of salvation, when founded on future repentance, is, if not a thoroughly false hope, at least a treacherous one, generally speaking, and always a presumptuous one; therefore the sinner should do penance at once.—*Preached on the third Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Gaudium erit coram angelis Dei super uno peccatore pœnitentiam agente.—Luke xv. 10.

“There shall be joy before the angels of God upon one sinner doing penance.”

Introduction.

Last Sunday I showed how unjustly sinners act towards God by refusing to hear His calls and by deferring their conversion. And now I ask, how is it with themselves? Do they despair of salvation? Have they given up all hopes of heaven? If you put the question to them, they will all answer: No, God forbid; we hope to save our souls, and to be happy in heaven. And on what do they ground their hopes? On repentance and the amendment of their lives? O sinners, if that is the case, then your hopes rest on the one sure foundation! Hear what He who seeks and receives sinners assures you of, and be consoled: "there shall be joy before the angels of God upon one sinner doing penance!" Yes, they answer, it is on that assurance I depend. Come, then, at once! Do penance; amend your lives; run to your Shepherd, who is stretching out His arms to you! Certainly, they say; but not yet; later on. Oh! then I see that the foundation of your hopes is future penance? But I tell you now, by way of paternal warning, and I shall prove to you that

Plan of Discourse.

The sinner's hope of salvation, when founded on future repentance, if not a thoroughly false hope, is at least a treacherous one, generally speaking, and always a presumptuous one. Such is the whole subject of to-day's exhortation.

Therefore, do penance and amend your sinful lives at once, if you wish to give joy to the angels and to ensure your salvation. Such shall be the conclusion. Give us Thy powerful grace there. to, O merciful Saviour, who receivest sinners: we beg it of Thee through the intercession of Mary and the holy guardian angels.

I have still time enough; I am young and strong; I will repent by-and-by, confess my sins, and serve God faithfully. Such is the cry of most sinners. You may hear it from blasphemers and slanderers; from the impure, the unjust, the vindictive; from drunkards, and from all who are not earnestly resolved to give up their accustomed vices. Thus does the hellish hound seek to change the birds he has caught into crows and ravens, that always croak out, "*cras! cras!*" to-morrow! to-morrow! But you, who croak in that way, hear the threat that God utters by the Prophet Sophonias. Speaking of such sinners, the Prophet imagines himself to be walking through the streets,

The sinner who trusts his salvation to future penance, builds on a very treacherous foundation:

listening to all sorts of birds singing in the different houses, when over the door of one house he sees a raven; O unlucky house! he cries out; it is all up with you! you will soon fall to ruin! "The voice of the singing-bird in the window, the raven on the upper post;" and what follows? "I will consume her strength."¹ I will take away all her strength, so that she shall go to ruin. Sinner! says St. Augustine, you are living at ease in vice; there is a singing-bird in the open window; you are often warned and exhorted to do penance and be converted to God, and you cry out: Not now! some other time! "*cras! cras!*" There is the raven's croak over the door of your heart. "I tell you, that, as long as you utter that croak, you are hastening to destruction."²

Namely, on the future, of which he cannot promise himself a moment.

For, tell me now, on what do you ground your hopes of salvation? On the penance, you say, that I will do. And when will you do it? Oh, by-and-by, you answer. But you have said the same thing before, and have often repeated it, and yet the time for doing penance seems as far as ever! It will come, you say, sooner or later. O blind mortal that you are! You speak as if you carried the future about in your pocket! Tell me, in God's name, how long have you to live, how much time have you still left to do penance? Can you say that you are sure of a year, a month, a day, nay, even of an hour? You know nothing whatever about it, for you dare not contradict the God of truth, who says to you and to me, "watch ye therefore, because you know not the day nor the hour."³ "Be you then also ready; for at what hour you think not, the Son of man will come."⁴ Whether you are old or young, weak or strong, sick or in good health, you know not whether you have a day or an hour of life still left.

For God can deprive him of life at any moment.

The end of life, says the philosopher Seneca, should always be before the eyes of young and old; "for our lives will not be demanded of us, as if they were an interest due at a fixed date."⁵ And how then? Let us hear what St. Paul says. "Keep the good thing committed to thy trust;"⁶ be careful of the deposit that God has entrusted to your keeping. There is a great difference between a deposit, and interest that has to be paid. The

¹ Vox cantantis in fenestra, corvus in superliminari; quoniam attenuabo robur ejus.—Sophon. ii. 14.

² Ecce tibi dico cum facis vocem corvinam, occurrit tibi ruina.—S. Aug., serm. 164. de tempore.

³ Vigilate itaque quia nescitis diem neque horam.—Matt. xxv. 13.

⁴ Et vos estote parati, quia qua hora non putatis, Filius hominis veniet.—Luke xii. 40.

⁵ Non enim citamur ex censu.

⁶ Bonum depositum custodi.—II. Tim. i. 14.

interest is due at a certain time, before which it cannot be demanded; whereas a deposit has no fixed time, the lawful owner can claim it whenever he pleases. This life is not an interest, but a deposit, so that there is not an hour in which one can be certain that it will not be demanded of him. If it were an interest, then, O sinner, you might say, I am still young and strong; my time is not come to pay the interest and to die; and you might have some excuse for your daring hope that you will do penance hereafter, be reconciled to God, and amend your sinful life. But since it is a deposit entrusted to your care, which the Lord and Master of life can demand of you in a hundred different ways, at His pleasure, without giving you the least warning, how can you dare to think and to say, I will repent and amend by-and-by, at some future time? If the Lord of your life were this night to give power to the demons to strangle you, you would not be the first to whom that has happened. If you were now suddenly struck dead with a fit of apoplexy, you would not be the first to die in that way. If you were this evening to be pierced by a sword as you walk through the streets, or to be killed by a chance shot, you would only be the victim of an accident that has already caused the death of many who were of the same opinion as you are now, and who deferred repentance. Do you not see, then, how weak, treacherous, and uncertain is the foundation on which you build your hopes of eternal happiness, namely, the uncertain future time, which is not yours, which you cannot dispose of in the least, and which may never be for you?

And meanwhile you are now actually in that miserable, unhappy state, in which, if the Lord were to take the deposit away from you, you are sure of being unhappy with the demons for all eternity. Where are your prudence and common-sense? How can you be at ease in that state? Remarkable is the fable related by St. Cyril: A sailor on the high seas was once very desirous of coming to land; he saw far off what he thought to be an island; he made for it at once, disembarked, and lit a fire to warm himself and to cook some food; but in a few minutes the island began to move, and he, thinking that it was on account of an earth-quake, betook himself immediately to his ship. But when he looked round, he saw the supposed island swimming about, and then knew that it was an enormous whale. Enraged at being thus deceived, he cried out to it: "Why have you thus betrayed me by pretending to be an island?" "And why," asked

Therefore he acts foolishly and presumptuously; shown by a fable.

the whale in return, "did you trust to me, who am not fixed to any one spot?" See how foolish and presumptuous you are, O sinner, to trust to a treacherous future your repentance and your eternal happiness. The sailor was excusable, because he thought the whale was really an island; but you are building on what you know very well to be unstable ground that is always flitting away. The sailor had his ship to fly to for refuge; but your faith teaches you for certain that, if your foundation once begins to move, that is, when the time of life is past for you, you have no other means left to escape eternal ruin. The sailor saw before his eyes that which he thought to be an island, and he knew that he could land on it; while you are utterly blind as to the future, and know not whether you will ever see it or not; and yet you trust to it your eternal life. Can there be any greater folly and presumption?

By deferring penance, he makes it more difficult.

But suppose that that indefinite future time really arrives, do you know that you will then do penance, amend your life, and be converted? You know what you have now determined to do; but who has told you that you will do it when the time comes? I now say to you, repent of and detest your sins, and abstain from them in future. No, you answer, not yet. And why not yet? Oh, it is too hard for me now; too difficult altogether to give up my love for that creature, to abstain from that pleasure, that bad habit. And if that is too difficult now, what will it be afterwards, when you will have spent a long time in the indulgence of that foolish love, that sensual passion, that bad habit? Is it likely to be easier for you to abstain from it then, than now? If you will but use your common-sense in the matter, you will see that your difficulty will increase more and more.

Shown by a simile.

"A long sickness is troublesome to the physician," says the Holy Ghost by the wise Ecclesiasticus; "the physician cutteth off a short sickness."¹ That is to say, a long-continued sickness wearies out the physician; while he has no trouble in curing a slight one. The meaning of this is evident. The physician is called in all haste to the sick man; as usual he feels his pulse at once, and notices a great increase of inward heat. Where do you feel the pain? he asks the sick man. Oh, answers the latter, over my whole body. This is a serious matter, thinks the other; it must be a case of violent fever. When, he asks further, did you feel ill first? Yesterday, is the answer; I knew there was

¹ *Languor prolixior gravat medicum; brevem languorem præcidit medicus.*—Ecclesi. x. 11, 12.

something wrong, because I had no appetite for my meals. Oh, then, if it is only since yesterday that you are ill, we will soon have you all right again. It is well for you that you sent for me in time. He is called to another sick person, whom he finds to be quite worn out, weak, and languid. Oh, he thinks, this is a bad sign! How long has he been ill? he asks those who are in attendance. He has now been ill for a long time, is the answer; we have tried all sorts of remedies; but nothing has done him any good. Ah, my good friends, says the physician then, there is no help for him now; he had better make his will, for he will never recover. But can you not prescribe something for him? Certainly I can, but to what purpose? The disease is an inveterate one; it has eaten into the marrow of his bones; it might have been cured if the remedy had been taken in time; but there is no chance now; it would take a miracle to save him. See how difficult it is to heal an illness of long standing, which, if it had been attended to in the beginning, might have been easily cured.

The Holy Ghost applies all this to the moral maladies of the soul. A man commits a mortal sin through natural weakness and frailty, or by being careless in a dangerous occasion, or because he is overcome by some violent temptation; he commits it two or three times, and even oftener. Alas! he is already in a dangerous and fatal illness. But what does it take to cure him of it? A single thought prompted by his uneasy conscience. My God, he says to himself, what have I done! A single good inspiration of God or of his holy guardian angel, to remind him that he has lost heaven, and deserved hell; the hearing a sermon in which his conscience is touched, so that he begins to think of the wretched state in which he is; any of these remedies is quite enough to cure him, to move him to earnest repentance and detestation of his sin, with a firm resolution never to commit it again; because his sin has not yet become inveterate, nor grown to a habit. There you have a case in which the cure is effected at once by the first remedy that God applies, and that the sick person takes without delay. But the sinner who continues in vice year after year; the unchaste man who has been for a long time wallowing in the filth of his unholy passions; the unjust man who has been steadily enriching himself by usurious and unlawful practices; the drunkard of long standing, accustomed to cursing and swearing; these and such as these, who have often confessed their sins, but not amended

The ordinary means are generally of little avail with an inveterate sinner.

their lives, they have now to return to God by sincere repentance; they must give up forever their sensual pleasure and accustomed vices, and live chastely, justly, soberly, and holily. Oh, how troublesome and difficult they will find it! God may give them an inspiration, their good angel may speak to their hearts, all the preachers in the world may exhort them, but it is all to no purpose; their sin is inveterate; it is a disease that has for a long time been eating into their vitals; remedies have been prescribed and forced on them often enough already; but no cure has been effected, for they have lost their power on inveterate sinners, and if God does not, so to speak, work an evident miracle of grace in their behalf, there is no hope for them.

As we see
in the traitor
Judas.

When has the world ever seen a more experienced physician of souls than Our Lord Jesus Christ? How many great sinners there were who followed Him, how many whom He sought out Himself; and He cured them all! The first word of warning He spoke, cured James and John of their ambitious desire to have the two first places in His kingdom. The first call He gave Matthew, who was then a public sinner, cured him of injustice so effectually, that he left all he had and followed Christ. The incredulous Thomas was cured by the first touch. A single look of His was enough to make Peter weep bitterly for having denied Him; and the first inspiration and ray of light that Magdalene, a public sinner, received, cured her of the vice of impurity. But none of the remedies that He applied to Judas was successful; so that the latter died impenitent and despairing. Whence arose the difference? The malady of the former was either recently contracted, or else they at once took the prescribed remedies, and did penance; Judas, on the contrary, had indulged his avaricious desires too long, and his disease had become inveterate. For, long before he betrayed his Master into the hands of his enemies for thirty pieces of silver, he was, as the Evangelist says, "a thief,"¹ and therefore he murmured at the waste of the precious ointment which Magdalene poured over Our Lord's head and feet. And what excellent opportunities he had of correcting that vice! He was in daily intercourse with Christ, the Son of God, he heard His salutary instructions and exhortations, and saw in Him a model of perfect poverty; but nothing could induce him to amend his life. How lovingly and tenderly Christ spoke to him at the Last Supper, through a desire of making him enter into himself and repent! Our Lord

¹ *Fur erat.*—John xii. 6.

even washed and kissed his feet, fed him with His own flesh and blood, and said to him publicly, as a salutary warning, "one of you is about to betray Me."¹ The other apostles were very much troubled at this, and began to ask Him, "Is it I Lord?"² Am I the treacherous apostle who is to commit such a crime? Judas alone kept silent, nor was he in the least disturbed, until Our Lord at last plainly alluded to him. "He that dippeth his hand with Me in the dish," He said, "he shall betray Me. . . . but woe to that man by whom the Son of man shall be betrayed."³ Better would it have been for that man, if he had never been born! At last Judas asked Him: "Is it I Rabbi?" He saith to him: "Thou hast said it;"⁴ you are the man. And yet the wicked man thought it too soon to do penance. While he was actually accomplishing his treason in the garden of Gethsemani, Our Lord kissed him, called him friend and again warned him. "Friend, whereto art thou come?"⁵ He said. Who would not think that the most hardened heart would have been softened at these words? But no; they had no effect on the traitor. At last, when he saw that Jesus was really condemned to death, Judas wished to repent. "Then Judas . . . repenting himself, brought back the thirty pieces of silver, saying: 'I have sinned, in betraying innocent blood.'⁶ But his repentance was too late to be sincere; "he went and hanged himself with an halter."⁷ "Useless, indeed," says St. John Chrysostom, "is the penance that is too long deferred!"

Now, O sinner, what has become of the hopes of salvation that you built on the future? Your soul is now dangerously ill. "Wilt thou be made whole?"⁸ I ask you, as Our Lord asked the infirm man in the Gospel. You have a salutary remedy at hand in the sacrament of Penance, and you have been often exhorted to have recourse to it, but your answer has always been: "No, I do not want that remedy yet; it is too severe; I find it too hard to free myself from my illness; there is still time; by-and-by I will take the remedy, and be cured." But wait till that by-and-by comes, and you will find that it will then be too late; for it will be far more difficult for you to do penance then, than now.

And in the end he will not do penance, at all.

¹ Unus vestrum me traditurus est.—Matt. xxvi. 21. ² Numquid ego sum, Domine?—Ibid. 22.

³ Qui intingit mecum manum in aproside, hic me tradet . . . vae autem homini illi per quem Filius hominis tradetur.—Ibid. 23, 24.

⁴ Numquid ego sum, Rabbi? Ait illi: tu dixisti.—Ibid. 25.

⁵ Amice, ad quid venisti?—Ibid. 50.

⁶ Poenitentia ductus retulit triginta argentes . . . dicens: peccavi, tradens sanguinem justum.—Matt. xxvii. 3, 4.

⁷ Abiens, laqueo se suspendit.—Ibid. 5.

⁸ Vis sanus fieri?—John v. 6.

And even if, like Judas, you had an inefficacious desire to do penance, the justice of God, who will be wearied with waiting for you so long, will withhold from you the grace and the opportunity of repenting, of which you have made yourself unworthy. "Woe to them that are with child, and that give suck in those days," says Our Lord Jesus Christ.¹ Woe to those who are always full of inefficacious desires to do good works, and who never try to carry those desires into effect! Their good intentions will all come to naught at last. And such will be the case with all those who defer repentance from year to year. The Prophet Job says of such people: "His heart shall be as hard as a stone."² He may in the end try to make his confession; but it will be a cold and dead confession, without true supernatural sorrow, without a firm resolution of amendment, and his heart will remain as hard as a stone that nothing can soften.

Shown by
figures from
Holy Scrip-
ture.

In the Book of Exodus God publishes the following law: If a Hebrew was sold as a slave, he should have his liberty at the end of six years; but if he was contented with his position, and did not wish to be set at liberty, he had to remain a slave all his life. "And if the servant shall say: 'I love my master and my wife and children, I will not go out free;' his master shall bring him to the gods, (that is, to the judges and chiefs of the people,) and he shall be set to the door and the posts, and he shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall be his servant forever."³ A strange, and, as it might seem, a useless law; for who would be so foolish as to choose slavery in preference to freedom? Do you know, O sinner, who is guilty of that folly? You are, and so are all those who, being in the state of sin, could be converted to God by doing penance, and defer doing it. By mortal sin you have sold yourself as a bond slave to the devil; how long are you now bearing that galling yoke? The good God offers you now, as He has often done before, the grace to free yourself from this slavery, and to regain the glorious freedom of His children. He says to you, in the words of St. Paul: "Behold, now is the acceptable time, behold, now is the day of salvation;"⁴ return to Me; do penance, and amend your life! But you go on refusing the proffered grace; you put off the Almighty to some

¹ *Vae autem pręgnantibus et nutrientibus in illis diebus.*—Matt. xxiv. 19.

² *Cor ejus indurabitur tanquam lapis.*—Job xli. 15.

³ *Quodsi dixerit servus: diligo dominum meum, et uxorem ac liberos; non egrediar liber; offerret eum dominus diis, et applicabitur ad ostium et postes, perforabitque aurem ejus subula; et erit ei servus in sæculum.*—Exod. xxi. 5, 6.

⁴ *Ecce nunc tempus acceptabile, ecce nunc dies salutis.*—11. Cor. vi. 2.

future time, which will perhaps never come for you. You are satisfied with your slavery; you think and say, "I love my master," I cannot give up that creature, and therefore I do not desire freedom. Oh, woe to you! what will become of you? By divine permission, your master, the devil, will pierce your ears as a sign of perpetual slavery; that is to say, he will make you deaf to all good inspirations and exhortations; God will withdraw His special graces from you, so that you shall not be able to do penance; for repentance will then become so difficult for you, that, humanly speaking, it will be an impossibility for you to be sincerely converted to God. And, indeed, this is only a just punishment for abusing the patience of the Almighty. You do not wish to be free? He will say: very well, then; remain in the slavery of the devil, and be his slave for all eternity! Such shall be the end of the presumptuous hope of eternal salvation that you have hitherto based on the future time, saying: "I wish to go to heaven, and therefore I will do penance and amend my life by-and-by."

But, you think, I hope it will not be so with me. There were many great sinners at all times in the world, and there are a great many still, who have done just as I am doing, and they were sincerely converted at last, were received again by a merciful God, and gained eternal happiness. David was guilty of adultery and murder, and had the guilt of those sins on his soul for some years, before he thought of repentance, and he is now in heaven. Manasses was converted after having spent forty-five years in idolatry, sacrilege, murder, and tyranny. Magdalene was converted after having led, almost from her youth, a luxurious, scandalous, and sinful life, and became a saint. Matthew became an apostle after having been a usurer. Zachaeus was received by Our Lord, after having been a public and notorious sinner, guilty of many acts of injustice; and there are countless examples of a similar kind. Why should I have less to hope than they had from the infinite mercy of God? At some future time I intend to imitate them and to save my soul. And do you again base your miserable hope on what happened to others? Have you forgotten what I said to you a few minutes ago? All the sinners you mention repented at once, as soon as they were enlightened by the grace of God, and had their eyes opened to their wickedness; they did not, like you, defer repentance to an indefinite period after having become sensible of the miserable state in which they were.

Useless to appeal to the example of other sinners who were converted at last.

For he
knows not
if he will
act like
them.

But supposing even that some great sinners like yourself were truly converted, and saved their souls after having deferred penance, (although you cannot be certain in any particular case, since you cannot see the hearts of the penitents, whether their sorrow is sincere and supernatural, or not; it is true that many sinners like you go to confession; they all do so during Paschal time, if they are Catholics; you have done so too, and perhaps more than once a year; but, God help us! what miserable confessions those are which are not followed by any amendment!) still, I say, granted that such sinners were truly converted, have you on that account any grounds for believing that the same thing will happen to you? Is there any one who can tell you that for certain?

Most people
like him do
not. Shown
by an ex-
ample.

Another thing, too, you must not forget; for one like you, who is converted and saves his soul, there are a hundred who never repent sincerely and who are lost forever, because, as they have rejected the lights that were bestowed on them, and neglected to avail themselves of the opportunities of grace given them, so, by a just judgment of God, they are afterwards deprived of those lights and opportunities. Henry Grau writes of a usurer who was often tortured by remorse of conscience on account of his wicked and un-Christian mode of life, and was repeatedly exhorted by others to give it up, but he used always to say, like you: "Certainly, I will give it up, and do penance, for I am not so foolish as to lose my soul for the sake of temporal things; I will amend, but not now; by-and-by, some other time, I shall have a better opportunity; there is no danger yet, etc." He fell sick; a zealous priest warned him of his state, and exhorted him to do penance and make restitution. But where was his "by-and-by" then? After remaining speechless for a long time, he at last cried out, in a loud voice: "O penance, where art thou? I cannot repent now, because, when I might have done so, I refused."¹ And having said these words, he breathed his last.

Confirmed
by another
example.

There is a well-known incident related in the "History of Treves" of a certain commandant, who heard in a dream, on three successive nights, the words: "you will die during the siege."² As he saw no sign whatever of a siege, he tried to put the matter out of his head; but in spite of himself he felt uneasy, so he resolved to make a general confession of his whole life, and he

¹ O pœnitentia, ubi es? De cætero pœnitere non valeo, quia dum facere pœnitentiam potui, nolui.

² Morieris in obsidione.

actually wrote down his sins with the greatest exactness. When on his way to one of our houses, to make his confession to the then rector, Father Duræus, a certain woman of his acquaintance nodded to him from her window, and invited him in (alas! what snares the devil knows how to lay for souls). Not wishing to appear uncourteous, the officer accepted the invitation, and went into the house, thinking that he would have time enough afterwards to make his confession. He remained in the house for some hours, when suddenly an alarm was raised in the street that the enemy was attacking the town. He rushed out, and mounted his horse in order to prepare to defend the place, but as he was busily engaged on the ramparts, he was lit by a stray bullet and killed on the spot. Unhappy, eternally unhappy man! If you had kept out of that house a few hours before, and had made your confession as you intended, you would have saved your soul! But, alas, with that "by-and-by" of yours, short a time as it was in coming, you ruined yourself forever.

Sinner, what do you think of this? May not the penance that you intend to do "by-and-by," be frustrated in the same manner? what will it then avail you to indulge a foolish hope built on such a treacherous foundation, in a matter that concerns your eternal bliss, or eternal misery? It may be that many great sinners like yourself were afterwards converted and saved their souls; but what better will you be for that, if you are amongst the far greater number of those who were deluded by their presumptuous hopes, and are now burning in hell without hope of release? think well over this matter now, for it is one that deserves your most careful consideration. Say to yourself: "I am now in the state of sin, and if God were to demand my life from me, as He may do at any moment, I should certainly be lost forever; He now, in His goodness, offers me His grace and invites me to do sincere penance, to amend my life, and to make sure of my eternal salvation. What may happen "by-and-by" I know not, nor do I know whether there will be a "by-and-by" for me, or whether I shall then do penance, or not. I certainly do not wish to go to hell for all eternity; my great desire is to be happy with God in heaven; therefore I must not, I cannot, I will not wait any longer, but will at once make use of the means that Jesus Christ now offers me to regain entrance into the fold of His chosen sheep." And what is that? "My sheep hear My voice,"¹ says the good

Conclusion
and exhortation to do
penance at
once.

¹ Oves meæ vocem meam audiunt.—John x. 27.

Shepherd. But when do they hear it? At all times, as often as He calls. And now I hear Him crying out: "To-day, if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts."¹ To-day God is calling on me to be converted to Him and to abandon my wicked life; therefore this very day I will hearken to Him, I will repent of my sins, confess them candidly, and make a firm resolution never to commit them again. If I do this, I may have a sure and well-grounded hope that the angels in heaven will rejoice over me, and that I shall hereafter rejoice with them for all eternity. Sinners, say with me, with all your hearts, so shall it be. Amen.

On Deferring Repentance till the hour of death, see the following Fifth Part.

FIFTH SERMON.

ON THE DIFFICULTY THAT THE SINNER WILL HAVE IN CORRECTING HIS BAD HABITS, IF HE DEFERS REPENTANCE.

Subject.

The stone of sinful habits must be rolled away from the heart at once, for the longer one waits, the greater will be the difficulty of removing it, until it eventually becomes an impossibility.—*Preached on Easter Sunday.*

Text.

Quis revolvat nobis lapidem ab ostio monumenti?—Mark xvi. 3.

"Who shall roll us back the stone from the door of the sepulchre?"

Introduction.

The greater the desire of these holy women to behold and to anoint the dead body of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the greater was their anxiety lest they should not be able to carry out their intention, for the grave was covered with a huge stone; and therefore they asked each other, "who shall roll us back the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" We poor weak women have not the strength to do it. Nevertheless, they went on their way, determined to do their best. It is a difficulty of this kind, my dear brethren, that deters most sinners from doing sincere

¹ *Hodie, si vocem ejus audieritis, nolite obdurare corda vestra.*—Ps. xeliv. 8.

penance, and being really reconciled to God. I say *sincere* penance, and being *really* reconciled to God; for in the ordinary confessions, especially at Easter, when every Catholic is bound to go, oh, what a lot of dissimulation there is! And how many there are who leave the confessional worse than they were when they entered it, because they have not a firm purpose of amendment! And that too, because they are shut up in a grave of sin by a huge stone that they are afraid to attempt to roll away. The inveterate habit of a certain vice, which they find it too difficult to give up all at once; an unlawful intimacy, which they imagine they cannot live without; the proximate occasion of sin, which they do not wish to abandon; this is the stone that lies on their hearts and that they think it impossible to remove. And therefore they often ask themselves, in their inefficacious desires, "who shall roll us back the stone?" who will free me at last from this occasion, this intimacy, this inveterate habit? To these I now say: Sinners! attack the stone at once, and courageously. God will help you with His grace to remove it now! But if you defer your repentance and amendment, it will be, humanly speaking, impossible for you to remove it, so that you will have little hope left of saving your souls, as I shall now prove.

Plan of Discourse.

The stone of sinful intimacy and bad habit must be at once removed from the heart, for the longer one waits, the greater will be the difficulty of removing it, until at length it becomes an impossibility. Such is the whole subject of my exhortation.

Those who have during this Paschal time been truly reconciled to God, will be strengthened, by what I am about to say, in their good resolution never to go back to their former bad habits and sinful intimacies. Almighty and merciful God! through the powerful intercession of Thy most Blessed Mother Mary and of the holy angels, we beg of Thee to give Thy precious grace to the just, that they may persevere in Thy friendship, and to sinners, that they may this day roll away the stone from their hearts and free themselves completely from the grave of sin.

I have undertaken to persuade you to do a very difficult thing, and when I consider the matter again, I am almost tempted to give it up as hopeless. For I am afraid it will be with me as it was with Lot, when he tried to persuade his two sons-in-law to leave the doomed city, Sodom. "Arise," he said

It is very hard to get rid of a bad habit.

to them, "get you out of this place, because the Lord will destroy this city. And he seemed to them to speak as it were in jest."¹ So hard, as the Glossa remarks, did they find it to leave the city in which they had been born and brought up. Ah! far more readily would I undertake to move a huge mass of stone, than to roll away the stone of sinful habit from the hearts of some sinners by preaching. "So tyrannical a thing is habit," says St. John Chrysostom;² so hard and difficult it is to leave all at once that which for a long time has occupied our hearts and affections! And what else can it be but a matter of the greatest difficulty for the proud man, who has hitherto been given to every worldly vanity, all at once to become lowly in his own eyes, modest, and humble? For the avaricious man, who has amassed wealth unjustly, to deprive himself of it by making the necessary restitution, and to close his heart and its desires to riches and temporal goods? For the unchaste man, who has hitherto given loose rein to his inordinate desires, or who has fostered an impure attachment for some creature, to resolve never to give way again wilfully to a sinful thought even, and to abandon forever the object of his sinful love? For him who is addicted to cursing and swearing, to cut off that bad habit at once? For him who wastes his time in drinking and gambling, and in the sins that are occasioned thereby, to live a temperate and sober life, and to spend his time in serving God with diligence? For one whose heart has hitherto been filled with hatred, enmity, and secret ill will, to change all at once, to be sincerely reconciled to his enemy, and to love him as himself? In a word, must it not be difficult for one whose thoughts were sunk in the depths of hell, to raise them all at once to the heights of heaven, and to begin to lead a Christian, holy, and heavenly life? There is no doubt that that is a most difficult task; it is one which requires great labor and great skill.

Shown from
Holy Scrip-
ture.

What reason had the Jews to weep and sigh for the flesh-pots of Egypt, as we read in the Book of Exodus: "And all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness," and said to them: "Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat over the flesh-pots, and ate bread to the full!"³ What

¹ Surgite, egredimini de loco isto, quia delebit Dominus civitatem hanc. Et visus est eis quasi ludens loqui.—Gen. xix. 14.

² Adeo tyrannica res consuetudo.

³ Et murmuravit omnis congregatio filiorum Israel contra Moysen et Aaron in solitudine; utinam mortui essemus per manum Domini in terra Ægypti, quando sedebamus super ollas carniū, et comedebamus panem in saturitate.—Exod. xvi. 2, 3.

reason, I ask, had they to give expression to such regrets, since their enjoyment of the flesh-pots of Egypt was earned only by hard labor under the merciless yoke of Pharaoh? And they sighed for the bread of slavery at the very time when God was leading them toward the promised land, and was feeding them miraculously with the heaven-sent manna! Were they not very foolish thus to long for the coarse food of slavery? St. John Chrysostom assigns a reason for this; "the Jews," he says, "longed for the garlic of Egypt, although they had the manna, on account of the influence of habit. Such a tyrannical thing is habit." So difficult is it to give up what one has become accustomed to. Is it then useless for me, O sinners, to speak to you of the bread of heaven, when you have been once accustomed to the flesh-pots of the world? For even the Prophet Jeremias despaired in this matter. "If the Ethiopian can change his skin, or the leopard his spots, you also may do well, when you have learned evil."² Alas! who will roll us back the stone? Who will remove that heavy weight from our hearts?

But what am I saying? I wish to persuade you to lay aside your sinful habits, and I represent to you in the very beginning, incautiously enough, that you will have an almost insurmountable difficulty in doing so! Instead of making your task easier by talking to you of the sweetness of repentance, I make it hard and bitter, and almost impossible! Is not that mode of proceeding likely to deprive you of all heart and courage for repentance, and to harden you still more in sin, by driving you to despair? No, O sinners! For the very fact of the difficulty of repentance, a fact that your own experience teaches you, must serve me as the only weapon that I intend using in order to conquer your understanding, and to convince you that you must at once, without delay, use every effort, and spare neither labor nor trouble, to roll away this stone, that is, to amend and abandon your sinful habits. For, tell me, do you intend to go to heaven or not? If the latter is the case, I have done with you, and there is no use in your hearing a sermon. But you say, God forbid! we certainly hope and desire to gain heaven, and to be eternally happy. Very good! But answer me this question: do you think you can save your souls, with that heavy stone on your heart, that shuts you up in the grave, in the state of sin?

Therefore
it ought to
be laid aside
at once.

¹ Judæi manna habentes. quærebant allia Egypti, propter consuetudinem. Adeo tyrannica res consuetudo est.—S. Chysost. Hom. 7, in Ep. i. ad Cor.

² Si mutare potest Æthiops pellem suam, aut pardus varietates suas; et vos poteritis benefacere, cum didiceritis malum.—Jerem. xiii. 23.

No, you say, we are not so ignorant as that; no one who is in the state of mortal sin can go to heaven; he must first be converted, do penance, and amend his life. Do you think, then, that you will one day repent and amend? Certainly; some day or other we will return what we have unjustly acquired, leave the proximate occasion of sin, make peace with our enemies, and give up vice. That is all I want for my purpose; now I have fast hold of you, provided only that you are willing to acknowledge the truth and to act accordingly.

Because it will be much more difficult to do so hereafter, as far as God is concerned.

Now, when do you intend to carry this resolution of yours into effect? Not yet, you say; it is too difficult now. And when, then? Some other time, in a year, or a few months perhaps. And do you believe that it will be easier for you to abandon your sinful habit and do penance in a few years or months, than it is now? This is the fearful trap by which the crafty tempter ensnares most sinners to eternal destruction; they fondly imagine that it will be easier for them to repent at some future time, because they know very well that repentance is necessary to salvation. But you may be quite certain that it will be far more difficult for you afterwards, than it is now. True, it will never be absolutely impossible for you to repent; yet, the longer you wait, the more months, weeks, days, nay hours, you spend in sin, the more troublesome will repentance become, until at last it will be, humanly speaking, impossible. And in the first place, this must appear clear enough when we consider the Almighty God. You acknowledge, O sinner, that you cannot free yourself from sin by your own natural strength alone, and that you never would do so unless God impelled you thereto by His grace. If you did not know this before, learn it now; it is an article of faith, and there can be no doubt about it. It is true that the good God never refuses to any one in this life, who is capable of receiving it, the grace by which he may be enabled to be converted and do penance; but the grace that is called efficacious, that is, the grace that God foresees man will really co-operate with, He is not bound to give to any one, and He bestows it as a special act of goodness and beneficence on whomsoever and at whatsoever time He pleases. Such is the general teaching of theologians. Again, the more wicked a sinner is, the longer he continues in sin, and the deeper evil habits have become rooted in his heart, so also the greater and more powerful, and, so to speak, even miraculous, must be the grace which will enable him to be truly converted. Our Divine Lord, as St. Augustine

remarks, teaches us that in the three people whom He raised from the dead, when raising the daughter of Jairus, He merely said: "Damsel, arise."¹ It cost Him, as it were, more trouble to raise the young man of Naim, who was being carried to the grave: "He came near and touched the bier;"² and He commanded him: "Young man, I say to thee, arise."³ But what labor it cost Him to raise Lazarus, whose body had already begun to decay in the grave! "He groaned in the spirit and troubled Himself;"⁴ as St. John says in the Gospel. And Jesus wept.⁵ "Jesus, therefore, again groaning in Himself, cometh to the sepulchre."⁶ And when He had caused the stone to be taken away from the sepulchre, He immediately began to pray: "Jesus, lifting up His eyes, said: Father, I give Thee thanks that Thou hast heard Me."⁷ Finally, "He cried with a loud voice: Lazarus, come forth."⁸ What was the reason of the difference in Our Lord's mode of proceeding in those three cases, my dear brethren? Had the almighty power of the Son of God greater trouble in raising one than the other from the dead? That cannot be; for to will and to accomplish are one and the same thing to Him. Christ, says St. Augustine, wished to show thereby that it is far more difficult, and requires a much more powerful grace, to convert one who has been buried for a long time in the grace of evil habits, than one who has sinned only now and then, or who has remained in sin only occasionally for a month or two, even during the space of several years.

Tell me now, O man, do you imagine that this special, powerful, and extraordinary grace, that God is bound to give to no one, will be given to you, when in some years' time you wish to amend your evil ways? How do you know that? You have never heard of a grace of that kind having been promised to any one, much less to yourself. But you say, perhaps it will be given to you? And perhaps, indeed, in all probability, it will not. For, to look at the matter reasonably, do you think that your continuing to offend Him is a likely way to induce the Almighty to bestow on you a special mark of His power? Is it probable that you will obtain extraordinary graces from Him, when, by offering Him insult upon insult, you make Him more and more your

Who will not give special graces hereafter.

¹ Puella surge.—Mark v. 41.

² Accessit et tetigit loculum.—Luke vii. 14.

³ Adolescens, tibi dico, surge.—Ibid.

⁴ Infremuit spiritu et turbavit seipsum.—John xi. 33. ⁵ Et lacrymatus est Jesus.—Ibid. 35.

⁶ Rursum fremens in semetipso venit ad monumentum.—Ibid. 38.

⁷ Jesus autem elevatis sursum oculis dixit: Pater gratias ago tibi, quoniam audisti me.—Ibid. 41.

⁸ Voce magna clamavit: Lazare, veni foras.—Ibid. 43.

enemy? when you despise the grace He now offers you, and do not hesitate to say to His very face: No, O God, I do not want Thy grace now; some other time it will be more convenient for me to accept it; Thou canst help me in a few years, after I have caused Thee still more displeasure; then Thou canst give me grace, and still more powerful grace, too. Alas, poor mortal, who are you to dare so presumptuously to dictate to the Almighty God, and to prescribe a mode of action to His goodness? Do you think that God will wait upon you, as if He were your servant, and that He will do whatever you tell Him? Must he give you wonderful graces, that He denies to many a pious soul, and that, too, after you have continued still longer to insult Him?

But will
abandon the
sinner.

Be careful, I beg of you! It is not safe thus to insult and mock a great lord. God will allow you to go on for a time, and will bear with you most patiently, but instead of giving you a special grace, He (and how could it be otherwise?) will deliver you up to your evil inclinations, and will allow you to become more and more entangled in the meshes of your sinful habits. Hear the threat He utters by the prophet Isaias: "Woe to thee . . . that despisest, shalt not thyself also be despised? . . . when being wearied thou shalt cease to despise, thou shalt be despised."¹ "I called and you refused," He will say; "I stretched out My hand, and there was none that regarded."² I called you last year, or last month, and exhorted you to return to Me, but you would not; I stretched forth My hand to raise you up from the state of sin, but you did not deign even to look at Me; "I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock."³ Oh, what a terrible threat, says St. Augustine. Sin away then, if you are bent on doing so, but remember that "the time will come when the sinner will wish to repent, and will not be able, because, when he might have repented, he refused to do so."⁴ It is one thing for the sinner who falls through mere frailty, even a hundred times, and remains in the state of sin for a certain length of time, to find mercy from God; but a far different thing for him to find the same mercy, who makes a habit of sinning, and wilfully and obstinately perseveres in sin. The former occurs frequently; the latter very seldom. The same

¹ *Vae qui spernis, nonne et ipse sperneris? Cum fatigatus desideris contemnere, contemneris.*—Is. xxxiii. 1.

² *Vocavi et renulstis; extendi manum meam, et non fuit qui aspiceret.*—Prov. i. 24.

³ *Ego quoque in interitu vestro ridebo, et subsannabo.*—Ibid. 26.

⁴ *Venit tempus quando peccator velit pœnitere, et non poterit, quia, quando potuit, noluit.*—S. Aug. serm. 58. de temp.

God who forgave the Ninivites, because, without waiting for the expiration of the forty days, they at once did penance for their sins in sackcloth and ashes, destroyed the whole world by a deluge, because in those days men did not hearken to oft repeated exhortations to repent, and refused to abandon their sinful habits. I do not wish, O sinner, to make out that repentance is impossible for you, or to drive you to despair, because you wish to defer your conversion, and to continue longer in sin; but this much I must tell you, that you will find repentance ten times more difficult hereafter, and that, if you are reasonable, you will say to yourself: If I find it hard to repent now, what will it be when the habit of sin has become inveterate? Therefore throw that heavy stone at once off your heart. "To-day, if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts!"¹ Do it at once, to-day; do not wait even till to-morrow, and much less for a few months, or years, or till old age, as you had determined.

The difficulty of conquering your bad habits will be made greater, too, by the devil, in whose service you are. Every sinner must know by experience, even if Holy Scripture said nothing about it, that he is a slave and servant of the devil. But perhaps you think that it is only a figurative slavery? If so, then just consider for a moment what you are and how you live; what strange, contradictory, and bewildering thoughts occupy your mind; what uneasiness and anxiety disturb your conscience, and what startling changes and contradictions there are in your will; and you will soon see that you are the slave of a remorseless tyrant, whom you must obey in all things, as the slaves among the Turks have to obey their taskmasters; nay, that you are, so to speak, compelled to dance to his piping. "They may recover themselves from the snares of the devil," writes St. Paul to Timothy, "by whom they are held captive at his will."² Are you not often aware of an inward impulse to do some good work? For instance, you know that it would be better for you to go to church, to hear a sermon, to remain away from that dangerous company, to say your prayers, to go to confession and Communion, etc.; but in spite of that knowledge of yours, the devil, either by himself, or by means of others, compels you, as it were, to go somewhere else, where you will commit a number of sins. How can he do that? Because you are not your own master, but his servant and slave, since you have given

It will also be more difficult as far as the devil is concerned.

¹ Hodie, si vocem ejus audieritis, nolite obdurare corda vestra!—Ps. xciv. 8.

² Resipiscant a diaboli laqueis, a quo captivi tenentur ad ipsius voluntatem.—II. Tim. ii. 26.

yourself over to him by your sinful habits. Thus he can do with you what he pleases; if he tells you to curse and swear, you are ready to do so; if he commands you to talk impurely, to slander your neighbor, to seek revenge, to sin against holy purity, you obey at once, although you know that you are doing wrong, and are acting against God and your conscience, to your own great detriment. So completely are you a slave to the devil.

Who has all
the more
power over
the sinner.

What becomes now of your intention to repent, to amend your wicked ways and to be converted to God after some years, when you have spent your youth in sinful pleasures, and have fully satisfied all your inordinate appetites? If the devil has already so much power over your will, after you have lived for a few years or months in sin, what power will he not have after you have spent still more years and months in his service, adding daily sin to sin? If you cannot free yourself now from the ten or twelve cords with which he has bound you, how will you be able to escape when you are fettered in iron chains from head to foot? When the man whose son was possessed by the devil complained to Our Lord that the disciples failed to cast out the evil spirit, as we read in the Gospel of St. Mark, Our Lord asked at once: "How long a time is it since this hath happened unto him?"¹ And the father answered: "From his infancy." A strange question, my dear brethren, for Him to ask to whom nothing is unknown! For there is no doubt that Our Lord knew more about the matter than the young man's father did. Why did He ask the question then? In order, says the Glossa, that we may understand why the disciples could not drive out the devil. For it is as if Christ said: Since he has been possessed since childhood, it is no wonder that the evil spirit does not wish to leave him. O sinner, if it is now difficult for a confessor or a preacher to drive out of your heart the demon who has taken possession of it by the habit of sin, who will be able to expel that evil spirit after he has possessed you for several years longer? God alone could do it, and that too by a miracle of grace. But I am afraid there is little chance of His helping you, if you continue to despise Him as you now do. Do you not see that, by deferring repentance, you are making it more difficult, and are entangling yourself more and more in the snares of the devil?

And at last
it makes re-
pentance

I pity the lot of the Israelites before they were freed from the slavery of Egypt, for they were forced to labor hard, "and they

¹ quantum temporis est, ex quo ei hoc accidit? Ab infantia.—Mark ix. 20

built for Pharaoh cities of tabernacles.”¹ O unhappy people, do you not know what you are doing? Can you not guess for what the walls you are building are intended? They are to serve as your prison, to prevent your escaping from bondage. If you desire liberty, why do you labor to defeat your desire? Every brick you lay makes the walls of your prison higher and renders escape more difficult. Do you understand the figure, O sinners? Alas, much more do I pity your poor souls! “Pharaoh,” says Paulinus, “compelled the children of Israel to build walls to prevent their own escape; and in the same way the devil urges sinners to add sin to sin, that they may surround themselves with a wall, which will imprison them perpetually.”² How the devil must laugh at your labor and at your intention of doing penance after you have committed still more sin! You are like a bird ensnared in the nets of the fowler, that entangles itself still more by its futile efforts to get free, to the great amusement of its captor.

almost impossible for him.

But supposing even that the devil were to leave you in peace, and to place no obstacle in the way of your conversion, and that God were to bestow on you a powerful grace; even then there would be a greater difficulty on the part of your own will to co-operate with grace, and a more determined opposition to the call to repentance. For, do you know what is required for a sincere conversion? The grace of God is not enough, but you, O sinner, must work with it, and you must once for all hate above all evils everything you have hitherto loved against the command of God; while you must love more than all imaginable goods everything you have hitherto hated and avoided against the command of God; and you must have, moreover, a firm, earnest purpose never for all eternity to consent, even in mere desire, to a mortal sin, for the sake of any pleasure, or person, or thing, and to avoid carefully all dangerous occasions of sin. If you have not those dispositions, your repentance is worth nothing. What do you think of the matter now? Is it not likely that your conversion will be far more difficult, when the inordinate love of sinful pleasures has been heated and inflamed to the highest degree by the fuel that has constantly been supplied to it? when your disgust at and dislike of good works have taken deeper root in your heart?

Finally, it will be more difficult as far as the sinner himself is concerned.

¹ *Edificaveruntque urbes tabernaculorum Pharaoni.—Exod. i. 11.*

² *Compulit Pharaoh filios Israel facere muros, ne possint exire; ita diabolus in talibus acit addere peccata peccatis, ut inde murum facientes includantur, ne exeant.*

For the
desire and
habit of sin
will be al-
ways on the
increase.

In Holy Scripture sin is compared to a weight or burden, to a bandage, to a cord, to an illness, and to a skin. It is a *weight* that oppresses the overburdened soul, so that it cannot raise itself to heavenly and supernatural things. There is a child groaning under a burden it can scarcely lift; if you increase the load by twenty, thirty, or a hundred pounds, will it become easier to carry? Every sin is a *bandage*, that blindfolds the eyes of the understanding, so that it can hardly discern good from evil. If you tie a bandage over your eyes, you will have great difficulty in seeing; if you tie on several bandages, you will not be able to see at all. Sin is a *cord* that draws the will away from good and binds it fast to evil; double that cord, and you will deprive the will still more of its freedom and make it, as it were, a prisoner, as St. Augustine testifies to have been the case with himself, when it appeared to him almost an impossibility for him to amend his life. And why? "I was sighing in bondage, being kept therein not by another, but by my own iron will,"¹ which had become quite hardened by long-continued habits of sin. Sin is a *malady* of the soul. A fresh wound, says St. Bonaventure, can be easily cured; but when it gets old, no medicine can do it any good. The habit of sin is like a *skin*. "There are some," says Cardinal Hugo, "who put on the habit of sinning, not like a garment that may be taken off, but like their own skin, which can hardly be removed."² A young and tender skin is so sensitive that it cannot bear the prick of a needle, but the skin that has become hardened and callous by work can bear even burning coals. In the same way, says Eusebius Emisenus, "the unfortunate habit of sin has this effect, that it makes one less sensitive to sin the more he sins, while it gives him a greater desire for sin;"³ because the inclination to evil is strengthened thereby, and the desire for forbidden pleasures increases the more it is indulged. From this comes, as St. Augustine says, a calm repose in wickedness, so that the sinner is quite satisfied with his condition, and has no desire to change it; nay, sin becomes to him a second nature, a necessity. "When a habit is not resisted, it becomes a necessity,"⁴ which cannot be changed afterwards, no matter how much one may wish to change it.

¹ Suspirabam ligatus, non ferro alieno, sed ferrea mea voluntate.—S. Aug. l. 8, Conf. c. 5.

² Quidam induunt se consuetudine prava, non sicut vestimento, quod potest auferri, sed sicut pelle sua, quæ vix potest exui.—Hugo in Joan. 13.

³ Habet hoc infelix consuetudo peccandi, ut quantum amplius peccaverit, tanto minus peccata ipsa intelligat, et tanto plus peccare delectet.

⁴ Dum consuetudini non resistitur, facta est necessitas.

Now, O sinners, let us consider this matter reasonably. You acknowledge that it is difficult for you now to abstain from sin, although you are not yet so far away from the true light and from God; how do you think it will be with you hereafter, when God and His light are still farther from you? You have now perhaps to contend against twenty, fifty, or a hundred sins; by-and-by there may be thousands of them. You have now to overcome a habit of one or two months; in time that habit will have a standing of many years. If you confess now that it is very hard for you to overcome your nature, how will you be able to do it when your nature shall have become more and more corrupt by daily sins? If you cannot now resist an inordinate inclination, which as yet is only as it were a little barking cur, how will you be able to resist it when it has become a fierce, roaring lion? You cannot extinguish your desire now, although it is as yet but a spark; how will you be able to conquer it when it has become a great fire? You have a difficulty now in breaking a thread; how will you hereafter tear asunder a strong cable? The nail as yet has been struck by the hammer only two or three times, and you cannot pull it out without trouble; how will you be able to extract it when it has been driven in to the head by repeated blows? Your wound is still fresh, but it is hard to heal; how will you heal it when it has become putrid and cancerous? You cannot climb the mountain now, although you are half way to the top; how will you climb it after you have tumbled down to the very bottom. In a word, if it is so difficult for you now to overcome your bad habits and do penance, what will it be hereafter, when the skin shall have grown hard and callous, when the stone shall have been secured by so many bolts and bars.

Hence he will hardly be able to overcome the difficulty hereafter.

Alas, what a terrible threat Christ Himself launches forth against you! "You shall seek me, and shall not find Me;" you shall die in your sins;¹ a threat that is to be understood particularly of the habit of sin. Truly, all the sins we commit are *our* sins; they are ours as to their malice, which comes from our perverse wills; ours as to the guilt and punishment they deserve, which guilt remains in us until we do penance; yet the sins we commit now and then through frailty, or when overcome by a violent temptation, are, properly speaking, not our sins as far as our inclinations and desires are concerned: for we repent of

He will remain in sin till death.

¹ Quæretis me, et non inuentis.—John vii. 34.

² In peccato vestro moriemini.—Ibid. viii. 21.

them easily, and soon throw them off our conscience. But the sins that are committed through long-continued habit, since they proceed from a more violent inclination and a more intense desire, and we persevere in them with studied intent and satisfaction, such sins have a special claim to be called *our* sins; just as a father calls his favorite child, "my child," although he has other children as well. In *your* sin then, O unhappy wretches, in your bad habits, which you refuse to amend, you will die, and go down to eternal death.

Conclusion
and exhortation
at once to
amend one's
sinful
habits

Therefore I repeat, if you are in earnest about going to heaven, and consequently if you are in earnest about amending your lives, oh, then do not delay any longer! Do not wait till your salvation becomes almost impossible! Be like St. Augustine and make an earnest resolution to repent at once. He found it just as hard as you do to roll away the heavy stone from his heart, and he was always putting off his conversion from day to day; at last he said to himself: "How long shall I keep on saying to-morrow, to-morrow? Why not at once? Why should not this hour be the last of my disgrace?"¹ Do you also say, I will give up sin, and why should I wait till to-morrow, or next year, or till some uncertain future time? Why not at once? Is not sin at this moment the worst evil that could befall me? I will renounce the devil, and escape hell; but why should I wait for some years before doing so? Is not the devil cruel enough, or hell hot enough now? I will one day enter on the road that leads to heaven; but why should I put off doing so? Is not heaven good enough or beautiful enough for me now? I will begin one day to love Thee, O my God, and to serve Thee zealously; but why do I not begin at once? Art Thou not now worthy of infinite love? Have I not already offended Thee enough? Ah, my God, worthy of all love, the first offence I offered Thee was too much! Never should I have done anything to displease Thee! Shall I continue then to embitter Thee still more, to go away still farther from Thee, and to despise the grace Thou offerest me? Oh, no, Almighty and eternal God, I am now firmly resolved to amend at once! I will wait no longer; this very day the stone must be rolled away. At first I shall find it rather hard to change my mode of life, to give up the pleasures, the creatures I have been attached to; but I know that in time I shall enjoy peace of heart under Thy mild yoke, and that before long I shall be able to exult with St. Augustine, and say: "Oh,

¹ *Quamdiu eras et eras? quare non modo? quare non hac hora finis turpitudinis mee?*

how sweet it has all at once become to me to be without the sweetness of vanities!" Thou, O Almighty God, who on this day didst send Thy angel to roll away the heavy stone from the door of the sepulchre, that the pious women who were seeking Thee might enter unhindered, Thou, if Thou wilt, canst by Thy grace make everything possible and easy for me now! If I look at my manifold sins, I must acknowledge that I have made myself unworthy of this grace. Alas, I am sorry from the bottom of my heart that I have sinned so often! But Thy infinite mercy is not shortened; that very Blood that has washed away so many sins, has not yet ceased to flow for mine! Permit me then to prostrate myself before Thee, and implore Thee to give me a powerful grace, which will soften my heart, so that I may at once do penance for my sins; and strengthen my will against all temptations and dangerous occasions, so that, after I shall have rolled away the heavy stone from my heart, I may never again fall into the grave of sin, and may love Thee, my God, who art so worthy of love, with my whole heart and above all things, to the end of my life. O Lord, hear this my prayer! Amen.

SIXTH SERMON.

ON THE TORMENT CAUSED BY A BAD CONSCIENCE.

Subject.

A bad conscience tortures the soul most keenly, 1. by continually upbraiding her with her sins; 2. by continually threatening her with eternal damnation on account of her sins; therefore we should at once free ourselves from sin by penance, and never commit it again.—*Preached on the Feast of St. Thomas, Apostle.*

Text.

Post dies octo iterum erant discipuli ejus intus, et Thomas cum eis.—John xx. 26.

“After eight days again His disciples were within; and Thomas with them.”

Introduction.

So obstinate and stiff-necked had Thomas become in his re-

¹ O quam suave mihi subito factum est, carere suavitatibus nugarum.

fusal to believe in the resurrection of Christ, that he separated himself from the disciples and would have nothing to do with them; for he could not hear with patience the arguments by which they proved to him that Christ had certainly risen from the dead, and that they had seen and conversed with Him. Yet he eventually came back to them again, doubtless on account of the uneasiness his bad conscience caused him; for he must have felt the sting of remorse when he remembered that he tried to make himself out wiser than the others, and that he persevered so long in his unbelief. To get rid of his uneasiness, at least in part, he again sought the company of the other disciples, after he had been away from them for eight days. And truly it was well for him that he did so, as otherwise he might never have regained peace of conscience, but have continued in his unbelief; for when Our Lord appeared to him on this occasion he acknowledged his error, and cried out, full of sorrow and repentance: "My Lord and my God!" How wonderful are the goodness and mercy of God to sinners! He invents all sorts of means to draw them to Himself and to keep them away from sin. He represents to them the uncertainty of life, the misery of an unhappy death, the loss of eternal happiness, and the inevitable, eternal torments of hell consequent thereon; and all these truths, as well as temporal trials and crosses, are so many special means that He makes use of to bring sinners to their senses. But, besides, He has given them over to a domestic torture, whose business it is to torment them day and night, namely, their own bad consciences. O sinners, if you are not sunk in the lowest depths of wickedness, you must know by your own experience what a cruel tormentor a bad conscience is! And are you not foolish, then, to remain in the unhappy state of sin, or to make a deliberate choice of that state by committing sin? For if you fear neither death, nor hell, nor any other punishment, at least the uneasiness and torment of your own consciences should frighten you. And it is a torment which has not its equal on earth, as I shall now show by way of salutary warning to you, and I say:

Plan of Discourse.

A bad conscience tortures the soul most keenly, by continually upbraiding her with her sins; as I shall explain in the first part. A bad conscience tortures the soul most keenly by continually threatening her with eternal damnation on account of her sins;

as I shall explain in the second part. Therefore he acts cruelly and foolishly towards himself who does not at once free himself from the actual state of sin, or who intends committing sin in future: the inference that follows naturally from the premises. Christians! let none of us be so foolish! Such shall be the conclusion.

Help us to keep it, Christ Jesus! We ask Thee through the intercession of Mary and the holy guardian angels.

There is no doubt that it causes most exquisite torture to be upbraided with what one is deeply ashamed of, and tries to hide in every possible way. But the torture is still worse when one cannot deny or excuse one's self for that which causes his shame, and when the accuser is a person of high authority, against whom no defence is possible, so that the only thing to do is to hang one's head in utter confusion. But the worst of all is, when the upbraiding is kept up for a long time, with bitter words and sarcastic laughter, and that under such circumstances the person upbraided is compelled to stand by and listen; this, I say, is so great a torture, that any honorable man would prefer to be beaten black and blue, rather than undergo it. Is it not so, my dear brethren? Some one says in company (and generally speaking, slanderous and uncharitable remarks about the faults of others form the staple of conversation): I know a certain person in town, whose name I will not mention, although he is well enough known, who has made a good deal of money in a rather unjust manner. What a shame for him! The man has no conscience, etc. I know one who is very frequent in his visits to such and such a person; it is easy to guess what he is after; he is a source of scandal to the whole neighborhood, etc. Now if, during a conversation of this kind, any one happens to be present who is addicted to any of those vices, and thinks that the remarks are intended for himself, how ashamed he must feel! He gets red and pale alternately, and wishes he were a hundred miles away from the place, although the person speaking may not even have thought of him. How much greater would not his shame and confusion be, if the uncharitable remarks were pointedly directed at him!

Imagine the state of Aman at the banquet given by Queen Esther to Assuerus. When they had eaten and drunk enough, Esther, at the king's command, made her request: "Give me my life for which I ask, and my people, for which I request;"¹ for

It wounds one deeply to be upbraided with a shameful act that cannot be denied.

Shown by an example from Holy Scripture.

¹ Dona mihi animam meam, pro qua rogo, et populum meum, pro quo obsecro.—Esther vii. 3.

I and my people are to be slain. And, what is still worse, our enemy is in such a position that, acting as he does in the king's name, his cruelty will be ascribed to the king. Consider now, my dear brethren, what must have been the state of Aman's mind on hearing himself accused so unexpectedly. The king, wroth at what he heard, asked: "Who is this, and of what power, that he should do these things?"¹ The question was like a thunderbolt to Aman. But Esther answered: "It is this Aman that is our adversary and most wicked enemy."² How great must have been the confusion of Aman at hearing this answer! "Aman," says the Scripture, "hearing this, was forthwith astonished, not being able to bear the countenance of the king and of the queen."³ Full of fear and shame and hardly conscious of what he was doing, he threw himself before Esther's couch, and would, no doubt, have rejoiced if he could have died on the spot. So intolerable is the torment caused by being upbraided with one's own shame.

A bad conscience is always reproaching the sinner with his wickedness.

Nearly every day, O sinner, you have to bear a similar torment, after having mortally offended your God, unless, indeed, you are one of those who are sunk in the very depths of depravity, and have become callous and obdurate. If you are not gone so far as that, then you will have torture and punishment enough to bear. You have within you, in your bad conscience, a devil that is by no means dumb; or, to speak better, your conscience is the devil that tortures you, by continually reproaching you with your shame in the bitterest terms; nor can you hear those reproaches without heartfelt anguish and confusion; and yet you are compelled to listen to them against your will. The moment you satisfy your brutal lusts, or your inordinate inclinations, and commit a sin, the tormenting demon is, as you must acknowledge, already there, and he calls out to you, as Pilate did to Christ, "what hast thou done?"⁴ Miserable mortal, where are you going to? Whither have your blind desires led you? Shame upon you! If any honorable man knew what you have done, you would be covered with confusion! And yet the Almighty God has seen you while you were actually insulting Him, and trampling under foot His precious Blood. Is that your gratitude to Him for the countless gifts and graces He has bestowed on you? And what better are you now for what you have done, poor wretch that you are? And what has become of

¹ Quis est iste, et cujus potentia, ut haec audeat facere?—Esther vii. 5.

² Hostis et inimicus noster pessimus iste est Aman.—Ibid. 6.

³ Quod ille audiens illico obstupuit vultum regis ac reginae ferre non sustinens.—Ibid.

⁴ Quid fecisti?—John xviii. 35.

your soul? It is sold to the devil for a vile and momentary pleasure, for a worthless thing! How can you dare any more to lift up your eyes to heaven? What has become of the merits of your former good works? You have lost them all in a moment. Where are now your so oft repeated protestations that you would rather die than offend God by mortal sin? How the devil must laugh at you, now that he has so easily ensnared you! And what must your angel guardian think of your conduct; for he was by your side when you so disgracefully forgot God and yourself, and, putting all honor and decency aside, sinned against the light of your own reason? Where is now your devotion to, your confidence in, the Mother of God? How can you dare to call her your Mother, after having so wickedly driven her most beloved Son out of your heart? Such are the bitter reproaches of your conscience when you have committed a sin. And that is according to what God said to Cain: "If thou do well, shalt thou not receive? But if ill, shall not sin forthwith be present at the door?"¹ That is to say, the remembrance of your sins will at once knock at the door of your heart, and will constantly cry out to you in tones of reproach, "what hast thou done?"

And what have you to say by way of defence? You cannot deny what you are accused of; your conscience brings it clearly before you; whether you will or not, you must acknowledge your guilt. In vain do you try to cloak your wickedness, or to allege false excuses for your sin. You may deceive men by them, but not yourself, your conscience speaks out plainly and distinctly; it cannot be deceived by flattery; and therefore you must hear it in silence, and bear your shame as best you can. You think perhaps, my sin was committed in secret, no one knows anything of it but myself and my associate in guilt, and I am certain that it will never be revealed, so that I can appear before men just as good as I was before, and they will have the same good opinion of me. True it is that, when you do wrong, you do not call in witnesses; and impurity, theft, and other shameful crimes are committed in the darkness of the night, and in hidden holes and corners, and are concealed from the eyes of men by a hypocritical appearance of piety; but tell me, asks St. Ambrose, "If you have no other witness of your sin, have you not the testimony of your own conscience?"² If no man knows of your guilt, it is known, at all events, to God and to yourself, and that is enough

And he has nothing to urge in his excuse.

¹ Nonne si bene egeris, recipies? sin autem male, statim in foribus peccatum aderit?—Gen. iv. 7.

² Si non habes consulum, annon habes conscientie testimonium?

to cause you to be tortured by the pangs of remorse. If men, angels, demons, nay, even God Himself, were to leave you in peace, you have within you a torturer whose bitter reproaches you must bear to your great confusion ; and it is in that especially that the torment of a bad conscience consists, namely, that it annoys and troubles you alone and in secret.

Nor dare he seek consolation anywhere.

Nay, the fact that you dare not make known your trouble to others, rather increases, than lessens it. Every one who is afflicted seeks consolation from his friends and acquaintances, and relates to them in detail all that he has to suffer, and he is able to bear his trials far more courageously when he is aware that others sympathize with him. The bitterest trial of all is the secret of which one dares not complain, and which he must bear alone and unsupported. Thus it often happens that a man appears outwardly with a smiling countenance, while in the depths of his heart he is consumed with anguish. And so it is in reality with the sinner who is tortured by a bad conscience. Shame prevents him from making known his sufferings to any one. That others have a good opinion of him, instead of lessening, rather increases his torment; for his conscience continually cries out to him: See, men look upon you as good and pious, and you are in reality a slave of the devil! What must God think of you?

Nor can he free himself from the reproaches of conscience.

And how are you to get rid of those importunate upbraidings? Will you run away from them? But whither can you go? No matter where you are, or what you do, you have your conscience, that is your tormenting demon, always with you. Nor can you induce it to be still; for conscience is, so to speak, without shame; it cannot be persuaded by flattery, or bribed by gifts; it is insensible to kind, as well as to harsh words, and it persists in doing the office entrusted to it by God, namely, exhorting and tormenting the sinner. It is a thorn in his side, which causes acute pain, that no ointment or medicine can allay until the thorn is pulled out. In vain do you keep away from sermons, lest you should hear some allusion to your secret vices; and it generally is the case that they who have a bad conscience are very negligent in hearing the word of God, especially when they have reason to suspect that the truth will be told them; but I say, it is no use for you to try to save yourself in that way, for at home, in your own room, you have a preacher who tells you the truth about your sins better than any one else, and that preacher is your own conscience, which reproaches you with your wickedness all

the more bitterly because you try to avoid hearing what it has to say. When the bell rings for the sermon, your conscience says to you, Unhappy man that you are! You have gone so far now, that you dare not hear the word of God, which used to strengthen and comfort you in the divine service. In fact, do what you will, you cannot avoid the pangs of remorse, and at last you will be obliged, if you wish to get any rest at all, to make known your shame and your sin.

Surius relates in the *Life of St. Medard*, that a thief once stole from that Saint a fine ox, and, as the animal had a bell round its neck, the ringing of which might betray its whereabouts, the thief very carefully stuffed the bell with grass, and brought away the ox to his house. Hardly had he fastened the ox in the stable, when the bell commenced to ring of its own accord loud enough to be heard all over the place. The thief, in alarm, ran in at once to stop the bell, but he could not do so. At last he tore it off the neck of the ox, and hid it in his house, in a chest full of old clothes; but even then it continued making such a noise that the neighbors ran in to see what was the matter. Thus the guilty man was forced to make known the theft he had committed, to restore the ox to its owner, and to beg pardon most humbly for his crime. The same Surius, in his *Life of St. Walburga*, relates a still more remarkable incident. At Eichstadt in Germany there was a man who had killed his travelling companion, in order to rob him of his money; as he was raising the dead body on his shoulders to carry it to a safe place, where he could plunder it at his ease, the dead man locked his arms and legs so tightly around the murderer, that the latter could not free himself. All his plans to get rid of his loathsome burden proving fruitless, the unhappy man, at last driven to desperation, threw himself into the Rhine, intending to drown himself with the corpse of his victim. But not even this plan succeeded; for the waters rejected him, and threw him back again on the bank. Thus he who was anxious to die was forced, against his will, to live, tied to a dead body. Consider, my dear brethren, what a miserable state the poor wretch must have been in. For a time he wandered about with his ghastly burden among the forests and caves of the mountains, in order to avoid the sight of men; but at last he was unable to bear the fearful stench of the putrifying body, and he went to the grave of St. Walburga, where he confessed to a priest the murder of which he was guilty and of which he had to carry the proof about with him,

Shown by
examples.

and thus he was enabled to get rid of the dead body of his victim at the grave of the Saint.

Until he is at last compelled to disclose his shame in confession.

Better examples than those, my dear brethren, could hardly be imagined to show how remorse tortures the bad conscience. As soon as a mortal sin is committed the conscience commences to ring at once like a bell, and to cry out, what have you done? and, as God says by the Prophet Ezechiel, "Do thou also bear thy confusion;"¹ of which text St. Jerome says, "he who is tortured by his own conscience, bears his torment about with him."² How many plans the sinner resorts to, in order to stop the ringing of this bell, and to free himself from the heavy and loathsome burden of his own conscience! But all to no purpose. He goes into company in order to divert his mind from its troubles; he tries to steal away the time, as it were, from his cares and to conceal his anguish from the eyes of men by all kinds of amusements, feasting, and dancing; but in the very midst of his pleasures he hears the bell that cannot be silenced. His smiling countenance, his outward gayety, are only a cloak to hide the trouble and uneasiness that are gnawing at his heart, which is groaning and sighing under a heavy burden. He tries to stop the bell with clothes and feathers, that is, he hopes to stifle his conscience for a time by indulging in excessive sleep; but even in his dreams he cannot get rid of the cares that oppress him; as king David testifies of himself after he had fallen into sin, "I slept troubled;"³ "There is no peace for my bones because of my sins."⁴ Sometimes the sinner thinks that he will silence the voice of conscience, and get rid of his trouble by putting off his confession for months and years, or, what is still worse, by concealing in confession the shameful sin that causes him remorse; but he only makes matters worse; for the bell rings louder, the burden becomes heavier on account of the additional guilt of sacrilege. He then tries another plan, and imagines that outward acts of devotion, or long prayers, or almsgiving, will quiet his uneasy conscience; but here too he is mistaken, and his remorse is only increased, for he is continually reminded that his prayers and devotions are not sincere, since he has not honestly made his peace with God. No matter what efforts he may make otherwise to find peace, he will at last be forced, like the thief and the murderer, to disclose his own

¹ Et tu porta confusionem tuam.—Ezech. xvi. 52.

² Portat tormentum suum, qui propria torquetur conscientia.

³ Dormivi conturbatus.—Ps. lvi. 5.

⁴ Non est pax ossibus meis a facie peccatorum meorum.—Ps. xxxvii. 4.

shame, to make known his sin in confession, and penitently and humbly to beg pardon for it. If he refuses to do that, he will never be freed from his torments.

How painful it must be for a soul to be thus perpetually tortured! According to the wise man, "It is better to dwell in a wilderness, than with a quarrelsome and passionate woman;"¹ and I can easily imagine that such is the case; but is it not a still more unbearable torment to have to dwell with a bad conscience, that is always reproaching you? O sinner! are you not really mad and out of your senses to expose yourself to such lasting and intolerable torture, and to forfeit the grace and friendship of God for the sake of some momentary pleasure, or trifling gain, or short-lived gratification of your evil desires? In the Arctic Ocean whales are sometimes seen writhing with pain as they swim on the top of the water, until at length, driven, as it were, to desperation, they rush toward the shore and allow themselves to fall an easy prey to the fishermen. They had no outward traces of wounds or sickness, nor do they seem to be flying from an enemy; the sea is calm, the wind still, and yet they are evidently tormented by something they cannot defend themselves against, or get rid of, because it is within them. It appears that there is in those regions a kind of bird, similar in size and appearance to our raven, and furnished with a long, sharp beak; when it finds the mouth of the whale open, it flies into its huge stomach and gradually gnaws away its heart and entrails. Frequently birds of this kind have been seen to come alive out of the open carcasses of whales. Thus a huge creature is forced to submit to a small bird, and to nourish and feed in its own body the enemy that gnaws away its life, although it is otherwise so strong that it can easily overcome any animal that attacks it by mere strength. It matters little to our purpose whether this story is true or false, for there is no doubt that it represents the remorse that gnaws at the conscience of him who is in the state of mortal sin, and shows how, in the midst of the apparent happiness and pleasures he enjoys, his heart is full of care and trouble; for, as St. Ambrose says, "the unreasoning sins of the soul gnaw at the mind and feelings of the sinner, and eat away the entrails, as it were, of his conscience."² If the whale were to seek for the bird and deliberately to allow it to

Foolish, then, is the sinner to expose himself to such torment. Shown by a simile.

¹ *Melius est habitare in terra deserta, quam cum muliere rixosa et iracunda.*—Prov. xxi. 19.

² *Irrationabilia animæ peccata mentem rei sensumque compungunt et quædam exedunt viscera conscientiæ.*—S. Ambrose in Luc. i. vii. e. 14.

enter his stomach, then it would only serve him right, although there would be some excuse for such a foolish proceeding in an unreasoning animal; but you, O man, who know very well how sin plagues and torments you and gnaws at your heart, how can you so readily and even laughingly swallow down the forbidden morsel that you know will cause you such suffering, for the sake of a momentary pleasure? whom have you to blame but yourself? And, indeed, according to the philosopher Seneca, you richly deserve the punishment you have brought on yourself. "The first and greatest punishment of the sinner is sin, nor does any crime go unpunished, for every crime is its own punishment,"¹ since it is always reproaching the sinner. But the torment of a bad conscience does not end here, for, besides its bitter upbraiding, it threatens the sinner with eternal damnation as his final destiny, as we shall see briefly in the

Second Part.

A prisoner is greatly troubled when sentence of death is passed on him.

While a prisoner is being tried and his case still under examination, he is full of anxiety as to how it will end; but if the judge passes sentence of death on him, his fear and terror know no bounds, as all those who have to prepare such prisoners for death know by experience. No matter how resigned they may have been before to the will of God, so that one might think that there would not be the least trouble in preparing them for death, when the fatal sentence is announced to them, they change at once, and give way to extreme anguish and despair, so that one can hardly dare to speak to them. They brood over their fate, and neither know what they are saying themselves, nor understand what is said to them, and if their terror allows them to sleep, they dream of nothing but the sword, the wheel, or the gallows that is to deprive them of life.

A sinner is always troubled in the same way

See, O sinner, how it is with you, when you have within you the tormenting demon of a bad conscience. It not only reproaches you with your shame, but also reminds you that sentence of death, and of eternal death, too, has been passed on you. You are lost! it says; you have deserved death! As long as you are in this state, you are doomed to destruction! Sentence is passed on you already; away to hell, to eternal fire! When you hear the roar of the thunder and see the flash of the lightning, you are filled with anguish by the voice of conscience, which cries

¹ Prima et maxima pœna peccantium est peccasse, nec ullum scelus impunitum est quoniam sceleris in scelere supplicium est.—Seneca, ep. 97 ad Lucil.

out to you, take care, an angry God is about to take vengeance on you! A thunder-bolt will fall on you; the lightning will strike you! Will you not now at least remember that there is an all-powerful God, whom you must fear, and whom you have hitherto so grossly insulted? If a pestilence attacks the city, and hurries off numbers of the people to their graves, your conscience fills you with terror. Alas! it says, what will become of you? Death is at your very door! Do you think you can escape the calamity from which so many good and pious people have suffered? It is you and such as you who have been the cause of this calamity, and what would become of you if you were now to fall sick and die? If you happen to hear of an accident, for instance, that poor man who was in perfect health when he went to bed last night, was found dead this morning; or, another man died in a quarter of an hour from a fit of apoplexy; or, that woman fell down and broke her neck; all these things are apt to fill you with mortal terror. Ah, your conscience says to you, you deserve that fate better than that man or that woman! Who knows what may happen to you this very day? If you chance, even against your will, to be present at a sermon which treats of death, or hell, or the judgment of God, you are terror-stricken; every word you hear seems to confirm the sentence of your eternal damnation. If your secret vice is even faintly alluded to, your conscience is at once on the alert; that is meant for me, you think; what business has the preacher to speak so pointedly at me? If you remain away from the sermon, your conscience is alarmed at the sound of the bell which gives the signal for it; there, it says, you have a clear proof of your eternal reprobation, since you avoid the word of God, which could bring you to repentance. So true are the words of the Holy Ghost in the Book of Wisdom, "For whereas wickedness is fearful, it beareth witness of its condemnation; for a troubled conscience always forecasteth grievous things."¹

Yes, says St. Chrysostom, he who is plagued by a bad conscience often imagines that even lifeless creatures, the stones, the wall, and the shadows on it are so many voices that pronounce sentence on him; he is like a poor prisoner who, when he hears the least noise at his cell door, imagines that he is to be led forth at once to execution, although the noise may be merely the howling of the wind. The Holy Scripture gives us a striking

Nay, he even imagines that lifeless creatures condemn him: shown from Holy Scripture.

¹ Cum sit enim timida nequitia, dat testimonium condemnationis: semper enim præsumit sæva perturbata conscientia.—Wis. xvii. 10.

proof of this in the wicked King Baltassar, as we read in the Book of Daniel. Baltassar was seated at table surrounded by the nobles of his kingdom, when, in the midst of his revelry, he suddenly grew pale: "Then was the king's countenance changed, and the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees struck one against the other,"¹ and he cried out in dread, so that all who heard him were alarmed. And what was the matter? What had frightened him? "There appeared fingers, as it were of the hand of a man, writing over against the candlestick upon the surface of the wall of the king's palace; and the king beheld the joints of the hand that wrote."² But, asks St. John Chrysostom, why should he be so frightened at the sight of a hand? What could a bare hand do against a mighty monarch surrounded by his satellites, and having at his command a whole army to defend his life against all attacks? If, instead of a hand, he had seen an armed giant, or a grisly spectre threatening him with a sword, he would have had some reason for alarm; but he saw nothing more terrible than the bare shadow or figure of a hand, not armed with a sword, but merely writing on the wall. And what did it write? Three little words, that the king did not even understand. What reason had he then for giving way to such excessive terror? It was not the hand, says St. Chrysostom, that frightened him, but his bad conscience, which made him suspect, what was really the case, that the hand was writing on the wall the sentence of death which his conscience had already pronounced on him. "For whereas wickedness is fearful, it beareth witness of its condemnation."

Confirmed
by other
examples

There are countless examples of the same kind: Theodoric, king of Italy, nearly fainted with fright when he saw a fish brought to table, thinking it was the head of Symmachus, whom he had caused to be put to death, that was coming open-mouthed to devour him. When Henry VIII., king of England, was on his death-bed, he thought that those who were standing round were the religious whom he had banished or put to death, and who were coming to summon him before the judgment-seat of God. The emperor Constantius imagined that every shadow he saw was the ghost of his murdered brother, quaffing to him a goblet full of blood. Persus destroyed all the swallows' nests he could find, and killed the birds themselves, because he

¹ Tunc facies regis commutata est. Compages renum ejus solvebantur, et genua ejus ad se invicem collidebantur.—Dan. v. 6.

² Apparuerunt digiti quasi manus hominis scribentis contra candelabrum in superficie parietis aulae regiae; et rex aspicebat articulos manus scribentis.—Ibid. 5.

thought that they were always accusing him of having murdered his father. Thus, "whereas wickedness is fearful it beareth witness of its condemnation." And this is the punishment that God threatens to inflict on sin, as we read in Deuteronomy: "If thou wilt not hear the voice of the Lord thy God, to keep and to do all His commandments. . . . the Lord will give thee a fearful heart, and languishing eyes, and a soul consumed with pensiveness. Thou shalt fear night and day, neither shalt thou trust thy life. In the morning thou shalt say: who will grant me evening? and at evening, who will grant me morning? for the fearfulness of the heart, wherewith thou shalt be terrified."¹ This is the torment of which St. Paul writes to the Romans, "Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that worketh evil."² It is the torment of which St. Augustine says that "amongst all the tribulations that can afflict the human soul, there is none greater than a bad conscience."³ Nay, if you wish to have, while still on earth, some idea of the torments of hell, then learn what it is to have a bad conscience. Ask king David how his tortured him; he will tell you: "There is no health in my flesh, because of Thy wrath; there is no peace for my bones because of my sins. I am become miserable, and am bowed down even to the end; I walked sorrowful all the day long. I am afflicted and humbled exceedingly; I roared with the groaning of my heart."⁴ "My sin is always before me."⁵ The adultery and murder that I have committed are always before my mind.

Perhaps you may think that, because David had, before he sinned, a good and tender conscience, it is no wonder that he felt the sting of remorse so keenly afterwards? Ask, then, another, who was sunk in the very depths of depravity; Luther, I mean, who cast all honor and shame to the winds, who feared neither God nor man, who bid defiance to spiritual and temporal authority, to princes and potentates; and you will find that even he

Even of the most wicked men.

¹ Quod si audire nolueris vocem Domini Dei tui, ut custodias et facias omnia mandata ejus. . . . dabit enim tibi Dominus ibi cor pavidum, et deficientes oculos, et animam consumptam mœrore. Timebis nocte et die, et non credes vitæ tuæ. Mane dices: quis mihi det vesperum? et vespere: quis mihi det mane? propter cordis tui formidinem, qua terreberis. —Deut. xxviii. 15, 65-67.

² Tribulatio et angustia in omnem animam hominis operantis malum. —Rom. ii. 9.

³ Inter omnes tribulationes humanæ animæ nulla major est, quam conscientia delictorum.

⁴ Non est sanitas in carne mea a facie iræ tuæ; non est pax ossibus meis a facie peccatorum meorum. Miser factus sum, et curvatus sum usque in finem; tota die contristatus ingrediebar. Afflictus sum, et humiliatus sum nimis; rugiebam a gemitu cordis mei. —Ps. xxxvii. 4, 7, 9.

⁵ Peccatum meum contra me est semper. —Ps. I. 5.

could not escape the tortures of remorse. Every day he indulged to excess in the pleasures of the table, hoping thereby to silence the reproaches of his conscience, but in vain. Hear his own words on this subject, as they are given by Ulenberg, his biographer: "Because I sometimes appear cheerful, people think I lead a happy life; but God sees what kind of a life I lead."¹ He confessed to his friend Pomeranus that it was impossible to describe the mental anguish he suffered. You may read of people whose hair turned suddenly gray through remorse of conscience. Such was the case with Louis the Severe, whose hair turned gray in a single night through remorse at a murder he was guilty of; so that, although he was quite a young man, he looked next morning as if he were seventy years old. You will find examples of people who, to get rid of the tortures of remorse, made away with themselves by hanging themselves to a bed post, or piercing their hearts with a dagger, or cutting their throats, or drowning themselves, etc. Thus they preferred to go straight to hell, rather than bear any longer the torment of a bad conscience. So true is it that "amongst all the tribulations that can afflict the human soul, there is none greater than a bad conscience."

Conclusion
and exhortation
to leave the
state of sin
at once, and
to avoid sin
in future.

Sinners, to you I address my conclusion in the words of St. Paul to the Romans, "what fruit therefore had you then in those things, of which you are now ashamed?"² Tell me, pray, what advantage have you gained by incurring the guilt of sin in the sight of God? What remains to you now of the past and momentary pleasure in which you sought your gratification? What have you gained by concealing that abominable sin in confession? You know now by your own experience, although you may not show it outwardly, what the result of your sin is, and it is nothing else but secret shame, anguish, and remorse of conscience, a hell upon earth. Are you not cruel towards yourselves in thus burdening your minds with such intolerable anguish? Are you not foolish in deferring repentance, when you can at once free yourselves from the miserable state in which you are? But perhaps you think I am exaggerating; perhaps you do not feel this torture so keenly? I know that not every sinner suffers from remorse in the same degree; there are some who suffer more, and others, less; according as their consciences are tender,

¹ Quia me hilarem nonnunquam exhibeo putant me jucundam vitam ducere, sed Deus perspectam habet morum meorum rationem.—Ulenberg, in *Vita Lutheri*, c. 19.

² Quem ergo fructum habuistis tunc in illis, in quibus nunc erubescitis?—Rom. vi. 21.

or hardened; in the same way, too, there are some vices that cause more shame than others; and finally, time lessens remorse to a certain extent; yet there is hardly any one who does not feel it in some degree or other. But if there is any one who, after having committed grievous sin, feels no uneasiness, nor remorse, then, alas! I need say no more to him, for he is evidently hardened in wickedness and abandoned by God; and that is the greatest punishment, next to eternal damnation, that can be inflicted on sin, as we shall see on another occasion. But if you still feel your consciences uneasy, oh, then thank God, and drive away the tormenting demon at once by sincere repentance and amendment! Do not think the worse of preachers or confessors if they reprove your vices sharply and try to deter you from sin by describing the malice of it. They mean well with you, and their object is either to save you from falling into sin and from thus incurring the tortures of remorse, or to free you from the state of sin, if you are already in it. For my part, I could not endure such torment for a moment, and I believe that, if there was no other punishment for sin but an uneasy conscience, I should try to avoid all sin with the greatest care; and if there was no other reward for a virtuous life, but the peace of mind that a good conscience brings, that alone would be enough to induce me to try to do the holy will of God in all things. So it is, pious Christians! and let this be your conclusion: do not allow yourselves to be deceived by the false and merely apparent happiness of sinners; serve your God faithfully, and enjoy in the possession of the highest good that peace which surpasses all worldly joys, and is a foretaste of the eternal joys of heaven. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the second Sunday after Easter.

Text.

Vocem meam audient.—John. x. 16.

“They shall hear My voice.”

This is the difference between the chosen sheep of Jesus Christ and the reprobate goats that are condemned to hell; the former, after having been brought to the true fold, hear the voice of their Good Shepherd, and endeavor to follow it always; while the latter, at the first difficulty or temptation, allow themselves to be scattered and devoured by the hellish wolf. By these latter I mean those sinners who, after having been converted to God

by true penance, do not remain faithful, but relapse easily into their former sins, and thus again take sides with the devil. I now beg of them to remember how wretched they were when in the state of sin, and, if they love themselves, not to inflict on themselves the pain and torture they had to suffer before; for there is no doubt that they will have experienced the truth of what God says in the Book of Deuteronomy, "But if thou wilt not hear the voice of the Lord thy God, . . . the Lord will give thee a fearful heart, and a soul consumed with pensiveness."¹ Will you not hear the voice of the Good Shepherd? Then you must, in spite of yourself, hear another voice, which will incessantly torment and fill you with anguish. And what voice is that? The voice of your own bad conscience, a torment that has not its like on earth; so that we have therein a very good reason to avoid all sin, as I shall now show to your salutary warning,—*continues as above.*

SEVENTH SERMON.

ON THE FALSE PEACE OF A SINFUL CONSCIENCE.

Subject.

How and by what means people are wont to falsify and pervert their own judgment and conscience, so that, although the conscience is in a bad state, yet it remains in peace and quiet.—*Preached on the feast of St. Matthias, Apostle.*

Text.

Et invenietis requiem animabus vestris.—Matt. xi. 29.

"And you shall find rest to your souls."

Introduction.

Oh, certainly sweet is the yoke, and light the burden, that he bears who, desirous of his eternal salvation, earnestly seeks to keep his conscience free from sin in the service of Jesus Christ, and to remain always in the friendship of God! Such a man finds out by experience the truth of the promise of Jesus Christ, "Take up My yoke upon you, and you shall find rest to your souls." And in reality he enjoys a sweet peace of soul, than

¹ Quodst audire nolueris vocem Domini Dei tui . . . dabit tibi Dominus ibi cor pavidum, et animam consumptam merore.—Deut. xxviii. 15, 65.

which there can be no greater in this life, and in which he may confidently rejoice in the Lord at all times, with his whole heart. Pious and just Christian; I congratulate you a thousand times! Continue with confidence to enjoy that consolation which is a mystery to the blind world and its infatuated children! Sinners! deplorable indeed is your condition, for you cannot have the least share in that consolation, as long as you are enemies of God, and in the state of sin. The intolerable torment of remorse, of which I have spoken elsewhere, is the miserable portion that sin has left you! Ah, should not even this fact be enough to induce you to leave at once the wretched state in which you are, that you may again participate in the peace and consolation of the children of God? Yet, as long as you feel the sting of remorse, you are, so to speak, the best amongst sinners; for there is still hope that your uneasy conscience will, as it were, compel you to repent and amend your lives. The worst and most wretched amongst you I can justly call those who, like you, are under the yoke of the devil. and yet imagine that they are living in peace and contentment. They imagine, I say; for there are Christians who are in a bad state as to their souls, since they have sinned grievously against certain commandments of God, and who, in order to preserve their peace of mind, have recourse to many false arguments and pretexts to deceive their conscience, to falsify and pervert their judgment, and thus to persuade themselves that evil is good and lawful. These people do not act honestly towards God and their own souls; they have deliberately falsified and deceived their own conscience, and consequently their peace of mind is only a false and deceitful one, with which they are hurrying on blindly to eternal ruin. The heartfelt pity I have for such souls impels me to give this exhortation, in which I shall explain

Plan of Discourse.

How and by what means people are wont to falsify and pervert their own judgment and conscience, so that, although the conscience is in a bad state, yet it remains in peace and quiet. Such is the whole subject, to the end that they who act honestly with God, if they see that they do not belong to this class of sinners, may be all the more confirmed in true peace of conscience; and that the others, having acknowledged the deceit they are guilty of, may enter on a better and a safe road to heaven, and take on themselves the sweet yoke of Jesus Christ.

Grant both those ends, O Jesus Christ, by Thy powerful grace, which we beg of Thee through the intercession of Mary Thy Mother, and the holy guardian angels.

Although the conscience never allows itself to be deceived when there is question of sin.

But what am I saying? How is it possible to enjoy peace of mind by deceiving one's own conscience? Is it really possible for a man by any effort of lying craft so to deceive his conscience, that it can no longer tell him the truth, and looks on evil as good, and sin as lawful? Is not the conscience, as St. John Chrysostom says, an impartial, just, and truthful judge, that cannot be deceived by bribes or flattery, nor terrified by contradictions or threats? A judge who cannot be reduced to silence, as I have explained already when speaking of the torments of remorse; who cries out continually to the sinner, against the sinner's own will, what have you done? you have offended God and made Him your enemy; you are a child of the devil, and are doomed to eternal ruin, etc.; who, when one is on the point of doing something unlawful, cries out, as St. John the Baptist did to Herod, "It is not lawful;"¹ what you are intending to do is wrong! The way in which you make money is unlawful; you incur eternal punishment by your acts of injustice! It is unlawful for you not to pay your debts when you can, and to turn away from your door your laborers, your tradesmen, and the shopkeepers with whom you deal, and to refuse them what is due to them! It is unlawful for you to spend so much on unnecessary luxuries, entertainments, and dress, so that you have nothing left to give the poor! Woman, that irregular, useless, idle life you are leading will never bring you to heaven; you are walking on the broad road that leads to hell! That perpetual visiting, those gambling habits of yours, for the sake of which you neglect your domestic cares, that carelessness in training your children, which is the occasion of their learning worldly vanity and being introduced to all sorts of dangerous company; all that is unlawful! you are damning yourself as well as your children! Son! daughter! you are making too free with that person; you are doing wrong! The occasion of sin must be cut off; it is not lawful for you to dress in that scandalous fashion; if you do not amend in that particular you cannot enter the narrow gate of heaven, etc.

Yet the sinner finds all sorts of excuses for sin, that he

It is true, my dear brethren, that at first conscience cries out in that way to every one who is guilty of sin; but what can one do to silence this voice of conscience, and to free himself from

¹ Non licet.—Matt. xiv. 4.

the tortures of remorse? Self-love supplies all kinds of pretexts and false arguments to pervert a man's judgment and to persuade him that there is nothing wrong in what he is going to do, that it is even good and praiseworthy. It refers him to the example of others, who do the same thing without being ashamed of it; it encourages him to follow the advice of those who are ready to approve of everything that pleases him; it consoles him by reminding him of the devotions he is in the habit of practising, and that are generally performed for the glory of God and the salvation of one's soul; it allows him to be blinded by his own passions and evil inclinations; it distracts him by temporal cares and worldly business, and prevents him from watching over himself and attending to the all-important affairs of his soul; and thus it brings him at last to such a state that he imagines he is on the sure way to heaven, and that he can continue in the mode of life to which he has grown accustomed. In this way one may lead a thoroughly un-Christian life, and yet find peace of mind. But since the conscience is deceived and betrayed, that peace is only a false one, that will surely bring with it, if not in this life, at least in the next, the gnawing worm of remorse.

may keep
his con-
science
quiet.

The first pretext, then, is the example of others, or the general custom. We see others doing wrong things without scruple or shame, and as we are inclined to do the same things, we allow our judgment to be perverted, look upon sin as lawful, and thus enjoy peace by deceiving our consciences. Long ago Our Lord reproached the Scribes and Pharisees with this gross error, when He accused them of appealing to the example of their forefathers by way of excuse for the grievous sins of injustice and uncharity of which they were guilty: "But He, answering, said to them: why do you also transgress the commandment of God for your tradition?"¹ You, hypocrites that you are, say that what your fathers have done you also must observe. But woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, that try to deceive yourselves in that way! And, my dear brethren, do we not find nowadays amongst ourselves similar pretexts and excuses, that people try to make available by a sort of prescriptive right almost, against the most important commandments of God? Who is there now who makes the least scruple of anything, if he can say of it, it is the fashion; it is the common custom; it is what people do nowadays in the world; others like me do it, and he

First pre-
text: the
common
custom of
men.

¹ Ipse autem respondens, ait illis: quare et vos transgredimini mandatum Dei propter traditionem vestram. —Matt. xv. 3.

who acts otherwise is looked down upon, and cannot get on in the world; there can be no harm in that which is done by every one? This, says St. Augustine, is what most people appeal to, when they think, "will God send every one to hell for that?"¹ And thus they flatter themselves that they are not doing wrong, and their consciences remain undisturbed.

It is a most grievous error, for no custom can make lawful to me what is forbidden by the law of God.

But, my dear brethren, what a grievous mistake we make in this matter, to the eternal ruin of our souls! Answer me this question: Does the law of God, that prescribes humility, modesty, Christian charity, temperance and abstemiousness, purity, self-denial, mortification of the senses; the law of God that forbids all pride, vanity, scandal-giving, revenge, hatred and enmity, gluttony and drunkenness, usury and unjust gains, impure love and all incontinence, etc.; does this law hold good only for a time, and in certain circumstances? or does it apply to all times and all circumstances? The good that this law commands, the evil it forbids, is it not always good or evil in itself? There is not a doubt of it, because the law of God that forbids us to do evil is founded on the law of nature. It is evident, then, that neither fashion, nor custom, nor the example of others, can make good and lawful that which is condemned by the law of God as bad and unlawful. No, no custom in the world can excuse me from grievous sin if, as many do, I were deliberately to deprive myself of the use of reason by excessive drinking. No custom can justify me if, as many do, I try to make unjust gains, or to keep unjustly what belongs to others by usury, or cheating in my business, trade, or profession, or in law-suits in which I am engaged. No custom on earth can make me to dress, as many do, in such a vain and luxurious style as to be to innocent souls an occasion of sin. No custom can make it lawful for me to return evil for evil, as many do, and to seek revenge for insults offered me. No custom can permit me to go into the proximate occasion of sin, or to keep up a sinful intercourse with a person of the opposite sex. No custom can excuse me if, like many parents, I train up my children to every worldly vanity; and the same is to be said of everything that is forbidden by the law of God. If I do or omit anything against that law, then I, and all who do or omit the same, are guilty of sin; and if I do not repent and amend my life, I and all who act like me, even if the whole world did it, will be lost eternally. There is not the least doubt of that. For if it were

¹ Numquid omnes perditurus est Deus?

not so, most vices would cease to be vices and would become quite lawful; since, alas, many vices have become so common, that they are looked on as fashionable and as matters of course.

But some may perhaps think, at least, there is some excuse for me, and a merciful God will not look on my sins as so grievous, since I only conform to the custom and example of others. No, Christians! you are quite wrong. The contrary is the case; your sin is all the greater and more inexcusable, the more common and fashionable it is; it offers a greater insult to God, since you disregard him for the sake of following the general custom, and it cries out more piercingly to heaven for vengeance, and compels a just God to punish the world. "The cry of Sodom and Gomorrha is multiplied," says the Holy Scripture, "and their sin is become exceedingly grievous."¹ If there had been in those wicked cities even a few, twenty, fifty, or a hundred, who were free from the abominable vice of impurity, God in His mercy would have spared the cities, as He Himself said to Abraham: "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten."² But because the sin was general, all the inhabitants were destroyed by fire from heaven. To say, therefore, others like me do this or that: it is the fashion or custom; I must do as others do; is the same as saying, others offend the great God; it is the fashion and custom to despise Him, and to trample His law under foot, and I, too, will despise and offend Him. Is not that increasing the malice of the sin, and making the vice more grievous?

Far different is the conclusion you should draw, according to the words of St. Paul to the Ephesians: "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."³ Redeeming the time, because the days are evil, wherefore become not unwise; but understanding what is the will of God;⁴ that is to say, since there are so many in the world who lead wicked lives, you, at least, ought to live piously, and do the will of God in all things as far as you can. If the air is full of pestilence, so that numbers of people die, you have to be all the more careful if you wish to escape the same fate. Now the whole world is full of vices, and most men are addicted to one vice or another, in accordance with the prevailing fashion, and therefore

I am guilty of contemning God more grievously when I follow the custom in unlawful things.

Therefore I am all the more bound to avoid such customs.

¹ Clamor Sodomorum et Gomorrhæ multiplicatus est, et peccatum eorum aggravatum est nimis.—Gen. xviii. 20.

² Non delebo propter decem.—Ibid. 32.

³ Nolite communicare operibus infructuosis tenebrarum, magis autem redarguite.—Ephes. v. 11.

⁴ Redimentes tempus, quoniam dies mali sunt: propterea nolite fieri imprudentes, sed intelligentes quæ sit voluntas Dei.—Ibid. 16, 17.

you have to be all the more careful, so as not to be, like them, unfaithful to God, that you may escape the eternal damnation that they incur, and may save your soul with the chosen few. It is useless, then, to appeal to the custom and example of others in order to excuse your sin and to set your conscience at rest; for by so doing you falsify your conscience, and gain only a deceitful peace of mind.

Second pretext: the advice of those who approve of all we do.

The next pretext by which the conscience is deceived, is grounded on the advice of certain individuals whom one consults, when in doubt, to find out whether it is lawful to make a profit by doing business in such or such a way, or whether one is bound to restitution in a certain case or not, whether one ought to leave that house, that companion, or to abandon that person, whether one is bound under pain of sin to avoid that worldly fashion, and so on. Very often in cases of this kind the troubled conscience cries out, it is not lawful! If you do so, you commit sin! And how can one manage to get rid of all uneasiness, and at the same time to retain his former habit of injustice, impurity, or worldliness? He looks out for a confessor, or some one else, who apparently is experienced in matters of conscience; but what kind of a one does he look for? For one whom he knows to be truthful and outspoken, and who will tell him plainly what the law of God and the claim of conscience require? Not at all! He does not want an advice of that kind. But he seeks for one whom he will be able to persuade by flimsy arguments to give him advice that will be pleasing to him; one who, as he knows by experience, will let him off easily, and will approve of the mode of action that he is inclined to follow. But if the first adviser is not satisfactory, if he is somewhat too severe, then another is sought, who will deal with the matter more leniently, and say, O yes, you are allowed to do that; there is no grievous obligation in the case; you need not be uneasy, etc. And thus the troubled conscience is set at rest, the former custom or habit is persevered in, and there is no danger of the torments of remorse.

In this way, too, we deceive ourselves.

Alas, God help you! you have thoroughly deceived and betrayed your own conscience. "Thy prophets," as Jeremias says, "have seen false and foolish things for thee, and they have not laid open thy iniquity, to excite thee to penance; but they have seen for thee false revelations;"¹ they have told you noth-

¹ Prophetæ tui viderunt tibi falsa et stulta, nec aperiebant iniquitatem tuam, ut te ad poenitentiam provocarent; viderunt autem tibi assumptiones falsas.—Lament. ii. 14.

ing but lies, or rather you wished to hear nothing else from them; you have deliberately looked for a prophet who would not tell you the plain truth, but would help you to excuse your sins and vices, so that you should not be obliged to repent of them. Do you think that you will be able in that way to excuse your sins at the judgment-seat of God, who searches the reins and the heart? you will find out later on, and you will see that you have not dealt honestly with your conscience. For if that pretext were available, we should again have to erase most vices from the list of sins, because there is hardly one of them that will not find a patron and protector to excuse it, and approve of it, either through ignorance, or thoughtlessness, or not understanding the thing properly, or flattery, or cowardice, or human respect, that prevents him from answering according to the truth. Alas, how often consciences are deceived in this way, even in the confessional! And hence it is that frequently no restitution is made of ill-gotten goods, nor atonement for injustice, nor the injured fame of another made good, nor the proximate occasion of sin avoided, nor sinful and scandalous abuses laid aside, and men continue in their sinful habits until the end of their lives, without scruple or uneasiness, and with peace of conscience; but it is a false and deceitful peace.

The third pretext for falsifying the conscience comes from our own evil inclinations and passions, which pervert the judgment and blind the understanding, so that we refuse to acknowledge our obligation, or at least to look on it as serious, in many matters of duty, either because we find a difficulty in them, or because they are opposed to our natural inclinations. In this way we act like a drunken man who is unable to discern good from evil, and who runs open-eyed into danger without seeing where he is going; and if any one beats or strikes him, he is incapable of feeling the pain of the blows until the next morning. This is always the case with those who allow themselves to be led astray by their unmortified passions and evil inclinations; and the Prophet Joel says to such people: "Awake, ye that are drunk;"¹ while St. Augustine, speaking in their person says: "Everything is good as long as it suits our inclination."²

A passionate, vindictive man can hardly bear the sight of one who has injured or insulted him; a thousand schemes of revenge run through his head every day; wherever he goes he has not

Third pretext: our own evil inclinations.

It is alleged for almost every vice.

¹ *Expergiscimini ebrif.*—Joel i. 5.

² *Omne quodcumque volumus, bonum est.*

a good word for his enemy, but heaps curses and maledictions on him, and slanders him in every possible manner; and what does his conscience say to him about all those sins? Sins? He never thinks of them as sinful; he imagines he has a perfect right to act in that way, and that his own honor and good name require him to do so. An avaricious man will hardly see any sin in being very stingy towards the poor, in trying to gain a law-suit unjustly by bribery, in allowing himself to be bribed to hold his tongue when he ought to speak, or to speak when he ought to hold his tongue; in a word, every contract or matter of business that offers him a chance of making a profit is sure to be good and lawful in his sight; while he claims credit from God for his avarice, which he looks upon as a praiseworthy and necessary economy, as a proof of his fatherly prudence in providing for his children. What does an impure man think of undue familiarity with the opposite sex, of the evil thoughts and desires that fill his heart, of the double-meaning expressions and impure conversation he indulges in, of the signs and gestures he makes, contrary to Christian modesty? He makes very light of those things; they are only ordinary acts of courtesy or friendliness, such as are in common use amongst men; there is no sin in them, unless they are carried to extravagant lengths, and even then they look on the sin as the result of human weakness, that deserves the pity rather than the anger of God. The woman whose mind and manners are in thorough conformity with the vanity of the world thinks it no sin to appear in church and at the Table of the Lord, dressed in luxurious and extravagant style; nor to have her hair dressed by a person of the opposite sex; nor to bring up her daughters to the same vanities, and allow them to go into dangerous company; nor to waste part of the day in sleep, and the rest in dressing, while the evenings are devoted to visiting and gambling, and household cares are neglected, as well as the Christian training of her children. All these things are utterly opposed to the duties of a Christian life, and to the obligations of her state; but what does she care for that? She does not even think it worth her while to mention them in confession, much less to repent of and avoid them. In fact, she is so blinded by passion, that she looks upon that incessant visiting and the habit of gambling as virtues, inasmuch as she pretends that thereby she can avoid idleness and uncharitable talk, as well as other sins, while mutual friendship, love, and charity are fostered, etc.; her extravagance in dress

she considers a matter of necessity, in order to please her husband, etc. Once we have a desire for a thing, it must be good. And people in this state go frequently to confession and Holy Communion without scruple or shame; they imagine even that they are very pious and good if they are constant in the performance of certain outward works of devotion, and their consciences are at rest. But, O deplorable blindness! "woe to you that call evil good;"¹ and are so blinded by your passions, that you try to turn vices into lawful customs! It is a false conscience, that causes a false peace of mind, and it will not be able to deceive God; for, as St. Jerome says: "that calm is a storm."²

The fourth pretext for falsifying and betraying the conscience comes from carelessness and sloth in what concerns our eternal salvation. Thus there are people who hardly think of examining their actions once a week, to see whether they are good or evil; they take no trouble to learn the duties and obligations of their state; they seldom or never come to sermons or instructions in which those duties might be explained to them; from morning till night they are distracted with all sorts of worldly occupations, and they hardly ever think of the presence of God; they gratify their senses to the full in all things, and thus commit hundreds of sins that they take no notice of; and withal, if they hear holy Mass on Sundays and holydays, observe the usual fasts, commit no murder, adultery, or manifest injustice, confess their sins four times a year, say a part of the Rosary, or the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin, or some confraternity prayers every day, they imagine that they are in a very good state, and so they live on, with their consciences at rest, and without remorse or anxiety. Nor is there any reason to be surprised at that. They commit sins enough; but since they take no notice of them through carelessness, wilful and culpable ignorance, and deliberate avoidance of the light and the encouragement they might receive by hearing the word of God, which is so necessary for them, they cannot arouse or disturb their slumbering consciences, and they remain in that way of which the Wise Man says, "There is a way which seemeth just to a man; but the ends thereof lead to death."³

The fourth pretext comes from want of watchfulness over ourselves.

O holy servants of God, whose relics are publicly venerated on our altars, how differently you lived when on earth! How

The saints acted quite differently.

¹ *Væ qui dicitis malum bonum.*—Isa. v. 20.

² *Tranquillitas ista tempestas est.*

³ *Est via quæ videtur homini justa; novissima autem ejus deducunt ad mortem.*—Prov

recollected you always were in the presence of God; how attentive to all your thoughts, words, and actions; how careful in following even the least inspirations of God; how diligent in avoiding every dangerous occasion of sin! you feared even the very name and shadow of sin, and yet most of you acknowledged with holy Job: "I feared all my works,"¹ I was always anxious lest I should have done something displeasing to the divine Majesty. And why? "Knowing that Thou didst not spare the offender;"² and that Thou, O most just God, wouldst not allow the least sin to go unpunished. "My ignorances do not remember;"³ you have often cried out with the penitent David; that is, do not remember the faults and sins I have committed through culpable ignorance and forgetfulness! So anxious were you, although your lives were so holy and perfect! But they who are daily immersed in all kinds of worldly business, who are constantly in dangerous occasions of sin, who hardly think seriously once in the day of God and their souls, who hear nothing good and do little good, who do much evil that is contrary to the obligations of a Christian, and take not the least notice of it; they live in undisturbed repose and tranquillity of conscience! Ah, believe me, "that calm is a tempest!"

The fifth
pretext
comes from
gross igno-
rance.

Finally, there are people who live in the vices to which they have accustomed themselves from year to year, and never leave the occasions of sin, so that they commit the same sins over and over again. And they are well aware, too, that they are doing wrong, but they do not let that disturb them; they feel no remorse, and most of the time their consciences are at rest. How do they manage that? They depend on their frequent confessions, and imagine that, when they have told their sins candidly, they have done enough and have wiped out all old scores, Thus they continue in their bad habits and in the occasion of sin without any uneasiness, trusting to the confession they intend making during the week, so that they are continually alternating between sin and confession, confession and sin. Now this pretext for quieting one's conscience, so as to enjoy a false peace of mind, is the clumsiest of all, for, as I shall prove more in detail hereafter, the confessions of those people, since they are made without true sorrow and purpose of amendment, are so many new mortal sins, and of course the absolution

¹ Verebar omnia opera mea.—Job ix. 28.

² Sciens quod non parceres delinquenti.—Ibid.

³ Ignorantias meas ne memineris.—Ps. xxiv. 7.

received in them is null and void. To these people, and to all who make use of the pretexts of which I have spoken, might be addressed the words of St. John to the Bishop of Sardis, "I know thy works, that thou hast the name of being alive, and thou art dead."¹ Alas, unhappy mortals! you flatter yourselves that you are in a good state, and that you have nothing to fear, because you are in the enjoyment of peace of mind; but your consciences are deceived, and your peace is only a false one, "There is a way, which seemeth just to a man; but the ends thereof lead to death."

But if those people are made to hear the truth, if their consciences are disturbed and their attention called to the falsity of the pretexts on which their peace of mind is founded, they are full of complaints and lamentations. They are like that foolish man in Greece, who imagined that he was always looking at a most entertaining comedy, in which there was everything to delight both ears and eyes; and while his delusion lasted, he was quite happy and contented; but when his friends, pitying the state in which he was, gave him medicine that brought him back to his sound senses, he cried out: Alas, my friends, what have you done? You have taken away my life in restoring me to reason!² You have deprived me of all pleasure; I wish I were still a fool, that I might enjoy myself as before! It is just the same with those Christians who in any way try to falsify their consciences that they may quiet the pangs of remorse. If they happen to read a spiritual book, or to hear through curiosity a sermon in which their pet vices are spoken of, and the truth is plainly told them; instead of thanking God for the light and knowledge He has sent them, they cry out, full of trouble and anguish; alas, what have I done? Would that I had not touched that wretched book! that I had not remained to hear that sermon! I might still be enjoying my former peace of mind. That book, that sermon has filled me with scruples and anxieties; I must not tamper with such things any more. And, my dear brethren, there are even some who, although they are otherwise very diligent in hearing sermons, if some truth is proposed to them that does not suit their fancies, because it disturbs their consciences and fills them, not with scruples but with a well-founded anxiety, give up going to sermons altogether, and even advise others to do the same, telling them that sermons

These people do not wish to be disturbed in their false peace.

¹ Scio opera tua, quia nomen habes quod vivas, et mortuus es.—Apoc. iii. 1.

² Me occidistis amici.—Horat. l. 2. Ep. ad Flor.

are not good for anything, except to fill the mind with useless fears. Then they who were not at the sermon are glad they remained away, so as not to be disturbed. How strangely those people act! Suppose that a traveller is on his way to Treves; he loses his way, and meets a peasant who asks him where he is going to. To Treves, answers the traveller. Oh, says the other, you are altogether out of your way, my friend! You must turn back and go by that other road, or you will never reach your journey's end. The traveller is very sorry to hear that he has gone astray; but he nevertheless thanks the peasant for his timely warning, and is glad to be put on the right road. But if, instead of that, he were to grumble and say all sorts of hard things of the peasant, because he had shown him his mistake and put him right, would you not look on him as a madman? True, if he were not warned, he would go on contentedly on the wrong way; but where would he come to at last?

They are in
a deplorable
state of
blindness.

O foolish mortals that we are! Woe to us, if we put down as scruples the well-grounded anxieties and warnings of conscience with which God in His mercy enlightens our culpable ignorance, and exhorts us to amend our lives, that He may bring us back on the right road to heaven, from which we have wandered so far astray! Woe to us, if we hate and shun those lights and admonitions, and love and seek our own blindness and darkness! We have reason to pity the wretched state of those sinners who knowingly and wilfully continue in sin year after year, without doing penance, for they are blindly hurrying straight to hell; and in truth, their condition is sad enough to make one shed tears of blood. But after all, do you not think that they who try to lull their consciences to sleep, that they may enjoy a false peace, are in a still more deplorable state? The former know their misery; the latter do not; the former feel the gnawing of remorse; the latter are free from it; and therefore it is much easier for the grace of God to move the former to repent of the sins they know they have committed, than the latter, who do not know their sins, and do not wish to know them.

Conclusion
and exhortation
to
seek true
peace of
conscience.

Ah Christians, either we are in earnest about going to heaven, or we are not! Do we not wish to go there? Then we can live as we please; but our damnation will be all the deeper hereafter, in proportion to the greater number of sins we commit. Are we determined to gain the eternal joys of heaven? Then, why do we try to hide the truth from ourselves, and to avoid the light? We are false to ourselves, but shall we be able to deceive

the all-knowing God, who sees the heart, and who has already assured us that He will search Jerusalem with a lantern, that is, that He will subject to a most rigorous scrutiny even the holiest works of the just? What better shall we be for having enjoyed a few years of false peace of conscience, as a result of our efforts at self-deception, if at the end of our lives, as will really be the case, our consciences will fling off the cloak of deceit, and show us how guilty we are, and will accuse and condemn us before our impartial Judge? No, my dear brethren, what we wish for, let us wish for it honestly before God and our own consciences. As Our Lord says, "whilst you have the light, believe in the light, that you may be the children of the light."¹ While we have and can have the light, we must receive it, and believe in it, and love and seek the truth; but if we are in doubt or anxiety we must ask advice from one who will tell us the truth, nor must we think, say, or do anything against the command of God, the Christian law; so that our consciences may truly give us testimony "that we are the sons of God,"² and that we may thus enjoy real peace of heart which will be followed by eternal peace in the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the Third Sunday in Lent.

Text.

Cum fortis armatus custodit atrium suum, in pace sunt ea quæ possidet.—Luke xi. 21.

"When a strong man armed keepeth his court; those things are in peace which he possesseth."

That can with truth be said of the man who is desirous of his eternal salvation, and who carefully tries to keep his conscience free from all sin, and to preserve constantly the friendship of God. "Those things are in peace which he possesseth;" he enjoys a most sweet peace of heart, than which there is nothing more desirable in this life, and he can confidently and with his whole heart rejoice in the Lord. Such, Christians, etc.,—*continues as above.*

On the great advantages of true peace of conscience, see several sermons in the following Fourth Part.

¹ Dum lucem habetis, credite in lucem, ut filii lucis sitis.—John xii. 36.

² Quod sumus filii Dei.—Rom. viii. 16.

EIGHTH SERMON.

**ON THE IGNORANCE WHICH THE SINNER VOLUNTARILY SEEKS
IN ORDER TO FIND PEACE OF CONSCIENCE.**

Subject.

In what this ignorance consists, how it is sought, and what an unhappy state is that of those who seek it.—*Preached on Whit-Monday.*

Text.

Lux venit in mundum, et dilexerunt homines magis tenebras quam lucem; erant enim eorum mala opera.—John. iii. 19.

“The light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil.”

Introduction.

Of the twenty-four hours the sun takes to accomplish its daily journey, the most unpleasant and disagreeable are those of the dark night; for then children are terrified, the healthy wrap themselves up in bed, the sick groan and sigh, wishing that the gloomy night were passed, the wild animals creep into their dens, and all creatures are, as it were, dumb and blind. Yet there are some birds, namely owls and bats, that cannot bear the light of day, and love the dark night, during which they fly about in quest of food. Hence they are hateful to other birds, and are pursued by them during the day. Is it possible, my dear brethren, that amongst reasoning beings there are owls and bats to be found? Yes; for Jesus Christ Himself, the Eternal truth, expressly says so: “The light is come into world, and men loved darkness rather than the light.” And why? “For their works were evil;” they are ashamed to let their works see the light of day, and therefore they seek and love the dark night; not, indeed, always our natural night, which could conceal their evil deeds from the eyes of men; but the gloom and darkness of their own souls, that they may conceal their evil deeds from their own consciences, and so live on in sin undisturbed. St. Thomas of Aquin distinguishes three kinds of spiritual darkness and blindness which men are fond of: the first is a wilfully sought blindness, which is in itself an inexcusable sin; the second is a culpable blindness, which is the occasion of many sins, and is there-

fore also inexcusable; the third is a blindness into which God sometimes allows man to fall, and it is the greatest punishment of sin. To-day I shall explain the first of these, namely, that wilfully sought blindness or ignorance which is in itself a sin.

Plan of Discourse.

In what this blindness consists, how it is sought, and what an unhappy state is that of those who seek it. Such is the whole subject of the present instruction.

Come, O Holy Ghost, enlighten our hearts and inflame our wills, that we may always seek Thy brilliant light, receive it with eagerness, and live according to it. This we beg of Thee through the merits of Thy virginal Spouse Mary, and of our holy guardian angels.

By the first kind of wilfully sought blindness, which is in itself sinful, the Angelic Doctor understands nothing else than a wilful ignorance of divine things, or a deliberate negligence on the part of him who does not wish or fears to be instructed in many things that concern faith, the divine law, his state and condition in life, his conscience, and his eternal salvation, lest the knowledge of the truth should convince him that he is bound to do more good, or to avoid more evil, than he is generally accustomed or now intends to do or to avoid. A man of this kind is one of those wicked people of whom holy Job complains that "they spend their days in wealth, and in a moment they go down to hell. Who have said to God: depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways."¹ We do not wish to have an exact knowledge of Thy commandments; the gloom in which we have hitherto lived is light enough for us; even if we are inexperienced in many things, and are often ignorant of the duties of our state of life, yet we are at peace, and can act according to our good will and pleasure. We are not subject to the anxieties that harass those scrupulous souls who are always trying to discern good from evil, and who make a sin and a hell in their own fancies of every little amusement they indulge in. The Prophet David says of such people: "He would not understand that he might do well,"² that is, they do not wish to learn what is good, lest they should have to do it. Nay, as St. Jerome says, "They rejoice in self-deception, and look on it as a ben-

If what wilfully sought blindness consists.

¹ Ducunt in bonis dies suos, et in puncto ad inferna descendunt. Qui dixerunt Deo: Recede a nobis, et scientiam viarum tuarum nolumus.—Job xxi. 13, 14.

² Noluit intelligere ut bene ageret.—Ps. xxxv. 4.

effit to delude themselves,"¹ because they are thus more at ease and do not so often feel the sting of conscience.

There are many who love that ignorance.

But, my dear brethren, is it necessary for me to speak of such people in a Catholic city? Is it possible for a man to sink to such depths of blindness and depravity, as to wish to shun the light, lest he should see the truth, and to have no desire to learn how to distinguish good from evil, that he may be more free to do evil? Alas, there are only too many cases of the kind in these days of ours! Nor do I allude now to wilful heretics, who at once close their eyes to the light, and avoid the trouble of making further inquiries, after they have received the light of grace to see the evident truth of our holy faith, and to have well-grounded doubts at least, regarding the palpable errors of the sect to which they belong; and they act thus, lest the knowledge of the truth should force them to embrace another faith and to change their mode of life; a change that human respect, an inordinate love of temporal things, a desire of their own ease and comfort, and a fear of difficulties have hitherto prevented them from making.

Even amongst Catholics.

Even amongst Christians (who could believe it?), amongst Catholics, there are owls and bats who shun the light, seek the darkness, and love their own ignorance and blindness. And these are half-hearted Catholics, who have barely the name of Christians, who deliberately continue in sin from day to day, from month to month, from year to year, without confession or repentance; or, if they do go to confession, it is only for the sake of appearance; for they never really open their hearts, nor disclose the maladies of their souls; or else they seek a confessor who, as they think, has no experience, or who lacks courage and zeal enough to reprove their vices and remind them of their obligations. And why do they act thus? Our Lord gives the reason in to-day's Gospel: "For their works were evil," and they wish to continue in them undisturbed. They are afraid of being warned of their duties, lest they should be obliged in future to mortify their inordinate appetites, to restore ill-gotten gains, to avoid the proximate occasion of sin, to renounce unlawful customs, or to give up the company of that person with whom they have hitherto lived in unlawful intercourse. It does not at all suit them to do any of these things, and therefore they do not wish to see the truth, or to be taught it, or warned of it by others.

¹ *Gaudent ad circumventionem suam, et illusionem pro beneficio ponunt.*

They are those who, although conscience and right reason now and then inspire them with grave doubts as to whether a certain thing is lawful or not, yet pay no heed to those doubts and dismiss from their minds all anxious thoughts and divine inspirations, lest they might find out that what they wish and intend to do is not right. And this they do over and over again, until they have stifled the cries of conscience and made themselves insensible to its gnawings. They are those who, for the same reasons, refuse to listen to good advice, and select as their counsellors people without candor, experience, or conscience, who are addicted to the same vices, and are of the same opinions as themselves. They are afraid to go to a sermon, for fear they should hear the truth, or have their consciences disturbed, or be reminded of the duties of their state. There is a certain nation, says Ambrosinos, called Phanesians, whose ears are so long and broad that they can lie down on one as on a bed, and cover themselves with the other as with a quilt; thus, wherever they are, they can rest comfortably during the night. I do not dare to assert that this is a true story, although it is related by different authors, but I am quite sure that, to enjoy real peace of conscience, we must have good ears to hear the word of God, in order to be instructed in the duties and obligations of our state of life. But those people make a different use of their ears to secure peace of conscience; they close them tightly, so as not to hear any good advice that might disturb them in their evil ways. Hence the only effect the truth has on them is to excite them to anger and hatred, so that even the pulpit itself arouses their enmity.

If they happen to hear a sermon that touches on their secret vices, they act like the governor Felix, of whom we read in the Acts of the Apostles. This Felix was a great sinner; he was living in adultery with Drusilla, whom he had taken away from her lawful husband; he was an unjust judge, who condemned the innocent, and absolved the guilty, because he allowed himself to be influenced by bribes; he employed assassins, revenged himself in secret, shed innocent blood, and was afraid of no man. St. Paul, laden with chains, was brought before him to be tried, and knowing well the kind of man he had to deal with, he said nothing in his own defence, but with a holy freedom spoke to him of his duty as a judge, of the necessity of observing chastity, and of the severity of the judgment of God that was to come. Felix, conscious of the impurity and injus-

Who do not ask when in doubt, nor wish to hear good advice or sermons.

Who pay no regard to what they hear.

tice of which he was guilty, began to tremble with fear; but instead of listening further to what the Apostle had to say to move him to repent and amend his wicked life, he stopped him short and told him to go away. "And as he treated of justice, and chastity, and of the judgment to come, Felix, being terrified, answered: For this time go thy way."¹ Such is the way in which those half-hearted Christians act. If you warn them of the dangerous state of their souls, they grow tired of listening at once, and if they cannot leave the church while the sermon is going on they endeavor to turn away their thoughts, so that what is said may make no impression on them. If they happen to take up a book that treats of the four Last Things, they throw it down at once, saying that it is no book for them because it makes them uneasy. They are very willing to take part in processions, to say the Rosary, or to be present at benediction, so long as they are not likely to hear the word of God; because they must practise some Christian devotion or other, and devotions of this kind are least likely to interfere with the false peace of their sinful hearts.

And hate all preachers, that they may go on undisturbed in their wickedness.

If any one at home speaks to them about what the preacher said, and how he inveighed against a certain vice, or described the torments of hell, or the difficulty of entering on the narrow way that leads to heaven, etc., O, let him preach away, they will say; that preacher has no control over himself; he does not know how to speak to people, nor to make the necessary distinction between respectable people and the common herd, whose way of life differs so much, etc. O what blindness! as if there were one law, one gospel for the rich, and another for the poor! as if there were one way to heaven for the great, and another for the lowly! as if God were so influenced by human respect that He wishes to be less feared, honored, loved, and served by the former, than by the latter! But they will find out all about that by and by! Meanwhile, however, they do not wish to be told the truth, and therefore they hate and despise preachers, or else they go to hear only those who, as they know by experience, will not disturb them nor interfere with their false peace of mind. They are, as the Prophet Isaias says: "Lying children, children that will not hear the law of God; who say to the seers: See not; and to them that behold, Behold not for us those things that are right; speak unto us

¹ Disputante autem illo de justitia et castitate, et de judicio futuro, tremefactus Felix respondit: quod nunc attinet, vade.—Acts xxiv. 25.

pleasant things, see errors for us;”¹ you can preach lies and falsehood to us, that we may continue our present mode of life undisturbed. And thus they do whatever is pleasing to their own comfort or sensuality, and they sin boldly without that anxiety of conscience they would feel if they were desirous of knowing the truth, and if they were diligent in hearing the word of God in sermons.

When a man is going to lay down to sleep, he first closes all the doors and windows of his room, blows out the light, and then covers himself up in bed. There is nothing more annoying to one who wishes to enjoy a sound sleep, than for some one to come in and shake him about, and hold a light before his eyes; oh, oh, he will say, turning away his face, take away that light! I want to go to sleep! There may be loud talking or laughing going on in the room, but it does not trouble him much; how is it then that the light has such power to annoy him? Because there is nothing that hinders sleep so much as to have a brilliant light shining in one’s eyes. And that is just the reason why a Christian who loves the darkness hates and flies the word of God, and cannot bear exhortation or instruction. He lies buried in the deep sleep of sin; he finds therein a false repose and the pleasures of sensuality, nor does he wish to be awakened or aroused. The light of truth, the word of God, is that which is most hostile to this sleep; it shines too strongly in his eyes; it calls out into his ears: “Rise, thou that sleepest!”² and therefore he cannot bear it. Away with the light! he says in thought; away with preaching and exhorting! I do not want it!

Shown by a simile.

And how could the proud man bear to have Christian humility and modesty constantly preached to him in those words of Our Lord: “Amen, I say to you, unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven;”³ “God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”⁴ Oh, a light of that kind is far too strong for his eyes! It would disturb him too much, and so, away with it! How could a vain worldling, who lives according to the luxurious usages and maxims of the world, listen patiently to the exhorta-

Therefore the proud, the avaricious, and the unchaste cannot bear the light.

¹ Filii mendaces, filii nolentes audire legem Dei, qui dicunt videntibus; nolite videre; ² aspicientibus: nolite aspicere nobis ea quæ recta sunt; loquimini nobis placentia, videte nobis errores.—Is. xxx. 9, 10.

² Surge, qui dormis.—Ephes. v. 14.

³ Amen dico vobis, nisi conversi fueritis et efficiamini sicut parvuli non intrabitis in regnum cælorum.—Matt. xviii. 3.

⁴ Deus superbis resistit, humilibus autem dat gratiam.—James iv. 6.

tion: "Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world;"¹ for he that loves the world is an enemy of God? No, that light is too troublesome; away with it! How could the unjust and avaricious man bear to be told that he must make restitution of his ill-gotten gains, or else he will lose heaven; that he must "make to himself friends of the mammon of iniquity, by being generous to the poor and needy, so that, when he shall fail, they may receive him into everlasting dwellings."² "Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee; and where shall those things be which thou hast provided?"³ Oh, that light shines too strong in his eyes! Take it away at once! How could the impure man, who indulges his carnal appetites, bear to hear any one constantly repeating to him, in the words of St. John the Baptist to king Herod: "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife;"⁴ it is not lawful for you to remain any longer in that house, in the company of that person; it is not lawful for you to go to that house, that person; even an unchaste look, or sign, or a libidinous kiss given or permitted, or an impure thought deliberately entertained, is a mortal sin? Away at once with such an annoying light; there is no possibility of resting as long as it is glaring in one's eyes!

Nor the vindictive, the intemperate, or the slothful.

How can the vindictive man, whose whole thought is revenge, listen calmly to the express command of Our Lord, "I say to you: "Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you; and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you."?⁵ "So also shall my heavenly Father do to you, if you forgive not every one his brother from your hearts."⁶ Unless you forgive your brother, and that too from your heart, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you your sins? That light is too strong for his eyes; it must be put out or taken away at once. How can the intemperate man, who drinks to excess, and thereby gives occasion to many sins, understand the threat of the holy Apostle, St. Paul, "Nor drunkards shall possess the kingdom of God;"⁷ or the

¹ Nolite diligere mundum, neque ea quæ in mundo sunt.—I. John ii. 15.

² Facite vobis amicos de mammona iniquitatis, ut cum defeceritis, recipiant vos in æterna tabernacula.—Luke xvi. 9.

³ Stulte, hæc nocte animam tuam repetent a te; quæ autem parasti, cujus erunt?—Luke xii. 20.

⁴ Non licet tibi habere uxorem fratris tui.—Mark vi. 18.

⁵ Ego autem dico vobis, diligite inimicos vestros; benefacite his qui oderunt vos; et orate pro persequentibus et calumniantibus vos.—Matt. v. 44.

⁶ Sic et Pater meus cœlestis faciet vobis, si non remiseritis unusquisque fratri suo de cordibus vestris.—Matt. xviii. 35.

⁷ Neque ebriosi regnum dei possidebunt.—I. Cor. vi. 10.

exhortation of St. Peter, "Be sober and watch."¹ No, a light of that kind interferes too much with his sleep! How can the man who is slothful and lazy in the service of God, or who devotes all his thoughts and cares to temporal concerns, or whose whole idea is to lead an idle, easy, comfortable life, how can he find any meaning in the words of Christ, "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away."² Broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many there are who enter thereon; narrow is the way that leads to life, and few there are who find it; strive then, do violence to yourselves, that you may enter by the narrow gate: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."³ Alas, that troublesome light is too painful for eyes and ears! Away with it! they all say; we do not want it, we do not wish to know anything about it, that we may sleep on undisturbed in our ignorance. To all these people one might say what a certain English nobleman once said to a heretical princess; he was pushing her rather hard in an argument on some matter of faith, and she said to him, O, let us change the conversation, and talk of something more agreeable; I do not want to be troubled by scruples or anxieties of conscience. Madam, answered the nobleman, you prefer to remain in the most dangerous ignorance, rather than feel any anxiety of conscience; very well, then! continue in that ignorance, and you will be lost forever without anxiety of conscience! And this, says St. John Climacus, is a real trick of the devil, who, like a thief that does not attempt to steal until all the lights are out and every one in the house is asleep, takes away the light from men, and deprives them of sound teaching and of good inspirations and exhortations, that he may all the more securely steal away their souls, keep them in the sleep of sin into which they have sunk, and at last drag them down to the eternal darkness of hell, out of the darkness that they have wilfully loved and sought for during life.

But, we might well ask, how is it possible for those Christians to live in peace and undisturbed when they are leading vicious lives? Their own consciences must necessarily disquiet them, and exhort them to amend their ways. Quite true, my dear brethren; but do you know how they manage matters with their

How these people try to calm their consciences

¹ Sobrii estote et vigilate.—I. Pet. v. 8.

² Regnum cœlorum vim patitur, et violenti rapiunt illud.—Matt. xi. 12.

³ Si quis vult post me venire, abneget semetipsum, et tollat crucem suam, et sequatur me?—Matt. xvi. 24.

consciences? They act as a man who, being seated at table and wishing to finish his meal quietly, acts towards his dog. The hungry animal, seeing the food brought in, does his best to let his master see that he is hungry; he barks and jumps from one side to the other, and gives no rest until he has attracted attention. At last his master throws him a bare bone. And will that satisfy him? will he be contented to gnaw at it, although there is not a bit of meat on it? this is not much, to appease his hunger on a bare bone; yet it is enough to quiet the dog; he gnaws away, and neither barks nor leaps about any more, so that his master can finish his meal in peace. In the same way do those wilfully blind people act. There is no doubt that their bad consciences, like barking and leaping dogs, often trouble them; but they throw a bone to the dog to keep him quiet. And what is that? Their own wilful ignorance. I am not guilty of sin, they say to themselves, unless I know beforehand that what I am doing is unlawful: but I know and wish to know nothing about it; I am not certain that this or that is forbidden, nor do I mean to take the trouble of finding out; therefore I can do it without committing sin. But what a futile, worthless, and empty excuse that is! The fact that you have wilfully avoided the light will not help you in the least at the judgment-seat of God! No matter; the bone is thrown to the dog to keep him quiet; the empty excuse keeps the conscience silent for a time at least.

They are in
a very un-
happy state.

Alas, says St Bernard, how miserable and unhappy the state of those people! For the soul is never in a worse or more desperate condition, than when the sinner is without remorse of conscience. "There is a conscience that is bad, and at the same time peaceful; and as there is nothing worse than it, so also there is nothing more miserable."¹ If you feel no remorse, then there is no check on your sins, nothing to move you to repentance and amendment; "that is, the conscience which has no fear of God, no regard for man, and which, once it has sunk into the depth of sin, becomes utterly callous."² And how, in God's name, can one do any good for sinners of that kind? A blind man, who knows and acknowledges that he is blind, bewails and deploras his affliction; he would willingly give all he

¹ Est conscientia mala et tranquilla, qua sicut nihil est pejus, ita nihil est infelicius.—St Bern. l. de conscientia.

² Hæc illa est, quæ nec Deum timet, nec hominem reveretur; quæ, cum venerit in profundum malorum, contemnit.

has if he could thereby be enabled once more to see the light of day; he walks about cautiously, groping with his hands and feeling his way, lest he should stumble against something and hurt himself; he allows himself to be led about by others, that he may not fall into a ditch and break his neck or his limbs. But those sinners are blind and ignorant, and they rejoice in their blindness and ignorance, because they can fall into the ditch without being aware of it; every hour of the day they get a severe fall, and they do not feel it; they inflict mortal wounds on their souls, but they do not wince under them; they are in imminent danger of eternal death, and they know it not. They are well aware that they are blind, but they will not allow any one to lead them. We read in the Fourth Book of Kings that, at the prayers of the Prophet Eliseus, the soldiers of the king of Syria were struck blind, so that they did not know where they were going to. "Strike, I beseech Thee," said the Prophet to the Lord, "this people with blindness. And the Lord struck them with blindness, according to the words of Eliseus."¹ Blinded as they were, they suffered themselves to be led about by the Prophet, until he brought them into Samaria, into the midst of the Israelites, their enemies; then Eliseus cried out to God: "Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see. And the Lord opened their eyes, and they saw themselves to be in the midst of Samaria,"² surrounded by their enemies. There you have a true picture of the unhappy condition of those wilfully blind people. Where do they not allow the devil and their own evil inclinations to lead them? And what a dangerous road they are on! For they are going straight to hell, where their enemies are awaiting them. And yet they are perfectly at ease; they know not and care not to know anything of their danger, for they have blinded themselves, and they love their blindness; but at the hour of death their eyes will be opened, and they will find themselves in hell, in the midst of their enemies. According to a certain author this is the mystic meaning of the event recorded in the Book of Kings. "Thus," he says, "sinners who are now blind to heavenly things will find at the end of their lives that they are surrounded by the enemies of their souls: but the eye of their mind will be opened

¹ Percute, obsecro, gentem hanc cæcitate. Percussitque eos Dominus, ne viderent, juxta verbum Elisei.—IV. Kings vi. 18.

² Domine aperi oculos istorum ut videant. Aperuitque Dominus oculos eorum, et viderunt se esse in medio Samaritæ.—Ibid. 20.

too late.”¹ Alas for those unhappy people! Would that a prophet were to arise, before it goes too far with them, to restore them their sight, that they may see what they do not wish to see now; that they may know they are already in Samaria, that is, in the hands of their most cruel enemies, the devils, fettered every day with still heavier chains, and being led on the way to hell! “Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see!”

And there is
no way of
helping
them.

But what am I saying? Why do I wish that a prophet should arise for them? There are prophets enough who are willing to enlighten them, but they do not wish to be enlightened, and they avoid the prophets. How then are they to be brought back to God, and to be moved to repentance and amendment? I know not; there is no means of moving them. Other and even great sinners are often led to repent by reading a spiritual book, or the lives of the saints; but they never think of taking up a book of that kind, lest their consciences should be disturbed. Other sinners are often converted by a conversation on heavenly things, or by hearing a sermon; they never go to a sermon, and they hate all salutary exhortations that might alarm or make them uneasy. The first step on the way to eternal salvation is to seek this way and to desire earnestly to find it; but they do not want to know anything about it, and how can they enter on it? The blind man of Jericho, as St. John Chrysostom says, would never have recovered his sight if he had not desired and longed for it; when he was told that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, he cried out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.”² “What wilt thou that I do to thee?”³ asked Our Lord. “But he said: Lord that I may see.”⁴ But these other blind people, what do they ask for? Instead of saying, Lord, that I may see; enlighten my understanding; have pity on me, that I may know my misery; they cry out in the desires of their hearts, Lord, that I may *not* see! I do not want the light; let me not know my faults and sins; keep from me the knowledge of the miserable and dangerous state of my soul, that I may not be overwhelmed by fear, anguish, and sadness!

Not even in
their death
beds.

Deplorable indeed is your condition! But, if you do not wish to change, go on in your blindness and ignorance! The time

¹ Sic peccatores ad coelestia caeci in extremo vitae suae ab hostibus undique conclusi certius mentis suae oculos aperient.

² Jesu, fili David, miserere mei.—Luke xviii. 38.

³ Quid tibi vis faciam?—Ibid. 41.

⁴ At ille dixit: Domine, ut videam.—Ibid.

will come when you will seek the light, and will not find it, and after you are gone, people will pray, and sing, and sigh for you, "Eternal rest give to them, O Lord;" but in vain; for as you have rejected the light here, you must lie forever hereafter in exterior darkness. Nor will your eyes be opened until you are in Samaria, in hell, and there you will know what a mistake you have made, and will see that you are in perpetual imprisonment. "He that hateth reproof shall die,"¹ says the Wise Man; eternal death is already prepared for him. Hear the fate that Job foretells for those who say to God: "Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways."² What will happen to them? "They shall be as chaff before the face of the wind, and as ashes which the whirlwind scattereth."³ His eyes shall see his own destruction, and he shall drink of the wrath of the Almighty."⁴ But when? Will they see their mistake in their last moments, when death is staring them in the face? Not by any means, unless God works a miracle, which they have little reason to hope for, who persistently rejected the light during life. They will die in the same blindness and ignorance in which they lived. Hear their last despairing sighs, as they are described by the Holy Ghost in the Book of Wisdom: "Therefore we have erred from the way of truth, and the light of justice hath not shined unto us, and the sun of understanding hath not risen upon us; we wearied ourselves in the way of iniquity and destruction, but the way of the Lord we have not known,"⁵ because we did not wish to know it. Now we know that our former ignorance will not help us before the judgment-seat of God; we are betrayed, because we have wilfully betrayed ourselves. "We have been able to show no mark of virtue; but are consumed in our wickedness."⁶ And when and where will they lament in those terms? On their death-bed? No; "Such things as these the sinners said in hell."⁷

O God of goodness! save us all from this terrible blindness! Christians, I hope this sermon is not for any of you, inasmuch

Conclusion
and exhortation
to

¹ Qui increpationes odit, morietur.—Prov. xv. 10.

² Recede a nobis et scientiam viarum tuarum nolumus.—Job xxi. 14.

³ Erunt sicut paleæ ante faciem venti, et sicut favilla quam turbo dispergit.—Ibid. 18.

⁴ Videbunt oculi ejus interfectionem suam, et de furore Omnipotentis bibet.—Ibid. 20.

⁵ Ergo erravimus a via veritatis, et justitiæ lumen non luxit nobis, et sol intelligentiæ non est ortus nobis. Lassati sumus in via iniquitatis et perditionis, . . . viam autem Domini ignoravimus.—Wisd. v. 6, 7.

⁶ Virtutis quidem nullum signum valuimus ostendere; in malignitate autem nostra consumpti sumus.—Ibid. 13.

⁷ Talia dixerunt in inferno hi, qui peccaverunt.—Ibid. 14.

seek and accept the divine light.

as you, by hearing the word of God, are zealously seeking the light and the knowledge of the way that leads to heaven! Therefore, for your advantage, I conclude, in the words of Christ in the Gospel of St. John, “ Whilst you have the light, believe in the light, that you may be the children of the light. ”¹ Go on as you are going, and be guided in all your actions by no other rule but the eternal truths; be not misled by evil inclinations and carnal desires, nor by the false maxims of the vain world, “ that the darkness overtake you not; ”² that you may not lose the light and be plunged into horrible gloom. Thou, O God of light, art the way, the truth, and the life; give to and preserve in us all a heart obedient to and desirous of hearing salutary instructions and exhortations; enlighten by Thy word the darkness of our understanding; impel our sluggish wills, that we may always know what is pleasing to Thy holy will, and fulfil it with all our strength, whilst we avoid above every other imaginable evil what we know to be displeasing to Thee. And grant that we may thus walk constantly in Thy shining light on the way to heaven, without ever straying from the right path, until, when the dangers of this life shall have passed, we enjoy, with Thy chosen friends, the eternal light of Thy glory. Amen.

NINTH SERMON.

ON CULPABLE IGNORANCE, AS A CAUSE OF MANY SINS.

Subject.

What culpable ignorance is; how common it is, and how inexcusable before God.—*Preached on the Tuesday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Illi autem non cognoverunt quid loqueretur eis.—John x. 6.
“ But they understood not what He spoke to them.”

Introduction.

It is not surprising that the Scribes and Pharisees did not understand what Our Lord meant by the similes He made use of. For they were blind to heavenly things, as Christ Himself said on

¹ Dum lucem habetis credite in lucem, ut filii lucis sitis.—John xii. 36.

² Ut non vos tenebræ comprehendant.—Ibid. 35.

another occasion, "Let them alone; they are blind, and leaders of the blind." ¹ Their vices had blinded them, and they were hardened in wickedness. But what does surprise me, my dear brethren, is this, that there are amongst Catholics, amongst the members of the one true Church who are illumined by the light of the Holy Ghost, and are not yet so hardened as the Pharisees formerly were, some who are so blind, so ignorant in many things that concern the law of God and their own salvation, that they do not understand what God and His servants say to them. But the fact is, they do not wish to understand; they are blind and ignorant, because they deliberately seek and love blindness and ignorance, that they may continue to lead sinful lives without being troubled by remorse. Yesterday I bewailed the unhappy state of those people. To-day I shall describe the second kind of spiritual blindness, namely culpable ignorance, which is the cause of many sins.

Plan of Discourse.

What this culpable ignorance is, how common it is amongst men, and how inexcusable it is before God. Such is the subject of the present instruction.

That we may avoid this ignorance, and keep Thy law in truth, give us, O Holy Ghost, Thy light and Thy grace, without which we can do nothing; this we ask of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

The ignorance of which we speak consists in this, that one would often refrain from doing, thinking, or saying certain things, if he were aware of certain circumstances connected with them; if he knew that those thoughts, words, or actions were unlawful and offensive to God, or else that he would not omit certain things if he knew for certain that he was in duty bound to do them under pain of sin; all which circumstances, however, he could and should know. And what is the meaning of that? He could and should know? Now pray be attentive to what I am going to say. It happens, for instance, that a fast-day or a holyday occurs during the week, but there is one individual who never thinks of it, and he eats meat on the fast-day, or else he does not hear Mass on the holyday, and it is only afterwards that he learns what kind of a day it is. The question is, has that man committed sin by eating meat, or by

In what in-
culpable
ignorance
consists.

¹ *Sinite illos; cæci sunt, et duces cæcorum.*—Matt. xv. 14.

not hearing Mass? No, I answer, because he knew nothing about it. But you say, he could have known about it? Quite true, absolutely speaking; he could have known about it, if somebody had given him warning beforehand, or if he had a reasonable doubt and suspicion concerning the matter. But, since there was neither warning nor doubt in the case, he could not and was not bound to know anything further, so that his ignorance was inculpable, and it frees him from all sin in the sight of God.

In what culpable ignorance consists.

On the other hand, there is another man who is about to do or to say something concerning which he has a reasonable doubt as to whether it is lawful or not, but in spite of the doubt, and without taking any trouble to settle it, he carries out his intention; or else he knows that he is not sufficiently instructed in religious matters that concern the duties of his state of life, and yet, through sheer laziness and indifference, he seldom goes to a sermon, or tries to get proper instruction; now this man commits many and grievous breaches of duty; does he sin by so doing? There is not the least doubt of it. But why? he does not know that he is guilty of sin. True; he could and should have known it under such circumstances; for when doubts of the lawfulness of his act occurred to him, it was his duty, before acting, to inquire and set his doubts at rest; and if he had done so, he would have found out that the action was sinful. Further, knowing himself to be ignorant of many things, it was his duty to attend sermons or other instructions, that he might learn what he had to do. But he neglected both of these duties, and therefore his ignorance is culpable, or, as theologians say, vincible, and it cannot excuse the faults and sins of which it is the occasion.

Through ignorance of this kind Saul persecuted David.

We have in King Saul an example of this ignorance. See how he tried to excuse himself for the rage and fury with which he persecuted David. "It appeareth," he said, "that I have done foolishly, and have been ignorant in very many things."¹ Mark how he puts forward his ignorance as an excuse. And yet, did he not know very well that David was most innocent in his regard, and never had the least intention of depriving him of life and usurping his crown? Did he not know that he himself was guilty of the greatest cruelty in persecuting and trying to kill an innocent man? There is no doubt that he was fully aware of it, but he was blinded by jealousy, and paid no attention to the fact

¹ Apparet quod stulte egerim, et ignoraverim multa nimis.—I. Kings xxvi. 21.

that he was persecuting David without cause; or rather, he knew well enough that such was the case, but he did not wish to know it. If his ignorance had been justifiable, he would have changed his persecution into love, after having found out the truth; but he did not do so, and therefore his ignorance was culpable and blameworthy.

We have a still clearer example of it in the high-priests and elders of the Jewish people who put to death Jesus Christ, the Son of God. To take God prisoner and treat Him as a malefactor, to scorn Him as a fool and a mock-king, to scourge and flog Him, and condemn Him to death like a public criminal, and to nail Him to a disgraceful gibbet, that was certainly a sin the bare thought of which is enough to make one's hair stand on end with horror; and yet it was a sin that had its origin in culpable ignorance. The Scribes and Pharisees and high-priests were certainly determined to persecute Christ and put Him to death; but they were not quite certain that He was the Son of God, or they would not have crucified Him, as St. Paul testifies: "For, if they had known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory." Truly, says St. Peter to the Jews, "the author of life you killed. . . . And now, brethren, I know that you did it through ignorance, as did also your rulers."² You have oppressed the just man, and have demanded a robber to be given to you in His stead, but it was all done through ignorance, because you knew not that He was the Son of God. Jesus Christ Himself, when praying for His murderers on the cross, said, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."³ Nevertheless, who will excuse the Jews and high-priests from a most fearful sin? For they could and should have known who Christ was. They were well aware that He had performed many miracles, that He had made the blind to see and the lame to walk, that He had cleansed lepers and raised the dead to life; and that was certainly proof enough that He was something more than a mere mortal; but they put the thought out of their minds at once, and, full of envy and hatred, they vented their rage on Him. Their ignorance, therefore, was gross and culpable, and altogether inexcusable.

My dear brethren, there is nothing more common among Christians nowadays, than this culpable ignorance, which every

And the
Jews cruci-
fied Our
Lord.

This cul-
pable igno-
rance is
common
nowadays
in matters

¹ Si enim cognovissent, nunquam Dominum gloriæ crucifixissent.—I. Cor. ii. 8.

² Auctorem vitæ interfecistis. . . . Et nunc, fratres, scito quia per ignorantiam fecistis, sicut et principes vestri.—Acts iii. 15, 17.

³ Pater dimitte illis, non enim sciunt quid faciunt.—Luke xxiii. 34.

relating to
superstition
and injus-
tice.

day occasions numbers of sins that are not considered sins. How many acts of superstition and devil-worship are not committed amongst the common people, for the purpose of curing illnesses, or healing cattle, or finding lost or stolen things, or to avert a misfortune, or to arrest a fugitive, etc.? And to this end they put their confidence in means or things that have been invented by fortune-tellers, or seen in dreams, and that have no power or efficacy to produce such effects, either of themselves, or from God, or from the Church. Simple-minded people are guilty of this folly, because they do not know what the law of God condemns or approves of in such matters; and as long as the desired effect is produced, they consider the means lawful, although a well-founded suspicion of its lawfulness may often occur to them. How many grievous sins, too, of injustice are committed in the same way? For very often things are stolen by the poor from the rich, by servants from their masters, by workmen from their employers, and by shop-keepers from their customers; and although the thefts are small, yet in the course of time they amount to something considerable. And the people who are guilty of those thefts excuse themselves in their ignorance, by saying: Oh, it is only a small matter; it is at the farthest a venial sin; it is surely no great harm to take a trifle from a rich man who has abundance. How many acts of injustice are also committed in different offices and employments by those who are well aware that they do not understand their business sufficiently, and yet continue in their office, although through ignorance and incapacity they are the occasion of harm to many! For as a general rule they persuade themselves that they can follow the custom observed by others, and if a doubt occurs to them, they appeal at once to the example of those who held the same office before them. They were sensible and honest people, they say, and they led edifying lives; there are others too, in the same position as myself, who imitate them; all these people wish to save their souls and escape hell; why should I not do as they do in this matter? etc. How many injustices are committed by defrauding workmen and laborers of their just wages, either wholly or partially? by keeping shopkeepers for years out of the money due them for goods bought from them? by not paying one's lawful debts, when possible? by borrowing money that there is no prospect of paying, and at the same time going to unnecessary expense in furniture, clothing, and costly living? And all these sins are committed by people who im-

agine that, as long as they have the good intention of paying some time or other, there is no danger of their committing sin, and hence they never think of mentioning such things in confession.

How many sins of lying and falsehood are committed amongst married people and servants, because, through ignorance, they think that it is lawful for them to lie to avoid discord and strife, and to preserve peace and harmony, as long as the lies do no harm to any one? In what an evil and un-Christian manner children are sometimes brought up in idleness and worldly vanity from their very youth, while they learn but little of the Christian doctrine, and, under pretence of relationship, or future marriage, or of learning how to behave in society, they are allowed all freedom with the opposite sex, both in public and private? This too comes from the culpable ignorance and deplorable negligence of parents, who do not think of, or acknowledge that most important obligation that God has imposed on them, of bringing up their children to work for the attainment of their last end, to love and fear God, and to gain heaven. And if any one reminds them of their duty, or if they feel the sting of remorse, they think and say: Oh, there is no harm done; the poor children must have some amusement; they must learn how to behave in society, etc. Meanwhile their innocent souls are stained with many sins, they grow up in the practice of secret vices, and the result often is that they go with their parents to the eternal flames of hell. How often and in how many ways that command of Our Lord, "but I say to you, love your enemies," is grievously transgressed by those who secretly nourish hatred and resentment against their neighbor for years and years, and who cannot bear to see him, or to say a friendly word to him, so that they refuse to give him the ordinary salutations, and, through a spirit of revenge, deny him the usual courtesies! And this they do without the least scruple, thinking that it is enough for them merely to say, I bear him no ill-will; I do not wish him any harm; I forgive him from my heart, etc; and that they are not bound to anything further.

By lying, not training one's children properly, and vindictiveness.

In how many ways, and how grievously is not Christian charity violated by rash judgments, fault-finding, and making ill-natured remarks about the actions of others, while they who sin in this way imagine that there cannot be much harm in it, since the faults they speak of are known to many, or because they speak of them only in confidence, and under a pledge of

By slander, scandal-giving, and bad confessions.

secrecy, or because they must contribute their share to the general conversation.

How many sins on occasions others to commit by caresses, impure gestures, and other actions which are the cause of scandal, although they are hardly thought anything of by those that are guilty of them, because they say to themselves: I have no bad meaning in what I am doing, nor do I intend to lead others into sin! How many sins of others do not people become responsible for by neglecting the duty of fraternal correction, when they could and ought to save their neighbor from sin, and from the danger of it, by giving him a salutary warning or exhortation! But they say to themselves: what is it to me? I have to look after myself, etc. How many unworthy Communions and sacrilegious confessions are not made by those who do not rightly know what is required for a proper examination of conscience, and especially for true sorrow and a firm purpose of amendment! For there are people who continue in the same habit of sin from one confession to another, in the same improper familiarity, in the same dangerous occasion, and they imagine all the time that it is enough for them merely to declare their sin in confession.

By impurity
and world-
liness.

How many grievous sins are not committed against purity by persons of both sexes! What impure thoughts and desires constantly pass through their imaginations! How many indecent words and songs they give utterance to! What disgusting pictures and statues are to be seen in their houses! What dangerous romances and love-tales are sometimes read, even before young people! How many love-letters are interchanged! How many impure looks are indulged in, even in the house of God! What freedom there is in jesting, laughing, recreation, and what dangerous liberties are allowed in mixed company! All these things are forbidden and condemned by our faith, and yet they are indulged in sometimes without scruple or anxiety, because there are people who, through gross ignorance, look on them as not sinful. Their idea is that, as long as one abstains from outward actions, there is no harm in indulging in mere thoughts and desires, which one has no intention of carrying into effect. Oh! if they only knew that everything that is done, said, or thought deliberately against holy purity, is sinful, and, generally speaking, mortally sinful, it would not be possible for Catholics who think of saving their souls to be so careless in this particular. What a vain, idle, unmortified and sensual life, utterly opposed to the Christian law and the spirit of the

Gospel, people sometimes lead! And yet they never think of saying anything about it in confession, much less of amending it, and that, too, through culpable ignorance, because they refuse to see any harm in such a mode of life, and it is one that chimes in with the ideas of the world. Meanwhile, if they are warned in a sermon, or in the confessional, and told that they are frequently guilty of mortal sin, alas, they cry out in an agony of remorse, would that I had known that before, and I would have led a different life! God forbid that I should make a compact with the devil by superstitious practices! God forbid that I should lose my soul by committing several small thefts! God forbid that I should be the cause of the eternal ruin of my neighbor, or of my own dear children! God forbid that I should make sacrilegious confessions and Communions! With the help of God I am free from those sins, for I knew nothing about them! You knew nothing about them? But you should have known about them, and therefore, through your culpable ignorance, you have often and grievously transgressed the divine law.

Now you have the answer to the question as to whether ignorance of that kind is likely to excuse us, before the judgment-seat of God, for the sins that are committed through it; and whether it will be of any advantage to us to say, by way of justification, Lord, I have, it is true, transgressed Thy commands, and violated the Christian law; but I did not know that I was guilty of a grievous sin thereby, or I would never have done it. Would to God, my dear brethren, that such were the case, that countless sins were not offensive to God, and that we could strike out of the catalogue of crime thousands of actions, and be thus released from the enormous debt of complete satisfaction and from the necessity of doing penance; for, God help us, there are mortal sins enough already committed with full knowledge and deliberation. But if I wish to speak the truth in the matter, I must tell you plainly, Christians, that these excuses are of no avail. I will let St. Bernard answer the question for me: Alas, he says, if such were the case, if ignorance of the kind excused us in the sight of God, why did the same God, in the Old Law, when men were not so enlightened in spiritual things as we are now, command His people to offer certain sacrifices for the sins committed through ignorance alone? These are the words of the law, that the Lord gave His people by the Prophet Moses: "And if through ignorance you omit any of these things, which the Lord hath spoken to Moses, and

Such ignorance does not excuse the sins committed through it

by him hath commanded you . . . and the multitude have forgotten to do it: they shall offer a calf out of the herd, a holocaust for a most sweet savor to the Lord . . . and a buck-goat for sin . . . and it shall be forgiven them, because they sinned ignorantly, offering notwithstanding a burnt offering to the Lord for themselves and for their sin and their ignorance . . . because it is the fault of all the people, through ignorance . . . But if one soul shall sin ignorantly, he shall offer a she-goat of a year old for his sin . . . The same law shall be for all that sin by ignorance, whether they be natives or strangers.”¹ Read the second chapter of Leviticus, and you will find a detailed description of the sacrifices that had to be offered in atonement for sins committed through ignorance by a priest, a prince, the whole community, or a private individual. In the latter case the sacred text says: “And if any one of the people of the land shall sin through ignorance, doing any of these things, that by the law of the Lord are forbidden and offending, and shall come to know his sin, he shall offer a she-goat without blemish” . . . and the priest “shall pray for him, and it shall be forgiven him.”²

They will
be punished
by God.

If our ignorance could excuse us before God, why did the penitent David, in fear and dread of impending punishment, cry out to God: “My ignorances do not remember?”³ He should rather have put them forward as an excuse, and have said: O dear Lord, do not forget that I did not know what I was doing; remember my ignorances, I pray Thee; for if they can excuse me from sin, there is nothing better for me than that Thou shouldst remember them. But such is not the prayer of the enlightened Prophet; he says rather: “My ignorances do not remember;” blot them. O Lord, out of that terrible book, which Thou wilt one day open against me, and out of which I shall be judged; pardon me for them now, and I will do penance. And why does the Wise Ecclesiasticus pray so earnestly to God, “O Lord Father and Sovereign Ruler of my

¹ Quodsi per ignorantiam, præterieritis quidquam horum, quæ locutus est Dominus ad Moysen, . . . obliquate fuerit facere multitudo: offeret vitulum de armento, holocaustum in odorem suavissimum Domino, . . . hircumque pro peccato . . . Quod si anima una nesciens peccaverit, offeret capram anniculam pro peccato suo . . . Tam indigenis quam advenis una ex erit omnium, qui peccaverint ignorantes.—Num. xv. 22-29.

² Quodsi peccaverit anima per ignorantiam, de populo terræ, ut faciat quidquam de his quæ Domini lege prohibentur, atque delinquat, et cognoverit peccatum suum, offeret capram immaculatam . . . rogabitque pro eo, et pro peccato ejus, et dimittetur ei.—Levit. iv. 27, 28, 31.

³ Ignorantias meas ne memineris?—Ps. xxiv. 7.

life," save me from my enemies, "lest my ignorances increase, and my offences be multiplied, and my sins abound, and I fall before my adversaries, and my enemy rejoice over me." ¹ If ignorance could excuse us from sin, why did the most just and merciful God punish it so severely in the Old Law? Hear what He says by the Prophet Isaias: "Therefore is My people led away captive, because they had not knowledge, and their nobles have perished with famine. Therefore hath hell enlarged her soul, and opened her mouth without any bounds, and their strong ones, and their people, and their high and glorious ones shall go down into it." ² And why, O just God? What have Thy people done? "Because they had not knowledge." In the Fourth Book of Kings the same is said of the Assyrians, who were torn to pieces by lions: "The nations . . . know not the ordinances of the God of the land; and the Lord hath sent lions among them: and behold, they kill them, because they know not the manner of the God of the land." ³ But, O God of goodness, all these people had no knowledge of Thy law; why, then, dost Thou punish them so severely? Is it their fault that they did not observe that of which they knew nothing? Yes; for they could and should have known it; they had teachers enough; the Lord sent them prophets; but yet they had not knowledge, because they did not earnestly desire it. They did not wish to understand that certain sensual indulgences are sinful, and so they were unchaste; they did not wish to understand that certain contracts are invalid, and so they were unjust: they did not wish to understand that all revenge is forbidden, and so they were vindictive; thus their ignorance went on increasing, until they fell into idolatry at last. There is no doubt, then, that it is not every ignorance that can excuse or justify us for the sins that we commit on account of it.

And to put the matter briefly, my dear brethren, there can be but few in our days, in this part of the world, who can put forward ignorance as an excuse for their sins. Why do I say that? Because we have, or at least easily can have, too much light and

In our days there is no excuse for Christians.

¹ Domine Pater et dominator vitæ meæ, . . . ne adincreſcant ignorantia meæ, et multiplicentur delicta mea, et peccata mea abundant, et incidam in conspectu aduersariorum meorum, et gaudeat super me inimicus meus—Eccles. xxiii. 1, 3.

² Propterea captivus ductus est populus meus, quia non habuit scientiam, et nobiles ejus interierunt fame, propterea dilatavit infernus animam suam, et aperuit os suum absque ullo termino, et descendit fortes ejus, et populus ejus, et sublimes, gloriosique ejus ad eum.—Is. v. 13, 14.

³ Gentes . . . ignorant legitima Dei terræ: et immisit in eos Dominus leones, et ecce interfecerunt eos, eo quod ignorent ritum Dei terræ.—IV. Kings xvii. 26.

knowledge about those things that concern the divine law and our eternal salvation. "If I had not come and spoken to them," said Our Lord of the Jews who persecuted Him because they would not acknowledge His divinity, "they would not have sinned: but now they have no excuse for their sin;"¹ for they have seen the miracles I have wrought, and have heard My sermons and exhortations, and therefore it is through culpable ignorance that they refuse to acknowledge My divinity. Christians, if we were in the middle of a desert, or in Japan, from which all Catholics are excluded, or if we had to live amongst heathens and Turks, so that we could learn nothing about the Gospel truths; or if those truths were declared to us only in figures and parables, as they formerly were in the Old Law; or if the times were now as they were a few hundred years ago, when heresies and persecutions were troubling the Church to such an extent that the word of God could hardly be preached to the people; then, perhaps, we might have some hope that ignorance and the want of proper instruction would excuse our sins before the judgment-seat of God, so that we could say to Him: I have sinned, O Lord, but I knew not what I was doing; there was no one to teach me the way to heaven, or to instruct me in Thy law, and therefore I could not know anything about it. But in a country, in a city, in which sound Catholic doctrine is taught; at a time when the word of God is preached so freely in so many churches, and when so frequently on Sundays and holydays the Christian doctrine is explained from the pulpit and in the confessional, and when it is so easy to ask the advice of learned and pious priests; if, I say, one of us, under those circumstances, were to attempt to excuse himself on account of ignorance (unless indeed he had lost the use of reason) and to say: I have sinned because I knew no better; I have sinned in ignorance, his excuse would not be of the least value before the all-seeing God.

On account of the many opportunities they have of learning their duty.

And he would make a mistake like that of the rich man in the Gospel, who put forward the ignorance of his brethren, who were still on earth, as a reason for Abraham to send Lazarus to warn them, that they too should not come to the same place of torments. And what answer did he get? "And Abraham said to him: They have Moses and the prophets: let them hear them;"²

¹ Si non venissem, et locutus fuisset eis, peccatum non haberent: nunc autem excusationem non habent de peccato suo.—John xv. 22.

² Alit illi Abraham: habent Moysen et prophetas: audiant illos. —Luke xvi. 28.

it is not necessary to send any one to them from the dead; the prophets can tell them what they have to do in order to escape hell; let them hear them, and follow their salutary exhortations; if they refuse to do that, their destruction will be their own work. Now come forward, you ignorant Christians, and say that you could not help committing sin, because you knew not what you were doing! You could not help it? And who could help it, then? The Almighty God perhaps, who could have given you greater knowledge? You ought to wait, then, to see if He will not send an angel from heaven or a Lazarus from the dead to instruct you. No; you have Moses and the prophets. You had your prophets, He will say; I have caused My law and My Gospel to be clearly explained to you; you were not wanting in understanding. and, besides, I have often given you good inspirations. For what else is the meaning of those doubts and suspicions, of that secret fear and anxiety you feel, lest some thing you are about to do be a sin? You should have tried to set your doubts at rest; but you did not do so, and therefore you have only yourself to blame. Was it not your fault that you did not know your duty? And whose was it if not that of the spiritual guides and preachers who did not explain the divine law, or correct your vices? (I shudder when I think of the great responsibility that rests on them.) But, God be praised, there were good prophets enough; why did you not hear them? You seldom came to a sermon; did you expect them to go after you? Therefore you have no excuse for your sin; you must attribute your ignorance to your own laziness and carelessness, and to the sensuality, love of comfort, and vanity in dress that prevented you from coming to sermons; or you must put it down to your over-indulgence in sleep, or to the temporal cares that engrossed you to such an extent that you paid no attention to the all-important business of your soul. In a word, you can blame no one but yourself, and you have no excuse before God, because your ignorance is culpable.

Nay, I say even more than that; your ignorance will accuse and put you to shame on the day of judgment, on account of the prudence and knowledge you display in matters that concern your bodily well-being, your honor, and your temporal goods, which are often more difficult to understand than the law of God, although you are never wanting in wisdom or knowledge regarding them. If there is a dollar profit to be made, or a chance of doing a good stroke of business, oh, how active and

Such ignorance will be put to shame in the judgment.

eager you become all at once, how you hurry out of bed and rush off immediately, so as to lose no time! How accurately you can weigh every circumstance so as to ensure success! How careful you are to avoid mistakes! How diligent in profiting by every favorable opportunity! If there were any one who could teach the art of making fifty dollars a day, I think there is hardly one who would not go to school to him. See, the divine Judge will say, how wise and prudent you were in earthly things; why were you not equally careful in those that concerned your immortal soul and its eternal salvation? These latter you trusted to chance, without consideration or anxiety, as if they were of no importance. Hence your ignorance will be condemned by so many simple peasants, nay, by so many heathens and infidels, who had not the light and instruction, nor the opportunities of doing good, nor the examples of virtue that you have or can have every day; and these people, with the light of reason alone to guide them, led better lives than you lead. There is no excuse, then, for your sin; but you have rather to fear greater confusion and a deeper damnation on account of the culpable ignorance through which your sins were committed.

Conclusion
and reso-
lution to fol-
low the
divine light
more care-
fully.

Ah, my Lord and my God, what shall I say to justify myself? I cannot deny, but must acknowledge with a thankful heart that Thou hast hitherto been generous enough in enlightening me; but I must also confess with sorrow and repentance that I have made a bad use of the lights Thou hast given me! Oh, how much good I have omitted, how much evil I have done through culpable ignorance, for I could and should have known better! There is nothing for me now but with Thy penitent servant David to acknowledge humbly my guilt, and to say with him: O Lord, "my ignorances do not remember." Pardon me according to the multitude of Thy mercies! I will be more careful henceforward in the most important affair of my soul and its eternal salvation! I will seek the truth and the understanding of Thy law by being diligent in hearing Thy divine word, and in asking advice of Thy servants in all matters concerning which I have a doubt in conscience. Never will I do, say, or omit anything until I shall have first fully considered whether it is in strict accordance with Thy divine law. Never more shall I look to what others like me do, but rather to what I am bound to do according to Thy law; nor to what the vain customs of the world might exact, but rather to what my last end requires of me, that I may know Thee, my Sovereign Good, love Thee with

my whole heart above all things, and after this short life, enjoy Thee with Thy elect forever in heaven. Amen.

TENTH SERMON.

ON THE BLINDNESS AND OB DURACY OF THE SINNER, AS A PUNISHMENT OF SIN.

Subject.

1. In what this blindness consists, and how God inflicts it on man as a punishment for his sins. 2. This punishment is the most dreadful of all evils.—*Preached on the fifth Sunday in Lent.*

Text.

Propterea vos non auditis, quia ex Deo non estis.—John. viii. 47.
“Therefore you hear them not, because you are not of God.”

Introduction.

What terrible words these are! “He that is of God heareth the words of God. Therefore you hear them not, because you are not of God;” you are abandoned and rejected by God, you will have no part in Him, and you will die in your wickedness, and be lost forever. This was the most fearful punishment that was inflicted on the Jews, and it was one that Our Lord had often foretold to them with tears in His eyes, namely, that they should become blind and obstinate, and should be rejected by God. I have already spoken, my dear brethren, of two kinds of spiritual blindness, the first of which is in itself a sin, and a most grievous sin, because on account of it one flies the light so as to have no knowledge of good and evil; while the second is the cause of many sins, and consists in a culpable ignorance of the divine law and of the duties of a Christian. I now go on to speak of the third kind of blindness, which is the greatest punishment of sin.

Plan of Discourse.

In what this blindness consists, and how God inflicts it on man as a punishment for his sins; that I shall explain in the first part. That this punishment is the most dreadful of all evils, I shall show in the second part.

O dearest Saviour, I have now only one request to make of Thee: I beg of Thee, by all that is most dear to Thee, to grant that there may be no one in the world to whom this sermon of mine may be applied, and that in this large congregation there may not be one who is in the lamentable state of which I am going to speak; for the only object I aim at is to inspire every one with an irreconcilable hatred, horror, and detestation of all sin. If, nevertheless, contrary to my hopes, there should unfortunately be any one here present who is sunk so deeply, then I beg of him, if he has the least desire of salvation left, to open his eyes now, as this may be the last chance he will get in this life, in order that he may see the miserable state in which he is, and do penance at once. Mary, refuge of sinners, and you, O holy angels, obtain for us the light of the Holy Ghost: for me, that I may rightly explain the truth; and for all who are listening to me, that they may understand it aright, and henceforth avoid sin more than any other evil.

Every sinner is blind.

Let no one imagine that I am now going to speak of corporal blindness; although, if that were the only punishment inflicted by the divine justice on our sins, it would certainly be enough to deter every sensible man from sin. For who is there among you, my dear brethren, who, if he knew for certain that he would be struck blind after offending God, so that he would nevermore see the light of day; who, I say, would wish to pay so dearly for a momentary and brutal pleasure, for a worthless and perishable gain, or for some forbidden enjoyment, such as sinners find in creatures? If I know you well, there is not one of you who would be so foolish. But this is not the blindness with which an angry God punishes sinners, otherwise I should not feel so much pity for them; but there is a blindness that is all the more deplorable, as the soul is more precious than the body. We have bodily eyes in common with the meanest creature that crawls the earth; it is the light, the eyes of the soul, that makes us like the angels, nay, like even to God Himself. Your one, precious, and immortal soul, O sinners, is thrown into exterior darkness and is stricken with the most deplorable blindness by sin. A punishment, alas! that we are all the more insensible to, the more we rob ourselves of the light. Nor is it my intention now to speak of the blindness that is common to all sinners; for every sinner, even the first time he grievously transgresses the law of God, foolishly deprives himself of the favor of God and sanctifying grace, which is the light of the soul; and as if he were incapable

of seeing what he is doing, chooses earth instead of heaven, a creature instead of the Creator, and the fire of hell instead of eternal happiness. Wherefore all sinners deserve to be called blind, and St. Paul speaks of sins as the works of darkness: "Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness," he writes to the Romans, "and put on the armor of light."¹

The subject of my sermon to-day is another and most terrible spiritual blindness, which arises from committing grievous sin over and over again, and from long-continued habits of vice, and it is called a blinding of the understanding and a hardening of the will in wickedness;² and, amongst other punishments, it is threatened to those who refuse to hear the voice of God calling them. "But if thou wilt not hear the voice of the Lord thy God," are the terrible words we read in the Book of Deuteronomy, "the Lord strike thee with madness and blindness and fury of mind, and mayest thou grope at midday as the blind is wont to grope in the dark, and not make straight thy ways."³ Of that blindness St. Paul says: "Because that, when they knew God, they have not glorified Him as God . . . their foolish heart was darkened . . . God delivered them up to a reprobate sense, to do those things which are not convenient,"⁴ that they may be filled with all kinds of iniquity and wickedness. With this blindness and obduracy God justly punished king Pharaoh, who had so often disobeyed Him: "and the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart . . . and his heart was hardened, and the heart of his servants, and it was made exceeding hard."⁵ So that the plagues he had to suffer only made him more obstinate in refusing to obey the divine command, and let the people of Israel go; but when at length he did let them go, he repented of having done so, pursued them with his whole army, ventured rashly into the Red Sea, in the face of an evident miracle wrought in favor of the Israelites, and was drowned with all his army. As St. John the Evangelist writes, the same blindness was inflicted by God on the obstinate Jews: "He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their heart: that they should not see with their eyes, nor under-

Blindness and obduracy come from long-continued habits of sin.

¹ Abjiciamus ergo opera tenebrarum, et induamur arma lucis.—Rom. xiii. 12.

² Excœcatio et obduratio mentis.

³ Quodsi audire nolueris vocem Domini Dei tui . . . percussit te Dominus amentia ac cœcitate, ac furore mentis, et palpes in meridie, sicut palpare solet cœcus in tenebris, et non dirigas vias tuas.—Dent. xxviii. 15, 28.

⁴ Quia cum cognovissent Deum, non sicut Deum glorificaverunt . . . obscuratum est insipiens cor eorum . . . tradidit illos Deus in reprobum sensum, ut faciant ea quæ non conveniunt.—Rom. i. 21, 28.

⁵ Induravitque Dominus cor Pharaonis . . . et ingravatum est cor ejus, et servorum illius, et induratum nimis.—Exod. ix. 12, 35.

stand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.”¹

In what
they consist.

Hence this punishment consists in the fact that God, as it were, abandons man altogether, and excludes him from His fatherly care, so that he can neither see nor understand anything good with his understanding, nor accomplish anything good with his will; and thus nothing is left for him but eternal damnation, as St. Augustine says.² They are abandoned by God and rejected by Him, that they may commit all the sins they are damned for. O merciful God, Thou art the Author of light, for Thou enlightenest every man that cometh into the world. Thou sayest of Thyself: “I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.”³ How then can it be that Thou blindest man, takest away all light from him, and hardenest his heart in wickedness, so that he may not be converted to Thee, but be lost forever? Yes, my dear brethren, it is even the infinitely good and merciful God who thus severely punishes man, when He has borne with his sins for a long time, and often exhorted and warned him to no purpose. Nor is this punishment too severe, for, as St. Augustine says, it is in accordance with the strictest justice: “It is a most just punishment of sin that one should lose that which he would not make a good use of . . . and that he who deliberately omits to do good, should at last neither know nor understand what good is.”⁴ Such, too, is the meaning of the words of St. Bernard regarding those philosophers of whom St. Paul speaks: “with justice is their foolish heart darkened; for, since they rejected the known truth, it is only right that they should be punished by having the light taken away from them, so that they can no longer see the truth.”⁵ Such, too, is the way in which the Holy Catholic Church acts, as well as temporal superiors, in the excommunication or banishment of those in whom no signs of improvement are to be observed, after repeated admonition; for those disobedient subjects are cut off from the society of the faithful as if the Church wished to know nothing more of them.

God inflicts
the punish-

But that no one, my dear brethren, may have a mistaken idea

¹ *Exceceavit oculos eorum, et induravit cor eorum, ut non videant oculis, et non intelligent corde, et convertantur, et sanem eos.—John xii. 40.*

² *Utique damnati, ut tanta operentur mala.*

³ *Nolo mortem impij, sed ut convertatur impius a via sua, et vivat.—Exod. xxxiii. 11.*

⁴ *Ilia est poena peccati justissima, ut amittat unusquisque illud quo bene uti novit . . . ut qui sciens recte non facit, amittat scire quod rectum est.*

⁵ *Merito obscuratum est insipiens cor eorum, quia, cum veritatem cognoscerent et contemnerent, jure receperunt in poenam, ut nec cognoscerent eam.—S. Bern. Ep. 19.*

of the mercy of God in this matter, as if He deliberately planned the eternal ruin of a man by increasing his guilt, you must not forget how this punishment of blindness and obduracy is inflicted by God. Our God is infinitely good, and patient, and merciful; He never abandons man unless the latter abandon him for too long a time altogether. He does not and cannot wish any one to commit sin, nor can He, nor will He condemn any one to hell who does not himself elect to go there; He rejects no sinner, no matter how great his guilt may be, who does true penance; and He is prepared to receive into His friendship even the most wicked sinner who does penance even at the last moment of his life. Such is the teaching of the infallible word of God in Holy Scripture; such, too, is the experience of many great sinners. If God intended first to abandon us, says St. Augustine, why did He send His Only-begotten Son down on earth to redeem all men, and show them the way to heaven? Why should that Son have allowed Himself to be so cruelly tortured, and to be nailed to the cross for our sake? No, once for all, it is and must be true, that the good God does not wish the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live. But now, see how He allows the sinner to become blind and obdurate. After He has given to a man many special graces for a long time, and, as often is the case, for many long years borne with his sins with the greatest patience, but sees that His inspirations are always rejected and despised, that the man constantly relapses into his former sins after confession, and through malice, and so makes a bad use of His patience and goodness, while there is no sign of amendment: what does God do then? In order to avenge Himself for the contempt with which he has been so persistently treated, He withdraws from the sinner the graces that He is not at all bound to give him, and which He has hitherto bestowed on him solely out of the superabundance of His goodness. Consequently He no longer gives him such a clear knowledge of the Gospel truths, nor does He bestow such vivid lights on his understanding, as to make him see and dread the malice and deformity of sin, the short duration of the pleasure to be derived from it, and the eternity of the pains that have to be suffered for it in hell. Thus he has greater difficulty in avoiding sin. Nor does God any longer give him those impulses and inward movements of the will, which we otherwise feel so sweet and refreshing, that we can easily keep His law, mortify our sensuality and evil inclinations, perform the works of Christian piety and charity, bear

ment on
sinners by
withdrawing
from
them His
special
graces.

132 *Blindness and Obduracy as a Punishment of Sin.*

crosses and trials patiently, practise virtue with ease and facility, and find such strength in dangers that we can overcome them easily. These graces, I say, which God is not bound to give to any one, He withdraws from the obstinate sinner, and delivers him over to his own desires and inclinations, as He says by the Prophet David, "My people heard not My voice: and Israel hearkened not to Me. So I let them go according to the desires of their heart; they shall walk in their own inventions."¹ And they will do all that sensuality and their own will may suggest to them.

Then the
desire for
sin in-
creases con-
tinually.

Now, when these graces are thus withdrawn from the sinner and he is given over to his own desires, what happens to him? Alas, the same that happened to our dear Lord, when Pilate delivered Him over to the will of the Jews: "But Jesus he delivered up to their will;"² they fell upon Him like wolves, dragged Him off to Calvary, and there cruelly murdered Him. O sinner, are you given over to your own evil inclinations? Alas, what will become of you? Nothing else can be the result but that your understanding will be blinded and your will hardened. For when those special graces of God no longer impel you to good and restrain you from evil, if the least temptation or occasion of sin, such as we are daily exposed to, assails you, you will consent to it without the least hesitation, fear, or shame; from one sin you will fall into another, from that into a third, and so on, until your sins are beyond counting. For, says St. Thomas, as the just man cannot long refrain from all venial sin on account of his inborn weakness, so also he who is in mortal sin will have even greater difficulty in avoiding fresh sin. If you throw a stone into a pond, it will at once make a circle in the water; this circle will make another, the other a third, and so it goes on until the last circle is so far away that it vanishes out of sight. So it is also with the heart of the wicked man, that the Holy Scripture compares to a stormy sea. "But the wicked are like the raging sea, which cannot rest."³ says the Lord by the Prophet Isaias; and one sin is constantly urging on the other therein without rest. From this comes the habit of sin, from the habit arises a concatenation of vices, an ever increasing circle of abominations, a deplorable ebb and flow of sin, and finally a natural necessity, as it were of sinning, as St. Augustine

¹ Non audivit populus meus vocem meam, et Israel non intendit mihi; et dimisit eos secundum desideria cordis eorum: ibunt in adinventionibus suis.—Ps. lxxx. 12, 13.

² Jesum vero tradidit voluntati eorum.—Luke xxiii. 25.

³ Impii autem quasi mare fervens, quod quiescere non potest.—Is. lvii. 20.

says; so that it is almost impossible to the sinner to amend, nor do his sins cease unless with his life, and when he is already at the gate of eternal death.

And on the other hand there arises a dislike to everything good; the desire for prayer disappears, the church is seldom visited, the holy sacraments and all works of devotion cause disgust, there is no relish for the word of God, and therefore the sinner hears no more sermons, or, if he does hear them, it is only to satisfy his curiosity, or to criticise the preacher; the desire and inordinate love of temporal goods increase more and more; there is a perpetual sighing with the Jews for the flesh-pots of Egypt, that brings with it a disgust for the bread of heaven; and, like the prodigal son, there is no longer any relish except for the husks of swine. All this will at last cause the heart to become so hardened, that it will become insensible to exhortations and threats alike. God in His mercy may be generous to him, and bestow abundant temporal blessings on him, but his ingratitude will only be the greater; with the best intentions towards him, God may visit him with trials and adversity, but, like Pharaoh, he will only become more obstinate. "I fed them to the full," is the complaint God makes of those people by the Prophet Jeremias, "and they committed adultery."¹ "Thou hast struck them," says the same Prophet to the Lord, "and they have not grieved; Thou hast bruised them, and they have refused to receive correction; they have made their faces harder than the rock, and they have refused to return."² "They have denied the Lord, and said: It is not He;"³ this punishment, they say, does not come from God; this misfortune has happened to me by mere chance; they are insensible to everything that happens to them, like the stone pillar in the field that remains unaffected by wind, rain, or hail. Pious people may talk kindly to them, or try to encourage them to do good by example, but to no purpose except to excite their ridicule; they look on pious, humble, and chaste souls as superstitious and miserable fools.

And the dislike to good works.

And what is there to be surprised at in that? The obdurate sinner is blinded once for all, and he is incapable, so to speak, of discerning between good and evil, between what is reprehensible and what is praiseworthy: "They have not known nor

And finally complete blindness in spiritual things.

¹ Saturavi eos, et mœchati sunt.—Jerem. v. 7.

² Percussisti eos, et non doluerunt; attrivisti eos, et renuerunt accipere disciplinam; induraverunt facies suas supra petram, et noluerunt reverti.—Ibid. 3.

³ Negaverunt Dominum, et dixerunt: non est ipse.—Ibid. 12.

understood, they walk on in darkness.”¹ If you represent to him the joys of heaven which he loses by mortal sin, he neither knows nor understands what you are speaking of. Open to him, if you can, the abyss of hell, show him the thousands of souls actually burning there, the hideous and cruel demons, the fearful phantoms, the burning lake of sulphur, the inextinguishable fire, the intolerable eternal pain in which he has already set his foot, and to which he will certainly be condemned if he does not repent; he will not understand anything of what you say. Remind him of the shortness of life, a single moment of which he cannot be sure of, the uncertainty of death, which generally surprises the sinner, but you will make no impression on him; you might as well be talking to a blind man of color, or tell the news to one who is asleep. “He speaketh with one that is asleep,” says the wise Ecclesiasticus, “who uttereth wisdom to a fool; and in the end of the discourse he saith: Who is this?”² He who is called or disturbed in the midst of a deep sleep, at once asks; Who is that? Who is calling me? What do you want? And he falls off to sleep again. O great Apostle, St. Paul, who hast converted so many souls by thy preaching, call out into the ears of those hardened sinners that exhortation of thine, “Be instant in season, out of season: reprove, entreat, rebuke in all patience and doctrine.”³ But thou wilt do them little good, for “They have not known nor understood; they walk on in darkness.” They know nothing of what thou sayest to them, because the light of the soul has been taken away from them. “The wicked man, when he is come into the depth of sins, contemneth; but ignominy and reproach follow him.”⁴ The loss of eternal happiness, the bitterness of death, the pains of hell, the remembrance of which used formerly to send a shudder through him, he now utterly disregards; since he has sunk into the depth of sin, he is no longer afraid of those things; nay, he laughs at them, and affects to disbelieve them; he looks on them as a dream, as mere talk of the priests, mere pointless arrows which cannot hurt; and, as St. Athanasius says, he is no more frightened at them than a blacksmith’s dog is at the hammering to which he has long grown accustomed. Meanwhile,

¹ Nescierunt neque intellexerunt, in tenebris ambulat.—Ps. lxxxv. 5.

² Cum dormiente loquitur, qui enarrat stulto sapientiam, et in fine narrationis dicit: quis est hic?—Eccelus. xxii. 9.

³ Insta opportune, importune; argue, obsecra, increpa in omni patientia et doctrina.—II. Tim. iv. 2.

⁴ Impius cum in profundum venerit peccatorum, contemnit; sed sequitur eum ignominia et opprobrium.—Prov. xviii. 3.

since he loses more and more every day the light and knowledge of divine things, whilst his wickedness is daily on the increase, he at length goes so far that he does not wish to be better, and cannot be worse, and even if it were possible for him to do penance, he would be as far off from it as the demons themselves. Such, my dear brethren, is the state of a blind and hardened sinner, such is the punishment that an angry God inflicts on man for his obstinacy in wickedness. Let these words resound in the ears of all sinners who are still capable of hearing them. Could a greater punishment than this be imagined? No; it is impossible, as I shall show in the

Second Part.

A punishment that is an unmixed evil, and has no good whatever in it, is certainly the greatest of all. Such a punishment is the blindness and obduracy of the sinner in wickedness. All other evils, no matter by what name they are called, are indeed just punishments for sins committed; but if one only knows how to make the proper use of them, they are at the same time means of attaining eternal life more securely, and therefore they are rightly reckoned amongst the benefits and graces of God. They are, says St. John Chrysostom, evils which by their severity purify and cleanse our souls, make us enter into ourselves and see the vanity and deceitfulness of earthly things; they force us, as it were, to seek God; they are evils which serve to satisfy for our past sins, to help us to persevere in faith and good works, preserve us from fresh sin, and increase our merit and our glory in heaven; they are, in a word, evils that make us good and holy; but the blindness of the soul is an evil above all others, because no profit or advantage can be reaped from it.

It is the greatest punishment.

Have you sinned, O man? Have you even grievously and shamefully sinned? Have you sinned continuously for years and years? But do you feel remorse of conscience? have you neither pleasure by day nor repose by night? do you continually hear a voice calling in your ear: What hast thou done? Thou art an enemy of God, a slave of the devil, a child of damnation. Certainly, as long as that lash is scourging you, you are suffering severely; but after all, be comforted and rejoice, because all is not lost for you yet; the light of your soul is not yet altogether extinguished; God has not abandoned you; He is actually knocking at your door, and calling you back to His grace and friendship; the torture your conscience causes you, cruel as it is, can

Remorse of conscience is a grace, when compared to it.

and will, if you are so minded, bring you back to penance, to God, to heaven. This is the testimony that St. Augustine, who was first a sink of vice, and afterwards an exemplar of penance and a vessel of election, gives of himself: "This very thing, my God," he says, "was for my good."¹ It was this that saved me from the thralldom of the devil; namely, my conscience, which daily and hourly was fighting against Thee and against myself. It was the bitter, but salutary scourge of conscience that forced me to return to Thee. See there, my dear brethren, the gnawing worm of conscience is indeed a punishment; but it is a salutary one.

And all
other evils
are salutary
punish-
ments.

If God sends me other trials:—for instance, He casts me down on a bed of sickness; I am reduced by misfortune to extreme poverty and destitution; I am persecuted by men, and put to shame before all my fellow-citizens; I am left desolate by the death of my parents and dear friends: all that is hard, without doubt; but still I can find consolation in all these trials and difficulties. Oh, how happy I am if I know how to use them properly! For I can raise up my mind to heaven, and say: Blessed be Thou, my Lord and my God, who chastisest me with Thy rod, as a loving father chastises his children! This sickness, poverty, misfortune, persecution, shame, and abandonment which Thou sendest me, is in Thy merciful designs a school in which I can learn patience, an easy purgatory in which to atone for my sins, and a certain means of escaping hell and gaining heaven. I have already misused, or may perhaps misuse, my health to indulge in unlawful pleasures; if Thou hadst given, or left me wealth, I might perhaps have used it to lead a luxurious or an idle life, or to extol myself above others; but now, since Thou hast not given, or hast taken away those things from me, Thou hast shown me the vanity of this life, freed my heart from earthly things, and raised my desires to heaven, so that my punishment is a most salutary medicine for me. Before now I had a horror of penance, fasting, and bodily austerities, and I used to seek in all things the gratification of my sensuality; now Thou compellest me to suffer something for my sins, so that my punishment serves as an atonement for them. I was before lazy and slothful in Thy service, O my God; I have done little or nothing for Thy honor and glory; now Thou givest me an opportunity of doing something for Thee, so that the punishment I suffer is a sanctifying one for me. Thus, my dear

¹ Hoc ipsum est, Domine Deus, quod mihi salutis fuit.

brethren, in every evil and chastisement that is incurred by sin, there is something good and consoling which lessens the pain one has to suffer.

But in the blindness and obduracy of the soul there is no hope of amendment, no satisfaction, no merit. God inflicts that punishment, but man can draw no profit from it. In fact, there is hardly any difference between it and the punishment of the lost souls in hell, the most terrible feature of which is, that the damned, with all their torments, can never satisfy God for their sins, and the more they suffer, the more hardened do they become in wickedness. In the same way spiritual blindness daily increases the number of sins and vices, makes the heart more wicked, embitters more and more the divine anger, and adds every hour to the future pains of hell. Hence it is evidently not only the most terrible of punishments, but also a certain sign of eternal reprobation. That, as St. John Chrysostom remarks, was the punishment that an angry God commanded the Prophet Isaias to announce to the Jewish people, when He was minded to chastise them most severely: "Blind the heart of this people, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted, and I heal them."¹ He did not say: humble the intolerable pride of that people; strike them dead; destroy them utterly. No, for all that seemed too slight a punishment, nay, no punishment at all, when compared to spiritual blindness. "Blind the heart of this people;" as if to say, this is the only punishment with which I can most severely avenge the insults offered Me. War, pestilence, famine, and all other plagues are not enough for those rebels; I will fill their souls with gloom and darkness, so that they may not understand or do any good. That is the terrible woe that the same angry God announces by the Prophet Osee to those inveterate sinners who are hardened in wickedness: "Woe to them when I shall depart from them."²

This is the anger and resentment of the Lord from which the penitent David, with sighs and tears, begs to be delivered: "O Lord, rebuke me not in Thy indignation, nor chastise me in Thy wrath."³ Thou hast taken my beloved child out of the world;

Obduracy is a sure sign of eternal damnation.

Therefore this is the only punishment from which one should

¹ *Excæca cor populi hujus, et aures ejus aggravata, et oculos ejus claude, ne forte videat oculis suis, et auribus suis audiat, et corde suo intelligat, et convertatur, et sanem eum.*—Is. vi. 10.

² *Væ eis, cum recessero ab eis.*—Osee ix. 12.

³ *Domine, ne in furore tuo arguas me, neque in ira tua corripias me.*—Ps. vi. 2.

beg to be
delivered.

my own son has made war on, and persecuted me; Thou hast decimated my people by pestilence. But all that, O Lord, I accept with resignation.¹ Yes, O merciful God, I kiss the fatherly hand that chastises me; I am ready to suffer still more punishments of the same kind; but one thing I beg of Thee, “Rebuke me not in Thy indignation,” nor with such anger as to give me over to my own desires, and to allow me to become blind and hardened in wickedness. Alas, woe to the man whom God thus punishes in His anger; for no worse punishment, but hell itself, can await him! Yet, why do I speak of a worse punishment? Is it not, asks St. Ambrose, a favor for such sinners to have their damnation hastened? If, O Lord, I should ever be in that most miserable state, which I fervently hope I never shall be; if I should become obdurate and be rejected by Thee; if I should give up all idea of repentance, then, if I can still ask a favor of Thee, take me out of the world at once, O Lord, and hasten the damnation that awaits me! Give me up to the demons; kindle the flames of hell for me, and hurl me at once into the place of my eternal torments! But what am I saying? Is it not time enough for me to go down into hell after ten or twenty years? No, O God, hasten my damnation; better for me to go now, than next year; to-day, than to-morrow; this very hour, than this evening. This is the greatest favor Thou canst do me in my present unhappy state, that Thou sendest me at once to the hell I have deserved! You are scandalized, my dear brethren, at this despairing prayer; but the idea is not mine; I have taken it from St. Ambrose. “It is better for sinners to die,” he says “than to live.”² So said also Our Lord to the traitor Judas at the Last Supper: “That which thou dost, do quickly.”³ Delay no longer about it! Thou hast the intention of betraying Me to My enemies, and thou wilt hang thyself and go down to hell; delay no longer, then, but do so at once. And why? Because the longer such sinners live, the more sins they commit, as we have seen already; and the greater the number of their sins, the more severe will be their eternal punishment. Therefore it is better for them to go down to hell a day, a year, ten, or twenty years sooner, than for them to live longer on earth, and increase a hundred thousand fold the eternal punishment that is in store for them in any case. Therefore God confers a favor on

¹ *Virga tua et baculus tuus: ipsa me consolata sunt.*—Ps. xxii. 4:

² *Melius est peccatoribus mori quam vivere.*—S. Amb. lib. de bono mortis.

³ *Quod facis, fac citius.*—John xiii. 27.

them (but alas, what a wretched favor it is!) by hastening their damnation.

O sinners, who are blind, and hardened, and obdurate in vice, listen to me now, in whatever part of the world you may be; ah! open your eyes, I beg of you! give up sin, try to get the grace of repentance, which will be refused to no one as long as he lives; be converted to God, and at once; do not wait till to-morrow, for to-morrow your case will be still more desperate! But what is the use of my talking to them? They have neither hearing, nor sight, nor understanding any longer. They can indeed do penance and amend, for that is never impossible; but they will never do it, because they will never wish to do it. "Let them alone," said Christ to His disciples of the hardened Pharisees, "they are blind."¹ O merciful Lord, must we let them alone? And what will become of them? They will be lost forever. Must we, then, look on while they are going on the way to hell, and not stretch out a hand to save them? Yes, let them alone; let them go to their destruction, because they are blind; take no further trouble concerning them; any labor spent in trying to convert them is fruitless; they are blind. "Let them alone!" O fearful words! O words that are not words, but rather hail-storms and thunderbolts! Let hardened sinners alone! Is there, then, no more hope of their conversion? Are they rejected by God and condemned to hell? Then all I can do is to say to them, alas! I pity you; I pity your miserable state, your precious souls, and, unless a miracle of grace is worked to bring you back again to the light, I pity you on account of the unhappy eternity that awaits you!

Finally, my dear brethren, I have a word to say to you, for I hope that not one of you is in that miserable state of blindness, and, in fact, the only object I have aimed at in this sermon is to give you a salutary warning that may deter you from ever falling into it. Ah, may God keep you and me from it! "Walk whilst you have the light;"² now, whilst your eyes are open, walk carefully in the exact observance of the divine commands; work out your salvation in fear, humility, and child-like love of God; hate and avoid sin alone above all things, as far as you can; see that you never get into a habit of sinning, for that is the next step to obduracy. If you are already in the habit of sin, and trammelled by an inordinate love of any creature, oh,

Conclusion
for hard-
ened sin-
ners.

Exhortation
to the other
hearers to
avoid sin.

¹ Sinite illos; cæci sunt.—Matt. xv. 14.

² Ambulate dum lucem habetis.—John xii. 35.

then, at once make a heroic resolution, and by speedy penance free yourselves from that state, "that the darkness overtake you not."¹ Have you done penance already? Then keep to it, and see that you never commit another mortal sin. Perhaps the next sin you commit may be the one which will so excite the anger and indignation of God, that, according to His inscrutable and at the same time most just decrees, He will withdraw His light from you, and leave you in blindness, a prey to your own desires. Say to yourselves every morning and evening: How many sins have I not committed during my life? Is it not time for me to leave off sinning now?

Prayer to
God to save
all from fall-
ing into
that state.

And Thou, O God of mercy, Source of all good, if there are any here present who have often excited Thy anger by sin; if there are any who have made a habit of a certain vice; if there are any who, being in the state of sin, have not yet done penance, but continue to offend Thee; for all these, O Lord, I may still send up a petition to Thee, O God of mercy; not in the words, "Blind the heart of this people," but in those of Thy penitent servant David, "Lord rebuke me not in Thy anger;" punish them not in Thy wrath, so as to take away the eyes of their souls! If Thou art determined to be angry with them, and I must confess with them that we have deserved Thy anger a hundred times, then pour out the vials of Thy wrath on them, but of that wrath which St. Bernard prayed for from Thee: "I wish, O Father of mercy, that Thou shouldst be angry with me; but with the anger that brings back the erring soul to the right path, and does not drive it off the road altogether."² If Thou hast resolved to punish them, if Thou canst no longer overlook their wickedness, then take in hand Thy fatherly rod, and not the sword of Thy wrath; punish them therewith as Thou wilt; avenge Thyself on their honor, on their bodies, on their temporal goods; but have pity on their souls, that they may not be hardened! Send them all the trials of this life; let all the calamities of the world befall them; visit them with the most painful illnesses. There are their heads; hast Thou no heaviness, pain, or toothache for them? There are their eyes; hast Thou no sores or swelling for them? There are their ears; hast Thou no deafness for them? There are their faces; hast Thou no cancer or ulcer to deform them? There are their hands and feet; canst

¹ Ut non vos tenebræ comprehendant.—John xii. 35.

² Volo Pater misericordiarum irascaris mihi; sed illa ira, qua corrigis devium, non qua extrudis de via.

Thou not send them some suffering? Their hearts; canst Thou not visit them with trouble and sadness? Their whole bodies; hast Thou no pains or afflictions for them; no hunger or thirst? There are their consciences; canst Thou not send a worm to gnaw at them, and torment them day and night, until they are compelled to return to Thee? All these things they will suffer rather than that terrible blindness! O Lord, save them from that! Perhaps, my dear brethren, you will again be shocked at my prayer, and think it a despairing one? But it is not so; it is a prayer that every one may join with me in sending up to heaven. For all the chastisements I have enumerated would be far better and more salutary for us, than that we should by repeated sins at length fall into hardness of heart, which is the greatest evil of all.

But we must try to deserve neither one punishment nor the other, and now, while it is still time, throw ourselves on our knees before our good God with contrite hearts, and say to Him: O God of mercy, Thou hast here before Thee one who has often despised Thee and committed sin after sin. Ah, I detest my sins and repent with my whole heart of having ever offended Thee! How many there are who, although their sins are less numerous than mine, are now in a state of blindness, or are actually in hell! I thank Thee that Thou hast allowed my conscience to torment me, and hast not withdrawn Thy light from me. O my God, I will sin no more: not another sin shall I commit! I offer myself completely to Thee, with all I have that is pleasing to me on earth; I submit willingly to Thy fatherly chastisements. Punish me according to Thy good pleasure with Thy dear children, by all imaginable crosses; helped by Thy grace I will bear them all in patience and humility for Thy sake. But one thing I beg of Thee with Thy faithful servant David, "Enlighten my eyes, that I may never sleep in death;"¹ that my mind may never be perverted. Preserve and increase in me Thy supernatural light, that I may always walk in the way of Thy commandments; turn the eyes of my mind to Thee and to heaven, that after this life I may come to the full enjoyment of Thy light in a happy eternity. Amen.

Resolution
to avoid all
sin.

¹ *Illumina oculos meos ne unquam abdormiam in morte.*—Ps. xli. 4.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the ninth Sunday after Pentecost.

Text.

Nunc autem abscondita sunt ab oculis tuis.—Luke xix. 42.

“But now they are hidden from thy eyes.”

Alas! unhappy city of Jerusalem, has it come to this with thee at last, that thy enemies shall surround thee, and beat thee flat to the ground, and not leave in thee a stone upon a stone? But that is the least of the evils in store for thee; that was not the reason why the Son of God wept through pity when He saw thee. Oh! “if thou also hadst known,” and received the light that shone so brilliantly for thee in the days of thy visitation; it would still be well with the souls that are in thee. But since thou hast refused this light, thy condition is desperate: “Now they are hidden from thy eyes;” and will always remain so. Thou wilt die and be eternally lost in thy blindness! This was that most terrible punishment inflicted on the obdurate Jews, which drew tears from the eyes of Jesus Christ. I have already treated, my dear brethren, etc.,—*continues as above.*

ON THE MOTIVES THAT SHOULD
ENCOURAGE THE SINNER TO
DO SPEEDY PENANCE.

ELEVENTH SERMON.

ON THE GOODNESS WITH WHICH GOD PROTECTS THE SINNER
ON ACCOUNT OF PENANCE.

Subject.

God is always the Patron and Protector of sinners; and for that very reason they should at once be converted and do penance.— *Preached on the feast of St. Matthew, Apostle.*

Text.

Euntes autem discite quid est: Misericordiam volo.—Matt. ix. 13.

“Go then and learn what this meaneth: I will have mercy and not sacrifice.”

Introduction.

Therefore sinners can find no better Protector than Jesus Christ their meekest Saviour. You may murmur and find fault, you envious Pharisees, as long as you please, Jesus will still receive repentant sinners; nay, He will defend and protect them, and rejoice with the whole court of heaven at the conversion of a single one of them. Seeing Him sitting at table with public sinners, you complain, and say to His disciples: “Why doth your master eat with publicans and sinners?” But He answers and says: “They that are in health need not a physician, but they that are ill. Go then and learn what this meaneth; I will have mercy and not sacrifice. For I am not come to call the just, but sinners.” Be of good heart then, O sinners! We have still the same merciful God in heaven, who is ready at

any moment to receive you to His friendship. If you only come to Him with penitent hearts, He will be as He was before, your Patron and Protector. Nay, He has protected you while you were actually in the state of sin, that you might be enabled to do penance. To-day, my dear brethren, I will speak of this wonderful goodness of God in protecting sinners, a goodness that is enough to move a heart of stone; and I will speak of it partly to console those who have already done penance, and partly to encourage those who are in the state of sin, to be converted at once. I say therefore:

Plan of Discourse.

God is always the Patron and Protector of sinners; and for that very reason they should at once be converted and do penance. Such is the whole subject of the present sermon, or rather meditation.

Most merciful God, who art so good to sinners, touch with Thy powerful grace the hearts of all sinners, that the meditation on this Thy mercy may make them surrender to Thee at once. Help us herein by thy intercession, O Mary, refuge of sinners, and you, holy guardian angels.

No man
would bear
from his
equal the
insults that
God bears
with from
man.

With reason does the Prophet David say, when meditating on the goodness and patient mercy of God: "It is good to confide in the Lord, rather than to have confidence in man; it is good to trust in the Lord, rather than to trust in princes."¹ Far better is it to put one's trust in the great King of heaven, than in all the potentates of earth. And certainly, if the sinner had to do with a man like himself, and had offended him a twentieth part as much as he has offended the great God, he might well despair of being forgiven or being again received into the friendship of the offended person, nay, he might cry out with the fratricide Cain, "My iniquity is greater than that I may deserve pardon."² At all events, he would have little good to hope from the man whom he offended. So touchy and sensitive are we at the smallest offence; and even the lowliest and poorest are not an exception to this rule. Every one is on the defensive, as best he may, against him who tries to injure him; and satisfaction for an injury is sought at once, either by punishing the offending party, or, if that cannot be done in reality, at least by entertaining a desire for revenge.

¹ Bonum est confidere in Domino, quam confidere in homine: bonum est sperare in Domino, quam sperare in principibus.—Ps. cxvii. 8, 9.

² Major est iniquitas mea, quam ut ventam merear.—Gen. iv. 13.

But what a noise is made about it, if a subject is guilty of any grievous offence against his sovereign, even if he commits it through mere inadvertence, to say nothing of publicly ill-treating his king or prince by addressing him in abusive terms, or even striking him! In fact, it is impossible to imagine that any sensible man could act so outrageously; and if he were to do so, it would be considered the greatest folly in him to entertain the least hope of mercy and pardon, while it would be looked on as an impossibility for him ever to gain the favor of his offended sovereign. The wheel and gallows are not severe enough to punish the crime of which he is guilty. If a malefactor of the kind were flying from justice, and I were to meet him in his flight and to call out to him: Where are you going? Why are you in such a hurry? You need not be afraid; you may go at once to the king's palace, and into his private room, and in spite of what you have done to offend him, he will undertake to protect you; he will not allow the officers of the law to hurt you; he will defend you against all your accusers, and will treat you with the greatest kindness; what would you think of that, my dear brethren? The poor wretch would look on me as more of a fool than he is of a miscreant; and he would not lose a moment in listening to me, but would hurry off as fast as his legs could carry him. And, indeed, he would be perfectly in the right; if I were in his place I would do the same. For if I were guilty of such an offence against my sovereign, I could not hope that he would overlook it, much less that he would protect me, or honor me with his friendship. According to law he who intercedes for one who is guilty of a crime against the person of the sovereign is declared infamous. Nay, there was once a certain nobleman of high rank in France, who was imprisoned for twenty years, merely because he happened to relate in company that he had a dream in which it seemed to him that he killed the king. So sensitive are earthly potentates, that they cannot bear any one even to dream of injuring them.

Much less would a king bear with such insults from one of his subjects.

“Exceedingly wonderful, O Lord, is Thy patience,”¹ says Oleaster with reason. What no king or prince would bear with from his subject, nor any private man from his equal, nor even one swineherd from another, that Thou bearest daily, with the greatest patience and with uninterrupted goodness, from sinners. All creatures are ready at every moment to act as the ministers of Thy justice, and to avenge on presumptuous sinners the

It is God alone who bears with and protects the sinner.

¹ O mirabilis valde est, Domine, patientia tua.

insults offered their Creator, as Thou Thyself sayest: "The whole world shall fight with him against the unwise."¹ The whole universe is ready to take up arms against foolish and wicked sinners; but Thou, O Lord, who alone art offended and insulted, Thou art the only One with whom wicked sinners can be sure of finding refuge, and to whom they can fly, even while they are in the state of sin, for defence and protection, and, if they only desire it, for full pardon for their crimes, and complete restoration to Thy grace and favor. Yes, O good God, such is really the case; and how often have I not found it so during my life! Thou, an infinitely great and mighty monarch, I, such a miserable worm of the earth! Thou hast not the least need of me and all my belongings, whilst I am in constant need of Thy help and support at all moments; and yet (ah, how fearful to think of it!) how have I dared to treat Thee! What fearful insults I have offered Thy divine Majesty, before whom the greatest princes of heaven tremble!

In spite of
the insults
the sinner
offers Him.

As often as I committed a mortal sin, which was the case nearly every day for many years, in thought, word, and act, I despised Thy divine Majesty, and trampled Thy law under foot, and before Thy very eyes, while Thou wert actually looking at me, I have dared to say, I will not serve; I will not do as Thou commandest. Thou hast spoken to my conscience, and said, think, poor mortal, of what you are doing; if you carry out your present intention, I will disinherit you, blot your name out of the book of life, and close the gate of heaven against you. But I have given Thee an insolent answer by my rebellious will, and have dared to say to Thee that I do not want Thy heaven, and that I will act, think, and speak as I please. Thou hast gone still farther in order to deter me from sin. Woe to you, unhappy mortal! Thou hast said; if you despise Me in that way, I will condemn you to the flames of hell, which are ready to receive every wicked sinner, and there you will burn with the demons for all eternity. But, by my conduct at least, the only answer I gave Thee, was: I am not afraid of hell; I will commit this sin in spite of Thy threats, nor have I the least intention of abstaining from what I know to be displeasing to Thee. O my Lord and my God, is it possible that Thou hast borne with such conduct? Is it possible that Thou hast had patience with a vile wretch, who has thus dared to insult Thee, and whom Thou hast at any moment completely in Thy power, and that Thou hast

¹ Pugnabit pro illo orbis terrarum contra insensatas.—Sap. v. 21.

let him go without punishment? Is it possible that I am still alive, and am not really in hell? Yes, I still live, and, as I now hope with child-like confidence, I enjoy Thy favor and friendship; for Thou wilt never, during all eternity, remember all those insults I have offered Thee.

Alas! how often have not Thy creatures been ready to avenge the insults I offered Thy divine Majesty, while I was still in that unhappy state in which I declared myself Thy sworn enemy, and rebellious to Thy authority. How often has not the earth been on the point of opening beneath my feet, and swallowing me up! How often has not water longed to engulf me like another Jonas! How often did not the lightning attempt to strike me to earth! How often did not the heavens long to send down fire to consume me! How often has not the cruel demon waited eagerly for a sign from Thee, that he might hurry me off to hell! But Thou, O great God, who hast been so insulted by me, didst not allow Thy creatures to have their way; Thou hast protected me against them, and like a loving shepherd Thou hast run after me, Thy lost sheep, till Thou wert tired, and hast called out to me offering me Thy grace: Return . . . and I will receive thee.”¹ And at last, after one or two sighs of repentance on my part, Thou hast taken me on Thy shoulders, and with the greatest joy and gladness, as if Thou hadst found some extraordinary treasure, hast brought me back to Thy own fold amongst Thy chosen flock, just as if I had never done anything to displease Thee and had always been Thy loving child; and Thou hast heaped on me countless benefits and graces. Most merciful God, what shall I think and say? What a monster I must be, if, after all this goodness on Thy part, I do not love Thee with my whole heart above all things! Nor am I the only one to whom Thou hast thus shown Thy mercy; Thou actest in a similar manner every day towards countless thousands of wicked sinners like myself. Alas, what terrible sins are committed every hour and moment, by day and by night, in every part of the world! What pride and vanity there are amongst people! What injustice and deceit! What drunkenness and intemperance! What quarrelling and contention! What fearful cursing, swearing, and blasphemy! What superstition and dealings with the devil! What profanation of churches and of days consecrated to God! What slander, calumny, and detraction! What disgraceful immorality is practised

All creatures are ready to take vengeance on the sinner, but God protects him.

¹ Revertere, et ego suscipiam te.—Jerem. iii. 1.

by people of all classes, married and single, in houses, in public places, in hidden corners, and even in the public streets! And there are many who go on committing sins of that kind from one Easter to the other, and they even increase their guilt by making bad confessions and Communion, since they never give the least sign of amendment; for he who makes no difficulty about committing one sin, will have no scruple in committing another, and thus sin is heaped on sin most recklessly. And Thou, O great God, art silent, while all these abominations are being perpetrated before Thy very eyes! But why do I say that Thou art silent? Thou protectest those miscreants, Thou bestowest Thy benefits on them; Thou defendest them, in the hope and expectation that they will at last enter into themselves, and do sincere penance, and be converted to Thee.

Even the saints would take vengeance on the sinner, if God did not prevent them.

If Thou wert to empower one of Thy holiest servants to pronounce sentence on sinners, and to carry it out: oh! woe to them, how miserably they would fare. And in truth, my dear brethren, the elect in heaven, although they are very anxious for our salvation, and pray constantly and desire with all their hearts that we may one day share in their endless joy, and praise God with them; yet they are enemies of sin, because it opposes, embitters, and angers God, whom they love above all things, and they would not have a moment's patience with it, nor refrain one second from taking up arms against the sinner, if such were the will of God, in order to avenge the insult offered to their Creator. Already in the very dawn of creation, when Lucifer with the countless host that followed him gave way to a proud thought and rebelled against God, St. Michael, the archangel, cried out at once, Who is like to God? Who will dare to oppose the Most High? And at once the rebel angels fell like a flash of lightning from heaven into the pit of hell. And what shall I say of those holy servants of God who are still on earth? Although, like all poor sinners, they are exposed to the imminent danger of sin from their own weakness, and therefore stand in need, like them, of the grace, patience, and mercy of God; although they are ready to spare no labor or trouble to gain souls; although they are adorned with many virtues and seem to be on fire with love of God and of their neighbor; yet they cannot bear wicked sinners, and, like the brother of the Prodigal Son, who, when he found that his scapegrace of a brother was received with open arms by his father, was so enraged that he refused to partake in the feast that was prepared for the occasion, they

complain almost to God of the too great patience He displays in bearing with sinners, and call on the divine justice to avenge the insults offered it. And woe to the world if the Almighty were always to hear their prayers and take vengeance on sinners! How often would it not have been utterly destroyed by sin and vice! We see examples enough of this in the Old and in the New Testaments.

Consider the example of the Prophet Jonas, how he sat alone in the desert, reduced to the verge of despair almost by anger and grief, as I have mentioned briefly on another occasion. "And Jonas was exceedingly troubled and was angry."¹ Why was he angry? Through zeal against sinners, and so to speak against God Himself, on account of His goodness and mercy towards them. The Lord had commanded him to announce the inevitable destruction of Ninive within forty days. "He cried and said: Yet forty days, and Ninive shall be destroyed."² This fearful prophecy threw the Ninivites into the greatest consternation; full of sorrow and repentance for their sins, they put aside their magnificent apparel, clothed themselves with sackcloth, covered their heads with ashes, and fasted till evening with their children, sheep, and cattle, while nothing was to be heard throughout that vast city but cries to heaven for mercy and pardon. And behold, the good God, with whom alone the sinner who desires to repent is sure of finding refuge, moved by the penance and humiliations of the people, withdrew His threat, and commanded the avenging angel to sheathe the sword that was drawn to punish them. "And God had mercy with regard to the evil which He had said, that He would do them, and He did it not."³ Meanwhile Jonas was awaiting, in painful expectation, the fortieth day, which was to see the accomplishment of his prophecy; he looked up to heaven and down to the earth to see if there was any sign of the approaching calamity; the heavens, he thought, must open and rain down fire on the godless city, or the sea will inundate it, or the earth will open and swallow it up with its inhabitants. But none of these anticipations was verified. The heavens were serene as before; the sea remained within bounds; the earth showed no sign of disturbance; the fortieth day passed, and Ninive was still standing

We have an example of this in the Prophet Jonas.

¹ *Afflictus est Jonas afflictione magna, et iratus est.*—Jonas iv. 1.

² *Clamavit et dixit: adhuc quadraginta dies, et Ninive subvertetur.*—*Ibid.* iii. 4.

³ *Et misertus est Deus super malitiam, quam locutus fuerat, ut faceret eis, et non fecit.*—*Ibid.* 10.

without having suffered any punishment. That was what Jonas in his zeal could not bear: "Jonas was exceedingly troubled and was angry." And he prayed to the Lord, and said: I beseech Thee, O Lord, is not this what I said, when I was yet in my own country."¹ Was I not right when I tried to escape from the duty of preaching? "Therefore I went before to flee into Tharsis; for I know that Thou art a gracious and merciful God, patient, and of such compassion, and easy to forgive evil,"² and that 'Thou canst not bear to punish sinners. Now, if I preach to the people of Thy goodness and mercy, they will only become worse, and if I threaten them with the severity of Thy justice, what better will matters be? For one or two tears of repentance are enough to satisfy and content Thee. Lord I am tired of life; 'I beseech Thee, take my life from me: for it is better for me to die than to live,'"³ it is better for me to leave this world, than to be consumed with anger at the wickedness of men. But how does God, whom alone the Ninivites offended, act? See with what goodness and kindness He takes their part, while the angry Jonas is crying out for vengeance on them. "Dost thou think thou hast reason to be angry?"⁴ said He. You are sorry because a worthless ivy was destroyed. "Thou art grieved for the ivy, for which thou hast not labored, nor made it to grow; which in one night came up, and in one night perished."⁵ You are so sorry for it that you have become weary of life, and you say that the worm should have spared it, "and shall not I spare Ninive, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons, that know not how to distinguish between their right hand and their left?"⁶ and whom I have created for eternal happiness? Thus the Ninivites found with the God whom they had offended the grace and protection they would have sought in vain even from the holiest of men.

From the
Prophet
Isaias.

God had an almost similar dispute with His Prophet Isaias, as St. Jerome says, writing on the twenty-sixth chapter of Isaias. God called His servant to Him, as if to take counsel with him

¹ Et oravit ad Dominum, et dixit: obsecro Domine, numquid non hoc est verbum meum cum adhuc essem in terra mea?—Jonas iv. 2.

² Propter hoc præoccupavi ut fugerem in Tharsis; scio enim quia tu Dens clemens et misericors es, patiens, et multæ miserationis, et ignoscens super malitia.—Ibid. 2.

³ Tolle, quæso, animam meam a me: quia melior est mihi mors quam vita.—Ibid. 3.

⁴ Putasne bene irasceris tu?—Ibid. 9.

⁵ Tu doles super hæderam, in qua non laborasti, neque fecisti ut cresceret, quæ sub una nocte nata est, et sub una nocte perit.—Ibid. 10.

⁶ Et ego non paream Ninive civitati magnæ, in qua sunt plus quam centum viginti millia hominum, qui nesciunt quid sit inter dexteram et sinistram suam.—Ibid. 11.

as to what was to be done in a certain case. See, He said, how the wicked people despise Me; they have nearly all fallen into idolatry and shamefully abandoned Me: what am I to do with them? I think I must still bear with them patiently and not exclude them from My goodness: "Let us have pity on the wicked."¹ What do you think of that? What? answers Isaias; have pity on them? Certainly not. Where, O Lord, is Thy justice? "Let Thy hand be exalted, and let them not see: let the envious people see and be confounded: and let fire devour Thy enemies."² Raise Thy almighty hand against them, and let the earth swallow them up. But God does not change His decision. "Let us have pity on the wicked," He says again. But, replies the zealous Prophet, "Thou hast done that before, and what has it profited Thee?" "Thou hast been favorable to the nation, O Lord, Thou hast been favorable to the nation; art Thou glorified?"³ Thou hast been good to the people, and have they not become worse? Raise Thy hand, O Lord, and let them feel it, and learn to know Thee. Hear this, my dear brethren; the Prophet cries out for vengeance on sinners, and the patient and merciful God says: "Let us have pity on the wicked."

In the same way St. Jerome considers how the Prophet Habacuc complains to God of His excessive goodness: "Thy eyes are too pure too behold evil, and Thou canst not look on iniquity; why lookest Thou on them that do unjust things, and holdest Thy peace when the wicked devoureth the man that is more just than himself?"⁴ His meaning was: Thy eyes, O Lord, are pure; Thy holiness is infinite; how canst Thou cast Thy pure eyes on the abominations of men? And Thou art silent, too, when beholding them! Sins are multiplied daily, and Thou holdest Thy peace! The wicked oppress the righteous, but Thou holdest Thy peace! Faith and justice are trampled on, and Thou sayest nothing! Pride, impurity, and intemperance are in the ascendant, and Thou lookest on in silence! Truly, the Prophet could not understand that. Even King David, the meekest man of his time, agrees with those other saints in this point, and often expresses a wish that God

From Habacuc and David.

¹ Misereamur Impio.—Is. xxvi. 10.

² Exaltetur manus tua et non videant: videant et confundantur zelantes populi, et ignis hostes tuos devoret.—Ibid. 11.

³ Indulsisti genti Domine, indulsisti genti: numquid glorificatus es?—Ibid. 15.

⁴ Mundi sunt oculi tui ne videas malum, et respicere ad iniquitatem non poteris; quare respicis super iniqua agentes, et taces devorante impio justiore se?—Habac. i. 13.

should moderate His goodness and mercy somewhat, lest His honor and glory should suffer loss. Hence he burst forth with the prayer, "Show forth Thy wonderful mercies;" that is, as St. Augustine explains, make Thy mercy more rare, O Lord. Do not make it so common in the world, lest it become too cheap. Thou art so generous in showing it, that men do not value it, because it is so common. But woe to Thee, David, if God had heard thy prayer! What would have become of thee after thy grievous fall into sin?

From the
Apo-
stles of
Christ.

And to go to the New Law, the Law of grace; how were men on the one side and God on the other disposed towards sinners? I am not surprised that the envious Scribes and Pharisees murmured against the public sinner, Magdalene, and that they wished to stone the woman taken in adultery; but both those sinners were protected by Our Lord, although they had not asked Him to protect them. Even the Apostles, who were so long in the school of the merciful Saviour, often called out for punishment on sinners. "Lord," cried out James and John, filled with indignation at a city of the Samaritans that had refused to receive them, "wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"¹ No, answered our patient Redeemer; that is not the way in which My heavenly Father acts with those who offend Him: "And turning He rebuked them, saying: You know not of what spirit you are. The Son of man came not to destroy souls, but to save."² "Lord," I hear Peter crying out in the Garden, filled with anger and indignation, and holding a drawn sword in his hand, when the godless Jewish rabble came forward to seize his divine Master, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?"³ And without waiting for an answer, he began at once to use his sword, and would not have ceased if the meek Saviour had not commanded him to put his sword back into the scabbard. Thus Christ actually defended those who had bound Him with chains and were about to drag Him away; nay, He returned them good for evil; for He miraculously healed the ear of the high-priest's servant, which had been cut off: "And when He had touched his ear He healed him."⁴

¹ *Mirifica misericordias tuas.*—Ps. xvi. 7.

² *Domine, vis dicimus ut ignis descendat de celo et consumat illos?*—Luke ix. 54.

³ *Et conversus increpavit illos, dicens: nescitis cujus spiritus estis. Filius hominis non venit animas perdere sed salvare.*—Ibid. 55, 56.

⁴ *Domine, si percutimus in gladio?*—Ibid. xxii. 49.

⁵ *Et cum tetigisset auriculam ejus, sanavit eum.*—Ibid. 51.

“Father,” He cried out in His death agony on the cross, while His murderers were mocking and jeering at Him, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”¹ Oh, what excessive mercy on the part of our God! But, O Lord, dost Thou not see that all creatures are crying out for vengeance on Thy murderers, and yet Thou prayest for them? The sun withdraws its light from them; the heavens thunder and send down lightning to destroy them; the rocks are rent, and the earth, indignant at their impiety, opens to swallow them up; the very dead rise out of their graves to accuse the wretches before the judgment-seat of God; but Thou dost not seek to be avenged. Nay, Thou art the only one that defendest them against the wrath of Thy creatures! Thou defendest them against Thy heavenly Father, in whose hand Thou probably didst see the thunder-bolt ready to strike them. Thou excusest their most inexcusable sin by alleging their ignorance, although it was a most gross ignorance. Father, forgive them, they do not quite understand what they are doing. And Thou wert praying then, not only for those who were actually putting Thee to death, but also for all future sinners!

Christ on the Cross prays for His murderers and all sinners.

Is it not the case, my dear brethren, that we ourselves sometimes feel annoyed when we hear of or see people leading reckless and un-Christian lives? We often look on it as an intolerable injustice that such wickedness should be so long allowed to remain unpunished. For my part, O my God, although I am in more need of Thy mercy than any one else, yet I must acknowledge that, if the matter depended on me, I should not have patience to bear with the many grievous sins that are daily committed against Thee. But in the words of Saul to David, I must confess that, “Thou art more just than I.”² Thou, O Lord, art more gracious, meek, and merciful than I. Thou sayest to me by Thy Prophet Isaias, know, O men, that I am far different from you: “For My thoughts are not your thoughts: nor your ways My ways.”³ And, as Theodoret says, Thou meanest thereby, My way of acting is widely different from yours: you hate Me, and I love you: you fly from Me, and I run after you; you wage war against Me, and My only defence is to load you with benefits: you run daily on the road to hell, and My only idea is to bring you back on the road to heaven; you

We, too, find it hard to understand this patience and mercy on the part of God.

¹ Pater, dimitte illis, non enim sciunt quid faciunt.—Luke xxiii. 34.

² Justior tu es quam ego.—I. Kings xxiv. 18.

³ Non enim cogitationes meae, cogitationes vestrae: neque viae vestrae, viae meae.—Is. lv. 8.

erect on earth prisons for evil-doers, and make wheels and gibbets to put them to death; the houses that I cause to be built for Me on earth are houses of reconciliation, and places of refuge for the wicked; My churches, altars, and confessionals are always open and ready to give refuge, pardon, and grace to sinners. O mercy! O goodness! I can say no more! That Thou, O great God, shouldst act so lovingly towards those who love Thee with their whole hearts; that Thou shouldst pour out Thy benefits on those who keep Thy commandments and try to do Thy will in all things, that I can understand; but that Thou shouldst be so good to the wicked, who despise Thee, mock at Thee, trample Thy law under foot, and often continue for years in the habit of sin, forgetting Thee altogether, O ye angels, that is what you may well be surprised at, that is what I cannot understand.

It is not to be expected from man.

Now I know what David meant when he sought to do good to some one of the house of Saul. "Is there any one left of the house of Saul," he asked, "that I may show the mercy of God unto him?"¹ Mark, my dear brethren, these words, "the mercy of God." Why does he use them? Did not David wish to be merciful to the descendants of his enemy? Yes. And why then did he not say, "my mercy," if so? But he was perfectly right in the words he used; for, generally speaking, our human mercy is shown only to those whom we love, or who do us good, or from whom we hope to receive benefits; while to do good to those who hate, persecute, and injure us requires the mercy of God. Yes, O Lord, Thou art the only One who showest such wonderful mercy even to Thy worst enemies, that Thou dost not allow Thyself to be wearied or overcome by any number of sins! Be Thou forever blessed, O God of infinite goodness! How can I return Thee adequate thanks for Thy great patience and astonishing mercy to sinners? If Thou hadst not borne with me, I should long since have been with the demons in hell.

This very mercy should make sinners repent at once.

Ah sinners, what a consolation it is for you and me to have to do with such a merciful God! But must not that very mercy move us at once to give up sin, to amend our lives, to return to Him by sincere repentance, and to love with all our hearts such a good God? "Despise thou the riches of His goodness, and patience, and long suffering," cries out to us the holy Apostle

¹ Numquid superest aliquis de domo Saul, ut faciam cum eo misericordiam Dei.—II. Kings ix. 3.

St. Paul; "knowest thou not that the benignity of God leadeth thee to penance." ¹ Will you not at last see that the mercy of God should impel you to amend? If not, you are not human, but are as hard and insensible as stone and iron.

Rosweid writes of a certain hermit who was so long assailed by grievous temptations, that he was reduced to despair, left his solitude, and went back into Egypt to indulge freely in the pleasures of a worldly life. He soon became inflamed with love for the daughter of a heathen priest, and demanded her of her father in marriage. The priest consulted his idol about the matter. No, answered the devil, speaking by the mouth of the idol, you must not give your daughter to that man until he has abjured his God and renounced his baptism. The poor despairing man found this condition very hard to fulfil; but his foolish passion was so great, that he consented at last, and renounced his baptism, his God, and the saints, as the devil required of him. (O impure love, to what a degree of madness thou canst bring men!) The priest went back to his idol to announce the acceptance of the condition; but the evil spirit was not yet satisfied; you must not give him your daughter yet, he said, for although he has really abandoned and renounced his God, yet God has not renounced him; He still protects and defends him. When the hermit heard this, he came to his senses at once. Alas! miserable wretch that I am, he cried out with bitter tears, what do I hear? what have I done? Good God, is it possible? Miscreant that I am, I have completely abandoned Thee, and renounced Thy friendship forever! I have denied and abjured Thee, and still Thou hast not forsaken me! still Thou favorest me with Thy protection! O my heart, why dost thou not burst with grief and sorrow? "The good God helps me even now, although I have sinned so grievously; and He has not abandoned me. Why should I abandon Him?" ² No, O merciful God, I will not leave Thee, but serve Thee faithfully for all eternity! Farewell to thee, O world, and to all thou hast! I will return to my solitude, and as long as I live will never cease deploring the grievous sin I have committed against such a loving and merciful God.

Shown by
an example

O sinners! let those be our sentiments also; let us, too, weep hot tears for our sins, and make a resolution to avoid them in

Conclusion
and sorrow
for sin.

¹ An divitias bonitatis ejus, et patientiæ, et longanimitatis contemnis? ignoras quoniam benignitas Dei ad poenitentiam te adducit.—Rom. ii. 4.

² Bonus Dominus etiam malum nunc adjuvat me, et non recessit a me. Cur ego recedam ab eo.

future. How often and how grievously have I not offended my God? How often have I not renounced Him, if not in words, at least by my actions? And yet the good God has not abandoned me. He has protected me while I was actually in the state of sin, and has never ceased to heap benefits on me. Why, then, should I leave Him? No, O good God, never again shall I do so! This very moment I will return to Him whom I have so often and so faithlessly forsaken. Hitherto I have often thought of heaven and its endless joys, but they did not seem precious enough to me to induce me to forego forbidden pleasures. I have often heard in sermons of the eternal flames of hell; but they did not seem terrible enough to deter me from vice. Thy infinite Majesty, O God, has hitherto failed to inspire me with reverence for Thee and with horror for sin; for I have not hesitated to sin before Thy very eyes. But I cannot resist the wonderful goodness and mercy with which Thou hast borne with me, ungrateful as I have been. I surrender to Thee, O Lord! My heart is subdued! Behold, it is now full of sorrow. And what grieves me most, is that I have ever offended so good a God. This very day I will candidly confess all my sins, and will never cease to be sorry for them as long as I live. And I will love Thee more earnestly, and seek to fulfil Thy holy will in all things more exactly, the more I remember that I have treated Thee most unjustly, O good God. Such is the resolution to which, with Thy grace, I will always remain faithful. Amen.

The above sermon may be preached on the text: *murmurabant Pharisei et Scribæ, dicentes; quia hic peccatores recipit.* Luke xv. 2. "And the Pharisees and Scribes murmured, saying: This man receiveth sinners," taken from the third Sunday after Pentecost.

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

Text.

Sinite utraque crescere usque ad messem.—Matt. xiii. 30.
"Suffer both to grow until the harvest."

The servants were anxious to root up the weeds at once, and to throw them into the fire; but the good man of the house, who was the only one to suffer loss on account of the weeds, said that they should be let alone to grow with the good wheat until the harvest time, and then they might be pulled up. In this

parable, my dear brethren, Christ represents the patience and long-suffering with which He endures sinners: for there is no doubt amongst the learned, that by the wheat are meant the just, and by the cockle, sinners. If creatures were allowed to work their will, they would at once say, like the servants in to-day's Gospel: "Wilt thou that we go and gather it up?" Give us permission, O Lord, to destroy the wicked off the face of the earth. But what does the merciful God answer? No, He says; be not too zealous: "Suffer both to grow until the harvest;" perhaps the wicked may still be converted and amend. This wonderful goodness of God, my dear brethren, etc.,—*continues as above.*

TWELFTH SERMON.

ON THE MERCY OF GOD IN BEARING PATIENTLY WITH AND RECEIVING SINNERS.

Subject.

The wonderful goodness and mercy of God towards the sinner, 1. while the latter is still in the state of sin, 2. when he wishes to leave the state of sin and to be converted.—*Preached on the first Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Estote ergo misericordes, sicut et Pater vester misericors est.
Luke vi. 36.

"Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful."

Introduction.

Mark these words, O sinners, and all you who have ever grievously offended God, and learn what a good and merciful Lord we have. Jesus Christ is not satisfied with merely showing His mercy publicly towards sinners, going after them everywhere and receiving them most lovingly into his friendship; but He also gives us as an example of mercy His heavenly Father, who makes His sun to shine on the good and the wicked, on the just and the unjust; and in fact, since the latter are more in need of pity and mercy, He shows special goodness to them by bearing with them so patiently while they are in the state of sin, and when He could at any moment hurl them into hell, and

by being ready to admit them into His love and friendship, if they do penance. This mercy, my dear brethren, which I have experienced hundreds of times, and therefore have so much cause to praise and bless unceasingly, will, I hope, to day be alone sufficient to win over your hearts and mine to God. What could not be done by the consideration of the uncertainty of life, the severity of God's judgments, and the eternal pains of hell, must and will eventually be effected by meditating on the merciful goodness of God; namely, sinners will be forced by a gentle violence to do sincere penance, and to avoid all sin in future. Teach us, therefore, O Lord, the wonders of Thy goodness and mercy to sinners! I will make known the thoughts with which Thou hast inspired me concerning them.

Plan of Discourse.

The wonderful goodness and mercy of God towards the sinner, while the latter is still in the state of sin; such will be the first part. The wonderful goodness and mercy of God towards the sinner, when the latter wishes to leave the state of sin and to be converted; such will be the second part.

Do Thou, O God, give us this day the grace and mercy, in case we are still in sin, to be moved by Thy wonderful mercy to conversion; and, in case we are already converted, to love Thee for the future above all things with our whole hearts. This we beg of Thee by the merits of Mary, the Mother of mercy, and through the intercession of the holy guardian angels.

Nothing is sweeter than revenge to one who has suffered injury.

Just as there is nothing sweeter or more agreeable to a healthy stomach than the food that is set before it, even if it consists only of a piece of dry bread; as there is nothing the thirsty man longs for so much as a draught of cold water; as one who loves always bears about in his heart and desire the object of his love; so, says the philosopher Aristotle, and experience confirms his words, there is nothing more pleasing to a passionate man, who has been grievously offended, than to give vent to his anger, and be revenged on his enemy. This is made evident by the secret joy that such a man experiences if he sees or hears that some evil has befallen the person who offended him; by his bitter envy and jealousy, if the other prospers; by his rage and resentment, if he cannot have satisfaction on him. Hence the world is struck with astonishment when it hears or reads that some one has forgiven his deadliest enemy, when he had him in his power and could have had full satisfaction from him. If one wishes to

excite admiration for king David, he is represented, not as slaying the giant Goliath, armed with nothing but his shepherd's staff and sling; not as killing with his own hand, while still a boy, the bear and the lion; but as allowing his sworn enemy Saul, who had inflicted countless injuries on him, and who was still pursuing him to take his life, to depart unharmed out of the cave without doing him the least harm, although he was completely in his power, a mode of action that compelled even Saul to shed tears. And such conduct is strange and almost incomprehensible to us; so that it is rare to find men who, if they are grievously offended and have a chance of avenging themselves, yet manage to conquer their anger and to forgive their enemy. Hardly to any purpose do preachers exhort people to forgive injuries; hardly to any purpose do they cry out till they are hoarse the words of Our Lord, "But I say to you: Love your enemies: do good to them that hate you."¹ Pardon those who have offended you, or else God will never pardon your sins; forgive, and that too from your hearts, or the fire of hell awaits you; you must necessarily choose one or the other. It is in vain, I say, to exhort people to practise the duty of forgiveness; for, generally speaking, they will remain as they were before. When anger and hatred have once taken possession of the heart, all the exhortations in the world will not prevent a man from being revenged when he can. So difficult it is for one of a passionate disposition to forgive his enemy, not to speak of loving and doing him good; so sweet and pleasant it is to be revenged.

O my Lord and my God, if Thou wert like men in this particular; if Thou, too, wert unwilling to restrain Thy hatred and anger; if Thou wert determined to take revenge on Thy enemy every time he offends Thee: oh, woe to me! where should I be now? Not here certainly; but long ago I should have been with the demons in the flames of hell! How would it now be with many of you, O sinners? Let us think a little of the past and of the state in which we are at present. How have we acted towards God, and how has God acted towards us? What injury has He ever done us? Is there any one who can point to the least thing that God has done to harm him? Nay, is there any one who can prove that God has not been constantly doing good to him every moment of his life? Therefore, in justice, there should

God is most grossly insulted by the sinner.

¹ Ego autem dico vobis: diligite inimicos vestros: benefacite his qui oderunt vos. - Matt. v. 44.

not be a moment of our lives during which we do not behave towards God with the greatest gratitude, reverence, fear, and love. But how have we acted towards Him in reality? Have we not dared, miserable creatures that we are, who are every moment in need of our God, have we not dared to rebel against Him without the least cause? How often have we not renounced His friendship, and declared war against Him; reviled and insulted Him to His face by our actions; despised, mocked, and laughed at Him; trampled on what we knew to be the expression of His will, and turned our backs on Him, thus showing Him that we cared little about Him? That is really what we have done every time we committed a mortal sin. That is what is still done every day by most men, by all kinds of injustice, by wilful drunkenness, impurity, cursing and swearing, calumny and detraction, in thought, word, and deed. For sin is nothing else than a rebellion against God, a contemning, dishonoring, insulting God; because man refuses to do what God wishes him to do, or does that which he knows to be displeasing to God. And what revenge has God, who is thus first insulted by us, what revenge has He taken, up to the present? "I have sinned," I might well say in the words of the Wise Ecclesiasticus, but with wonder at Thy patience, O Lord, and with most humble thankfulness for Thy goodness: "I have sinned, and what harm hath befallen me?"¹ In spite of having so wantonly offended Thee, I have as yet felt no punishment.

And He is
very angry
with the
sinner.

And is it because the great Lord does not feel the insults His weak and miserable creatures offer Him; just as a brave man does not mind the barking of a little lap-dog? Ah, indeed, He does feel them! He speaks Himself in the Sacred Scripture of the great sorrow and anguish caused Him by sinners transgressing His commands, and of the disgust, hatred, and anger He feels towards the sinner. "To God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike,"² He says in the Book of Wisdom. "Neither shall the wicked dwell near Thee; nor shall the unjust abide before Thy eyes. Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity."³ The same David speaks of the anger and disgust that God has of sin: "Shall Thy anger burn like fire?"⁴ And St. Paul also, when he says, "But according to thy hardness and impenitent

¹ Peccavi, et quid mihi accidit triste?—Eccus. v. 4.

² Similiter autem odio sunt Deo impius et impietas ejus.—Wisd. xiv. 9.

³ Neque habitabit juxta te malignus, neque permanebunt injusti ante oculos tuos. Odist omnes qui operantur iniquitatem.—Ps. v. 6, 7.

⁴ Exardescet sicut ignis ira tua?—Ibid. lxxxviii. 47.

heart, thou treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath.”¹ To show the sorrow and grief He feels at sin, God Himself uses an expression which, strictly speaking, could be employed by man only: “And God, seeing that the wickedness of men was great on earth. . . touched inwardly with sorrow of heart, He said: I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth. . . for it repenteth me that I have made them,”² since they now despise and offend Me. See what terrible vengeance God took on His own, innocent, Incarnate Son, when He allowed Him, after suffering unheard-of torments, to be nailed to an infamous gibbet, and that, too, for the sins of others, which He had undertaken to satisfy for. “For the wickedness of My people have I struck Him,”³ says His heavenly Father. Hear what the reprobate in hell have to say about it, who, although they were redeemed by the precious Blood of Christ, will have to suffer endless torments in that lake of fire, while the just, and good, and merciful God will look on, and will hear their howls of despair, without being in the least moved to mercy or pity; nay, He will laugh at their sufferings and take a special pleasure in them. “I will laugh in your destruction,”⁴ He says. Therefore God must feel most grievously hurt by sin, and His anger against sinners must be very bitter. Because, the more He must love Himself above all things, as the Supreme Good, the more also He must hate and abominate sin, which is opposed to Him, as the worst of all evils; so that no man can cause another such grief and vexation, or offer Him such an injury, as the sinner causes and offers to God by violating His commands deliberately; nor can any man have such hatred or anger against his bitterest enemy, as God has against the sinner. A soul in the state of mortal sin is in the sight of God such an abominable object, that a dead and putrid dog (such is the simile used by St. Augustine) causes less disgust to the most delicate nostrils, than such a soul causes to its God.⁵

But, my Lord and my God, what am I to conclude from this? Why dost Thou not pour out the vials of Thy wrath? Why dost Thou not let sinners feel Thy anger? Hast Thou perhaps

And can
punish him
at once, if
He pleases.

¹ Secundum autem duritiam tuam et impenitens cor thesaurizas tibi iram.—Rom. ii. 5.

² Videns autem Deus quod multa malitia hominum esset in terra. . . tactus dolore cordis intrinsecus, delebo, inquit, hominem, quem creavi, a facie terrae. . . poenitet enim me fecisse eos.—Gen. vi. 5, 6, 7.

³ Propter scelus populi mei percussi eum.—Is. liii. 8.

⁴ Ego in interitu vestro ridebo.—Prov. i. 26.

⁵ Tam tolerabilis canis putridus foetet hominibus, quam anima peccatrix Deo.

not opportunities, or means, or strength enough to revenge Thyself on Thy enemy? Is not man at all times, and in every place, even when he is actually committing sin and treating Thee so unjustly, completely in Thy power, so that Thou canst do with him as Thou pleasest? Dost Thou not hold him in Thy hands? Only give a sign to the clouds, and they will send down their lightnings on the head of the presumptuous wretch who dares to offend Thee; give a sign to the earth, and it will open and swallow him up; let the demons loose for a moment, and they will hurry him off to hell; withdraw from him for a single instant Thy own protecting hand, and he will at once fall back into his original nothingness. If Thou art so enraged against sinners, why dost Thou do none of those things?

Yet He re-
frains from
punishing,
and pa-
tiently
awaits the
sinner.

Ah, there is where we see the wonderful love, patience, meekness, goodness, and mercy with which God treats the sinner, inasmuch as he overcomes, so to speak, such an intense dislike, restrains such hatred and anger, and, although He has nothing good to hope from the sinner, and no harm to fear from him, yet he does not take the least revenge, when it is so easy for Him to take it; but with the greatest patience bears with his wanton offences and transgressions, and allows Himself to be insulted and annoyed, year after year, by daily sins, without doing the least thing to harm him, preserving him in life all the time. St. John Chrysostom makes some beautiful reflections on this mercy of God. See, he says, when a man wishes to build a house, what a long time it takes him to finish it from the foundation. How many tradesmen, laborers, masons, and carpenters have to work at it. Whole years may pass before it is in a fit state to be dwelt in. But if a house is to be thrown down, only a few days are required; a spark of fire is enough to destroy a palace, or to reduce this cathedral to ashes, unless measures are successfully taken to prevent the flames from spreading. It is quite the opposite with the works of God; the Almighty Lord builds up very quickly, but He is very slow in tearing down. In the beginning He formed the intention of creating this mighty world; how long did it take Him? He simply said, "*fiat*," let it be done, and it was finished. The earth was there, millions of stars shone in the firmament, the immense ocean was filled with fishes, the air with birds, the land with animals.

As He did
formerly,
when He
wished to

But when the same God was forced to destroy the wicked world by the universal Deluge, on account of its sins, it took Him a hundred and twenty years to complete His vengeance. For

the whole of that time beforehand He gave notice to men of the calamity that was impending over them; He sent to them the Patriarch Noe to exhort them to amend their sinful lives, and to tell them that, if they continued in their sins, punishment was to be inflicted on them by an angry God; but if they abstained from sin, that they might appease His anger. When Noe saw that his exhortations were fruitless, he began to build the ark; and what a long time it took him by divine command to finish it? He spent fully a hundred years at it, although he might have finished it much quicker, if he had employed more workmen to help him. Why was this? In order that men, seeing that the threat was meant in earnest, might have time to amend, and to do penance for their sins. "They waited for the patience of God," says St. Peter, "in the days of Noe, when the ark was a-building." And God waited patiently; it seemed hard to Him to destroy men, although they were His greatest enemies; just as a loving mother is unwilling to punish her dear child. At last the day appointed for the fulfilment of the threat arrived, and the clouds poured down torrents of water; but in what manner? They certainly could have overwhelmed the world at once; but even while inflicting punishment, the good God could not forget His mercy. The rain fell steadily for forty days, and the waters rose gradually until they entered the houses and finally outtopped the mountains. Why was that? asks St. John Chrysostom. Because the patience of God was waiting that men might have time, while climbing higher and higher to get out of the reach of the waters, to repent of their sins, and at all events to save their souls from the eternal flames of hell, as doubtless many succeeded in doing.

destroy the
wicked
world.

It is just the same to-day with me and you, O sinners! The good God is very quick in pardoning, and forgiving, and admitting us to His friendship; but He is very slow in inflicting on us the punishment we so well deserve, no matter what provocation we give Him. He waits from one day to another, from one month to another, from one year to another, nay, sometimes till old age creeps on us; and during the whole time He gives way to us as if we had done nothing whatever to displease Him. He exhorts, threatens, promises, runs after us, and calls out to us to return to Him. "What if God," says St. Paul, and we know by experience the truth of his words, "willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much

And as He
acts with
man now-a-
days also.

¹ Expectabant Dei patientiam in diebus Noe, cum fabricaretur arca.—I. Pet. iii. 20.

patience vessels of wrath, fitted for destruction.”¹ As if he had forgotten His omnipotence when He wished to be revenged on His enemies; as if He did not see our sins, and knew nothing about them. “Thou hast mercy on all,” says the Wise Man of Him, “because Thou canst do all things, and winkest at the sins of men for the sake of repentance.”² Thou actest, O Lord, as if sin did not affect Thee, because, as Thou Thyself affirmest with an oath, Thou desirest not the death of the sinner, and this Thou sayest by Thy Prophet Ezechiel in order to give the sinner courage to do penance. “Say to them: As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live;”³ as if his damnation would cause Thee some great loss; and Thou callest after him: “Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; and why will you die?”⁴

The presumption of the sinner and the goodness of God to him shown by a simile.

Oh! when I consider on the one hand the great presumption of the sinner in daring to rebel against God, and on the other hand the wonderful patience and mercy with which Gods acts towards him, I imagine I see a little child in the arms of its mother. The child has not yet come to the use of reason, but, small as it is, it has its fits of bad temper, and sometimes, when things are not to its liking, it can be very obstinate indeed; it kicks and struggles, and tries its best to get free from its mother’s arms; it even gnashes its teeth against her, and actually raises its hand to strike her, so angry is it in its weakness, at not getting what it wishes. And what does the mother do? Does she beat it? Sometimes, indeed, that would be a very good thing to do; but it is not generally done. Ah no! she presses the child to her heart all the closer, talks to it in a loving manner, and sings for it and soothes it, until it is quite satisfied. That is the only punishment she inflicts on her obstinate child. There you have a striking example of the presumption of the sinner, and at the same time of the goodness and mercy of God towards him. Man, when arrived at the age of reason, knows well that he is held in the arms, in the very lap of God, whose presence he can never avoid, and yet he dares to vent his anger against God, to revile Him, to despise Him, and, as it were, to raise his hand to strike Him in the face (for all the buffets that Christ, the Son of

¹ Quodsi Deus volens ostendere iram, et notam facere potentiam suam, sustinuit in multa patientia vasa irae, apta in interitum.—Rom. ix. 22.

² Misereris omnium, quia omnia potes, et dissimulas peccata hominum propter poenitentiam.—Wisd. xi. 24.

³ Dic ad eos: vivo ego, dicit Dominus Deus: nolo mortem impii, sed ut convertatur impius a via sua et vivat.—Ezech. xxxiii. 11.

⁴ Convertimini, convertimini a viciis vestris pessimis; et quare moriemini?—Ibid.

God, received from the Jews and the soldiers did not cause Him half so much pain and anguish as a single mortal sin, which offends Himself and His heavenly Father); and this undutiful conduct he persists in often for years and years. Meanwhile, how does God act towards him? Not otherwise than the loving mother or nurse acts towards the child; as He says Himself by the Prophet Osee: "And I was like a foster-father to Ephraim, I carried them in my arms: and they knew not that I healed them."¹ He holds him all the closer in His arms, that he may not die in the state of sin and fall into the jaws of the hellish wolf; He continues to bestow His benefits on him as before; He gives him the light of the sun; He warms him with fire, covers him with clothing, and gives him food and drink every day; for all these things must come from the hands of God. "Who," asks St. Lawrence Justinian in astonishment, "who can count the benefits that God bestows every day on ungrateful sinners?"² See how He commands all His creatures to serve and preserve them; see how He allures them by kindness;³ how He heaps benefits on them;⁴ how He calls to them by His promises and exhortations;⁵ how, with the greatest patience and overlooking their sins, He tries to bring them back to the right way;⁶ and how with the most loving caresses He tries to draw them to Himself."⁷

Oh, wonderful certainly is God in His goodness and mercy to the miserable and wretched creature who has offended and angered Him. Reflect on this, O sinner! If the little child, in the midst of its impotent struggles against its mother, were suddenly to come to the use of reason, what would be its sentiments when the fit of passion passes away? Would it not be filled with dismay and terror at its own insolence and presumption in having dared to raise its hand against her in whose arms it was carried, and who need only have taken away the support of her arms, when it would have at once fallen on the ground and, perhaps, broken its neck? Would it not be astonished at the meekness and goodness of its mother, in thus allowing it to beat her and struggle against her, without ceasing to show it the greatest love and tenderness? With what sorrow would it not beg pardon, and how sincere would not its love be

This wonderful goodness and mercy should move the sinner to do penance at once.

¹ Ego quasi nutricius Ephraim, portabam eos in brachiis meis: et nescierunt quod curarem eos.—Osee xi 3.
² Quis verbis explicet quanta quotidie ingratis peccatoribus Deus beneficia conferat?
³ Illos blanditiis alliecit. ⁴ Muneribus onerat. ⁵ Exhortationibus vocat.
⁶ Revocat indulgentia. ⁷ Charitate trahit.

in future for so good a mother? Ah sinner! why do you not do so now? Why are you not moved by the patience with which the good and merciful God has waited for you so long? You should consider the matter deeply, and often say to yourselves: God could many a time have hurled me into hell; and He has not done so, but, on the contrary, has conferred on me countless benefits. Let that thought cause you to shed tears of sorrow and repentance, and say, like King Saul, when David spared his life in the cave: "Thou art more just than I." I, O Lord, have insulted Thee, and Thou hast done good to me. I have fought against Thee to the utmost of my power, and tried almost to compel Thee to chastise me; and Thou hast spared me, and, like a mother, carried me in Thy arms. For that very reason I now detest my past insolence and presumption, and am resolved to return to Thee by sincere repentance. Courage then; delay no longer! You cannot do anything more pleasing to your heavenly Father than to fly at once to the lap of His mercy; and nothing will give Him greater pleasure than to receive and forgive you from His heart. How will He forgive you? Here again we have to admire the goodness and mercy of God to the sinner who does penance; as we shall briefly consider in the

Second Part.

It takes a great deal of care and trouble to obtain forgiveness of one whom we have offended.

If he who has offended another wishes to be re-admitted to his favor and friendship, what must he do, especially when the offended person is a mighty lord? Must he at once run to his house, acknowledge his guilt, and beg pardon? Certainly not; that would be a foolish thing to do; it would be only throwing oil on the flames. How could he expect the offended lord to give him a good reception, if he rushes into the house uninvited, although his only intention is to ask forgiveness? His conduct would be considered a fresh insult, that would inflame the other's anger anew, and perhaps make him receive the intruder at the point of the sword. The first question would be, who has asked you to come here? How can you dare to appear in my sight? Or, at all events, he need not expect a kind reception, and must not be surprised if the person he has offended turns his back on him, tells him in cold and scornful words to come another time, and at last consents to speak of forgiveness only when ample satisfaction has been offered for the insult. No; a

¹ Justior tu es quam ego.—I. Kings xxiv. 18.

matter of the kind must be dealt with much more carefully. The offender must employ the good offices of a third person to act as his advocate, and say a good word for him. And the advocate, too, has to be on his guard; it will not do for him to blurt out the matter at once; he must wait for a favorable opportunity, when the other is in good humor, and not even dare to say a word of the insult suffered until he has with great caution asked and obtained permission. Then he might say that the poor man (for he dare not as yet mention his name, unless he is expressly asked to do so) is in such trouble on account of having incurred displeasure, that he is very sorry for his conduct, and is ready to do anything at all by way of satisfaction; and would there be any objection to his sending an apology? and so on. So much trouble is required, so many plans have to be considered, and so much time spent, before one succeeds in being reconciled to the person whom he has offended. And if the means used are successful, and the reconciliation effected, there still remain often a secret dislike and mistrust in the heart of the offended person, and the insult suffered is never forgotten, so that there is no chance of true friendship ever existing between the parties again.

Ah! how different the Almighty and Sovereign Lord is to us in this respect. If I have made God my enemy; if I have fallen into disgrace with Him; if I have grievously offended Him a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand times; if I have wantonly insulted Him for ten, twenty, thirty, or forty years; how much time will it take to appease His anger, and be reconciled to Him? It would be but right and just that, as I have allowed Him to knock, sigh, and call out so often at the door of my heart, without deigning to give Him a hearing, and have turned Him away like a troublesome beggar; it would be only right that He, mindful of the way in which I have treated Him, should in turn allow me to knock and sigh without giving me an answer. But no; a single moment is all the time I require to be reconciled to Him; whatever moment suits me, if I am only in earnest, I will be always sure to find Him in a good humor, and ready, nay, anxious to forgive me and to offer me His grace and friendship. He Himself has promised by His Prophet Ezechiel, that, at whatever time the sinner is converted, he will live, and his former iniquities will no longer be remembered. And how am I to present myself before Him? Oh, there is no need of a third person's interference now to dispose His heart to

The sinner needs only a moment of repentance, and God forgives him at once.

listen to me; I need not seek for some one to present Him with an apology in my name! If I only wish, I myself can go directly to Him, although He is embittered against me; I can present myself before Him, and ask His pardon. What must I do to receive it? I have only to acknowledge my sins with true sorrow in confession; and if I have no opportunity of confession, a single penitent sigh, one heartfelt word of sorrow, "I have sinned, O Lord, and I am sorrow for it; I will never sin again;" that is quite enough to reconcile us thoroughly, and to blot out a thousand million sins, if I had committed them. I am again a friend of God, His beloved child, and a lawful heir of the kingdom of heaven. I am again admitted to grace, without bail or surety for my future conduct, although I have broken my word already a hundred times, and have abandoned Him after He has forgiven me. I am received by Him without any fear on my part that He will keep up against me the remembrance of my former wickedness, or that He will be less friendly to me on account of it, nay, with the assurance that He will not remember my sins any more.

And receives him with the greatest joy.

God receives me into His friendship, and that, too, with so much love and joy, that it seems as if He looked on it as a great happiness to be able to forgive me, and a greater one than I consider it to receive His forgiveness; so that it would be almost a new sin for me not to repent of my sins at once, in order to procure Him that happiness. Time does not allow me, my dear brethren, to illustrate this truth by some of the many examples of which the Holy Scripture is full. With what loving kindness did He not act towards the sinners Zachæus and Matthew, towards the woman taken in adultery, the Samaritan woman, the notorious sinner Magdalene, the penitent thief, Peter, who denied Him thrice, and Thomas, who had lost faith in Him? To none of these did He make the least reproach on account of the grievous sins they had committed; He never upbraided them with their vices; He treated them with the greatest friendship, ate and drank with them publicly, and defended them against detractors, as if He Himself were attacked in their persons, so that He got the name of being a protector, receiver, friend, and harbinger of sinners.

As appears from the Gospel parables.

If you wish to see what joy it gives the Almighty God to admit the repentant sinner to His friendship, read and meditate on the parable of the Good Shepherd, who leaves His whole flock to go in search of the one sheep that has gone astray. How He

seeks it over mountain and valley, and, when He has found it, brings it back on His shoulders rejoicing, and prepares a feast for His neighbors, that they may rejoice with Him. "Rejoice with Me," He says to them, "because I have found My sheep that was lost."¹ Read the parable of the Prodigal Son, to whose father God compares Himself: this undutiful son, after having squandered his whole patrimony in gluttony, drunkenness, and riotous living, and disgraced his father, came back half naked and starving, in the hope that his father would hire him as a servant. The father saw him coming afar off, and was not satisfied with merely admitting him into his house, which certainly would have been more honor than he deserved, but ran out to meet him, as if he were a great lord, and before asking what he wanted, fell on his neck and kissed him with tears of joy, sent all the servants hurrying about to get him new clothes, a ring for his finger, and shoes for his feet, and had a grand banquet prepared to testify to the joy he felt at having his son back again. "Let us eat and make merry," he said, "because this my son was dead, and is come to life again; was lost and is found."² The other son, who had always remained faithful to his father, never had any such rejoicings made over him; a fact of which he complained bitterly. "So I say to you," says Christ, "there shall be joy before the angels of God upon one sinner doing penance."³ St. Thomas makes a wonderful remark on this in admirable words: "God calls the angels together to rejoice, not with men, but with Himself. when a sinner does penance; as if man were the god of his God; as if the whole happiness of God consisted in finding the man whom He had lost, and as if God could not be happy without man."⁴

O sinner! how long will you refuse to give this great consolation and joy to the God who loves you so much? Have you not abused His patience long enough? Can you be so cruel as to offend Him still more, and to treat Him so shamefully? He is no Christian, but a heathen, a barbarian without religion (I am not saying half enough); he is an unreasoning wild beast, a monster; help me, my dear brethren, with your thoughts, to say

Conclusion
and repentance for
having offended such
a merciful God.

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

² Manducemus et epulemur: quia hic filius meus mortuus erat, et revixit; perierat et inventus est.—Ibid. 23, 24.

³ Ita dico vobis, gaudium erit coram angelis Dei super uno peccatore poenitentiam agente.—Ibid. 10.

⁴ Omnes angelos convocat ad congratulandum, non homini, sed sibi; quasi homo Dei deus esset, et tota salus divina in ipsius inventionem penderet, et quasi sine ipso beatus esse non posset.—St. Thom. opusc. lxxiii., c. 7.

what he must be, who is not touched by the wonderful patience and goodness of God; who is not moved by it to repent of his sins at once, and who, instead of loving such a good Lord with all his heart, actually offends Him anew! O my God, after all, what a severe revenge Thou takest on me; for Thou makest me ashamed of myself, and intolerable in my own eyes, when Thou remindest me of Thy loving mercy, when I think of the patience with which Thou hast borne with me so long while I was in the state of sin, when I recall to mind how I was wearied on the way of evil, and yet I could not exhaust Thy patience; how, after my many infidelities, Thou didst not take any revenge on me; how Thou didst confer innumerable benefits on me, Thy enemy; how Thou hast so often received me again and with joy into Thy friendship, never reproaching me with my former sins, and how Thou art willing henceforth to place me in the number of Thy beloved children. This mercy, I repeat, puts me to greater confusion than any revenge Thou couldst take on me, bitter death, strict judgment, fire and torments of hell, uncertain and long eternity, and anything else that can terrify me. I do not want you to impel me to do penance, and to abstain from sin in future! There is nothing more intolerable to me than to think that I have ever offended and despised so good a God; nothing more terrible than the thought of again offending Him. Take, O Lord, Thy heaven and all its promised joys away, and everything that could entice me to serve Thee; this incomprehensible mercy of Thine, which I have so often experienced, is quite powerful enough of itself to captivate my heart, even against my wicked and obstinate nature, and to draw it altogether to Thy love! O God of patience, how could I treat Thee so unjustly and offend Thee! I am sorry a thousand times for all my sins. "Be merciful," I say with St. Bernard, "to the miserable penitent, whom Thou hast spared so long when he was a sinner."¹ From this moment I am firmly resolved (mark, O holy guardian angel, what I am about to say, and write down the date and place in which I make this resolution!), not half-and-half, as hitherto, but with all the power of my heart, never more, O God, to offend Thee even by venial sin, wilfully and deliberately; but to love Thee constantly above all things, until, as I firmly hope from Thy great mercy, I shall one day in heaven be a living and ever grateful witness to Thy wonderful love and mercy to sinners. Amen.

¹ *Da misericordiam misero et poenitenti, cui tamdiu pepercisti peccatori.*

THIRTEENTH SERMON.

ON THE TRIALS WITH WHICH GOD VISITS THE SINNER.

Subject.

God visits the sinner with trials, that he may repent and amend; and woe to the sinner who has no trials to suffer!—*Preached on the feast of the Dedication of a church.*

Text.

Venit enim Filius hominis quærere et saluum facere quod perierat.—Luke xix. 10.

“For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

Introduction.

Such was the end that Jesus Christ Our Saviour had in view, when he came into this world: “to seek and to save that which was lost.” This was His only occupation as long as He lived on earth; to this were directed all His toil and labor, His watching and prayer, His hunger and thirst, His wanderings hither and thither, His eating and drinking with sinners, His preaching and miracles, His sufferings and death; everything He did was to bring eternal happiness to men, whom sin was bringing to eternal ruin. God has still the same will and intention with regard to us; as far as lies with Him, He desires the salvation of all men. To carry out His wishes He makes use of different means, according to the dispositions and characters of men; some who hear his voice, He tries to allure to Himself by kindness and friendliness, as He formerly did with Zachæus; others He calls by different crosses and trials, thus using a sort of violence with them, so as to make this life uncomfortable to them; and that is the experience of most sinners in the world. This last means is certainly very bitter to our sensuality, and we often think that God is ungracious and unmerciful to us, when He visits us with trials; yet the intention that God has in so doing is none other than to bring our souls thereby to eternal happiness. God visits with trials sinners who are still in the state of sin; He visits with trials the just who have done penance for their sins; He visits with trials the innocent who have never sinned; He visits with trials even those saintly souls that

lead holy lives. The first, that they may be converted to Him, and amend their lives; the second, that they may suffer in this life the punishment they have so richly deserved for their sins; the third, that they may be all the better preserved from the danger of sin, and may gain heaven; the fourth, that their virtue and holiness may be proved and increased. From this it follows that, when we have trials to suffer, we should take them with humility from the hand of God, who always means so well with us, and fully resign our wills to His, so that the suffering, which we cannot avoid, may not be without fruit for us. To-day I take the first class of men, who have most trials to suffer, and I say,

Plan of Discourse.

God visits with trials sinners who are in the state of sin, that they may repent and amend; and woe to the sinner who, since he does not amend, suffers no trials! Such is the subject of the present sermon.

O God, of goodness, one favor I have to beg of Thee, through the merits of Thy dearest Mother Mary and the intercession of our holy guardian angels, for those sinners who have much to suffer; not, indeed, that Thou mayest free them from their sufferings, for that I leave to Thy fatherly providence, and, indeed, I would rather ask Thee, if they cannot be brought to repentance any other way, to increase their crosses; but that Thou mayest open their eyes to see how well Thou meanest with them by visiting them in this life with trials and adversity, so that this knowledge may make them return to Thee at once. But for all others who suffer, we beg of Thee the grace that they may bear all their crosses with patience for Thy sake.

Chastisement is good and necessary for a stubborn horse, or a disobedient child.

There is in a stable a stubborn horse, which will bear neither bit, bridle, nor saddle, and kicks out viciously whenever the groom comes near him; what does the owner do in order to tame him, and make him useful? Does he give him more food, and keep his manger always full, so as to subdue him by kindness? No, indeed not; that would only make him worse. He tries harsh measures with him; puts a severe bit on him, and ties him so that he cannot kick; he leaves him for a time without food, and then gives him only a little chaff and straw to eat; in that way the horse will soon learn to know his master, and to obey him. But is it not wrong to treat a poor, dumb animal so cruelly? By no means; the horse is of no use; he has to be made

useful, and therefore that severe treatment is good for him. You hear a child crying; there is a man behind him with a stick, who is giving him a good beating; what do you think, my dear brethren? Is he not a cruel fellow? Why should he beat a harmless child? But a wise man would think at once, that man is the child's father; he means well with him, and wishes to make him a good boy; doubtless, the child has committed some fault, and therefore it is good and necessary for him to be punished, if there is no other means of teaching him to do what is right.

The author of the life of Andronicus Palæologus, the second emperor of that name at Constantinople, tells us that that emperor was once attacked by a grievous lethargy, which kept him in bed for a whole year, nor could any medicine be found to help him, until a person of great experience advised the empress to annoy and tease the sick man in every possible way, so that he should frequently be moved to anger; if that plan failed, there was no hope of his recovery. The empress, who dearly loved her husband, followed the advice punctually; and to torment him all the more, she went herself to his bedside, and commenced to shake him about from one side to the other, leaving him no chance of repose, either by day or night. The emperor begged to be let alone, but she was deaf to his cries; and if he asked for anything, she gave him quite the contrary. At last he could stand it no longer, and called out in a rage for his servants and soldiers. Am I not master in my own palace? he said; must I allow myself to be tortured to death, and that, too, by my own wife? But the empress stood by and only laughed at him; while the servants and lackeys had to do the same. The emperor was nearly mad with fury. But by the violence of his passion the vital spirits were stirred in him again, his blood was warmed, and the foul humors which had caused the illness were soon absorbed, so that he was fully restored to health, and lived for twenty years longer. Now suppose that during his sickness he had sufficient strength left, would he not have seized the empress in his anger, and strangled her with his own hands? Not a doubt of it. But when the matter was explained to him afterwards, and he found out how well the empress meant with him, he thanked her a thousand times for the love she showed him, and his love for her was immeasurably increased. It was a good thing for the emperor under the circumstances to be annoyed in that way, as otherwise he would have succumbed to his illness.

And also for
many sick
people.
Shown by
an example.

The sinner is sick; he is an unruly horse, a disobedient child.

My dear brethren, what is the sinner who is in the state of sin? Such is the question that St. Augustine asks. He is a sick man, he answers, who is sunk deep in vice; he finds rest and repose in sin, as long as he enjoys the false pleasure it gives, and so he lies there in imminent danger of eternal death, unless certain means are used to save him. This is conformable to what St. Paul says, who, when exhorting sinners to repent, speaks of their arising from sleep: "It is now the hour for us to rise from sleep."¹ What is the sinner? He is a disobedient, ill-behaved child, who, like the Prodigal in the Gospel, has run away from his Father into a distant land, even to the gates of hell, and has squandered away all the goods and treasures of his soul, all the merits of his former good works, all the grace and friendship of God, and all his right to the kingdom of heaven. What is the sinner? He is an obstinate horse that has shaken off his bridle, and refuses to bear the sweet yoke of his master. A madness against which the Prophet David has long since warned us, in these words: "Do not become like the horse and the mule, that have no understanding."²

God wishes to cure him.

Now, what shall the good God do with one who thus remains in the state of sin, if He still loves him, and desires his conversion? Hear His own words, in which He takes counsel with His Prophet Osee: "What shall I do to thee, O Ephraim? What shall I do to thee, O Juda?"³ What means shall I use to make this sinner repent? What an extraordinary thing that is! Does the Almighty God then actually ask advice as to how He is to help sinners? Yes, as St. Jerome says, speaking of this text, He acts as if He knew not what to do; "as if the Lord wished to say: I know not what medicine to apply to your wounds."⁴ What shall I do? Shall I allow the sick man to go on in his sleep? Ah! if I do that, he will awake only in the fire of hell. What shall I do? Shall I allow the unruly horse to run about the meadow and eat his fill of the rich grass? If I do that he will grow worse and worse, until I shall not be able to get any good of him. What shall I do? Shall I allow the prodigal son to go on in his evil ways and send him the means of continuing his excesses? Ah! if I do that, he will never think of returning to his father's house.

Other means have

What shall I do with the sinner? I will speak to him in a

¹ Hora est jam nos de somno surgere.—Rom. xii. 11.

² Nolite fieri sicut equus et mulus, quibus non est intellectus.—Ps. xxxi. 9.

³ Quid faciam tibi Ephraim? quid faciam tibi Juda?—Osee vi. 4.

⁴ Quasi dicat: non invenio quam plagis vestris possim adhibere medicinam.

friendly manner by My inspirations: “Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and will lead her into the wilderness; and I will speak to her heart.”¹ Yes, O Lord, do so; for thus St. Peter was converted after having thrice denied Thee, and having persevered obstinately in forgetting Thee; one look of Thine was enough to soften his heart: “And Peter, going out, wept bitterly.”² But what good will that do? Have I not often tried it before with that sinner? How often have I not exhorted him to repentance by Myself, by My angels, by his confessor, and by My servants, whom I sent to preach to him? How often have I not represented to him the uncertainty of the hour of death, the strictness of the judgment, the joys of heaven, and the eternal torments of hell, in order to warn him to amend his life? And in spite of all that, he is just as he was before; nay, he will not come to those sermons in which he fears that his conscience will be touched. What shall I do? I will send him still more health and temporal prosperity, and I will bless all his undertakings, and so I will conquer him by mildness: “I will draw them with the cords of Adam, with the bonds of love: and I will be to them as one that taketh off the yoke on their jaws: and I put his meat to him that he might eat.”³ Right, O Lord; for in that way Thou hast brought to Thyself so many frail and sickly people whom Thou hast miraculously cured; and Thou hast won over many thousand souls, when Thou didst feed them in the desert. But, after all, that plan is even less likely to succeed than the former; for the more generous I have been to him hitherto, the more ungrateful and obstinate did he become; nay, he even abused My benefits to offend Me more daringly. What shall I do? I will fill his conscience with fear and anxiety, as I have often threatened to do to sinners; I will give him “a fearful heart and languishing eyes, and a soul consumed with pensiveness.”⁴ Good, O Lord! Thou hast helped many hundred sinners in that way; for they could not bear the gnawing worm of conscience, that left them no repose day or night. But even that has done him no good hitherto; he has smothered his conscience and drowned its clear voice by the manifold sins that he has committed over and over again. What shall I do? What plan shall I have recourse to, that I may induce him to repent, and to avoid eternal death?

hitherto not helped.

¹ Propter hoc ecce ego lactabo eam, et ducam eam in solitudinem, et loquar ad cor ejus.

² Et egressus foras Petrus flevit amare.—Luke xxii. 62.

³ In funiculis Adam traham eos, in vinculis charitatis; et ero eis quasi exaltans jugum super maxillas eorum: et declinavi ad eum ut vesceretur.—Osee xi. 4.

⁴ Cor pavidum, et deficientes oculos, et animam consumptam moerore.—Deut. xxviii. 65.

At last He
must use
the rod.

There is still one means left, O Lord, which Thy servant David formerly proposed to Thee: "With bit and bridle bind fast their jaws, who come not near unto Thee."¹ Subdue, then, this unruly horse; torment and annoy this lethargic sick man, and give him neither rest nor peace; for, as Thou Thyself hast said by Thy Prophet Isaias, "Vexation alone shall make you understand what you hear."² Punishment alone will arouse him; let the undutiful son suffer hunger and thirst, so that he may be forced to return to his Father's house. Good, then, says the Lord; since I have the eternal welfare of sinners at heart, "I will visit their iniquities with a rod: and their sins with stripes."³ "I will kill, and I will make to live; I will strike, and I will heal."⁴ I will torment them until they are cured. I will allow that proud man, that vain woman, to fall into disgrace; then they will correct their pride, and, by being humbled, will learn that I, whom they have hitherto thought so little of, am their sovereign Lord, and that I can put down the mighty from their seat, and exalt the humble. I will send misfortunes to that unjust extortioner, that miser, that mistress of a family who is so hard to the poor; then they will enter into themselves, and will see with humility that it is from My hand that all temporal blessings come; and in the sorrow of their hearts they will cry out: "Our Father, who art in heaven, give us this day our daily bread." That impure young man I will throw on his bed by a violent fever; I will deform that vain and frivolous young girl by a hideous cancer; then their unchaste passions will cool down, and the dangerous occasions of sin will be removed from them. That gambler and drunkard shall in a short time suffer the pangs of hunger with his family; then he will forget his orgies, remain at home, attend to his work, and ask Me and others to have pity on him. This quarrelsome, litigious man shall have the worst of it in every lawsuit he undertakes; he shall be put to shame by his opponents, and then he will give up quarrelling and contending with others. "I will visit their iniquities with a rod: and their sins with stripes;" I will chastise those sinners with My rod; I will take away their consolation from them by death; I will send them one trial and cross after another; I will fill them with tears, and gall, and bitterness, so that life will become a burden to them; and then they will at

¹ In came et freno maxillas eorum constringer, qui non approximant ad te.—Ps. xxxi. 9.

² Tantummodo sola vexatio intellectum dabit auditui.—Isa. xxviii. 19.

³ Visitabo in virga iniquitates eorum; et in verberibus peccata eorum.—Ps. lxxxviii. 32.

⁴ Ego occidam, et ego vivere faciam: percutiam, et ego sanabo.—Deut. xxxii. 39.

last open their eyes, and find out by experience how bitter it is to abandon their Lord and their God; and when they are deprived of all human consolation, advice, and help, they will be forced to turn to Me, to bewail their sins, and to amend their vicious lives.

For, as St. Gregory says, "the eyes that are closed by sin are opened by penance."¹ The merciful God has often taken similar vengeance on sinners. "I will go after my lovers,"² says the abandoned woman by the Prophet Osee; I will go to my lovers with whom it is well with me. What did the Lord do? "Wherefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns."³ I will take away my corn in its season, and my wine in its season;⁴ as if to say, because My people have abandoned Me, I will visit them with crosses and trials, so that, like a traveller who finds the way blocked up, and is compelled to turn back, they may be forced to enter on a better way and to seek Me again. "And she shall say: I will go, and return to my first husband; because it was better with me then, than now."⁵ And this, my dear brethren, is the only reason why our good God visits with trials and afflictions those who are or have been in the state of sin. He does not take revenge, as if He were influenced by anger, He rather exercises the mercy of a loving father; He chastises the sinner to make him enter into himself, and do penance for his sins, that he may not be lost forever. "But whilst we are judged," says St. Paul, "we are chastised by the Lord, that we be not condemned with this world."⁶ Speaking of this text, St. Anselm says: God "does not spare us now, that He may spare us in eternity."⁷ "Therefore," he continues, "they who commit sin in this life, and have nothing to suffer in this life, are in a deplorable state;"⁸ for that is a sign that eternal sufferings await them. And woe to the Prodigal Son, if things had gone well with him in the strange land to which he went; or if his father, through foolish love, as many parents do, had sent him money to support him there; he would certainly have continued to lead a vicious life to the end! What a fortunate thing it was

Thus He draws the sinner by violence, as it were, to Himself.

¹ Oculos quos culpa claudit, poena aperit. ² Vadam post amatores meos.—Osee ii. 5.

³ Propter hoc, ecce, ego sepiam viam tuam spinis.—Ibid. 6.

⁴ Sumam frumentum meum in tempore suo, et vinum meum in tempore suo.—Ibid. 9.

⁵ Et dicet: vadam et revertar ad virum meum priorem: quia bene mihi erat tunc magis quam nunc.—Ibid. 7.

⁶ Dum judicamur autem, a Domino corripimur, ut non cum hoc mundo damnemur.—1. Cor. xi. 32.

⁷ Ideo nobis modo non parcat, ut in æternum parcat.

⁸ Unde illi merito lugendi, qui, in hac vita peccantes, in hac vita non patiuntur.

for him that his hunger drove him to beg for the husks that were thrown to the swine, and that no one gave to him. His torn garments and the pangs of privation drove him back to where he could be well fed and clothed: "And returning to himself, he said: How many hired servants in my father's house abound with bread, and I here perish with hunger? I will arise and will go to my father, and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee."¹

He thus
brought
back the
Prophet
Jonas.

In reference to this subject, we have in the Holy Scripture, my dear brethren, an example of a headstrong sinner, another of a proud sinner, and a third of a thoroughly wicked sinner. The first is the Prophet Jonas; the second, Nabuchodonosor; the third, king Manasses. God had commanded Jonas to go to Ninive and announce the impending destruction of that city on account of its crimes; but, whether through mistrust in the fulfilment of the prophecy, or through fear of exciting the anger of the king and the other inhabitants of Ninive, or through pride, because he foresaw that the people would do penance, and escape the threatened punishment, so that he would lose his reputation as a prophet, he disobeyed the divine command, and took ship, and went to Tharsis "from the face of the Lord."² His conscience troubled him on account of his disobedience; but in spite of that he went away, and refused to do as God had told him. There you have an example of a headstrong sinner. But was there no way of bringing him back to his duty? Certainly; for while he was on the sea, and was trying to get a little sleep, in order to forget for a while the torments his conscience was causing him, a violent storm arose, which placed the ship in the utmost danger, so that the sailors, after having cast lots, threw him into the sea, in order to save their own lives; the monstrous prison that then opened to receive him, the belly of the whale into which he was swallowed down alive, was the means of bringing him back to obedience, as he himself says in the second chapter: "I cried out of my affliction to the Lord; I cried out of the belly of hell. When my soul was in distress within me, I remembered the Lord."³ When I was not in danger, I despised the command of God, and refused to do what

¹ In se autem reversus dixit: quanti mercenarii in domo patris mei abundant panibus, ego autem hic fame pereo? Surgam et ibo ad patrem meum, et dicam ei: Pater, peccavi in cœlum et coram te.—Luke xv. 17-18.

² A facie Domini.—Jonas i. 3.

³ Clamavi de tribulatione mea ad Dominum. . . . Cum angustiaretur in me anima mea. Domini recordatus sum.—Ibid. ii. 3, 8.

He told me; but when I was thrown into the sea, and was sunk in the depths of that miserable prison, "I remembered the Lord;" I cried out to Him, repenting of my disobedience, and offered to do anything He wished: "I will pay whatsoever I have owed for my salvation to the Lord."¹ Thus freedom drove him away from God, and affliction brought him back. "And Jonas arose and went to Ninive according to the word of the Lord."²

Let us now consider the example of Nabuchodonosor; he became so inflated with pride, that he caused himself to be publicly adored as a god, as we read in the third chapter of the Book of Daniel. Daniel, at the command of God, went to him, and tried to bring him to his senses by exhortations and threats; but all was in vain; the sick man only became worse. He would walk on the terrace of his palace, and casting his eyes on the mighty city of Babylon, say with pride: "is not this the great Babylon, which I have built to be the seat of my kingdom, by the strength of my power, and in the glory of my excellence?"³ There was a proud sinner for you! Was there any means at all of converting him to God? Now mark what follows, my dear brethren. "And while the word was yet in the king's mouth, a voice came down from heaven: "To thee, O king Nabuchodonosor, it is said: Thy kingdom shall pass from thee, and they shall cast thee out from among men, and thy dwelling shall be with cattle and wild beasts; thou shalt eat grass like an ox."⁴ Then thou wilt learn to live like a human being, when thou wilt first have lived like a brute beast; in the desert thou wilt acknowledge the God whom thou despisest in thy palace; thou wilt learn humility by being chastised. "The same hour the word was fulfilled upon Nabuchodonosor."⁵ He was driven out from amongst men, and wandered about in the forest, without house, or shelter, or clothing; he ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dews of heaven, until at last his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle, and his nails became like the talons of a bird of prey. What is become of thy pride now, O king? Dost thou acknowledge thy Master at last? Hear what he says, after having spent

Nabuchodonosor.

¹ Quæcumque vovi, reddam pro salute Domino.—Jonas ii. 10.

² Et surrexit Jonas, et abiit in Niniven, juxta verbum Domini.—Ibid. iii. 3.

³ Nonne hæc est Babylon magna, quam ego ædificavi in domum regni, in robore fortitudinis meæ, et in gloria decoris mei?—Dan. iv. 27.

⁴ Cumque sermo adhuc esset in ore regis, vox de cælo ruit: tibi dicitur, Nabuchodonosor rex: regnum tuum transibit a te, et ab hominibus ejicient te, et cum bestiis et feris erit habitatio tua; fœnum quasi bos comedes.—Ibid. 28, 29.

⁵ Eadem hora sermo completus est super Nabuchodonosor.—Ibid. 30.

seven years in that miserable state: “Now, at the end of the days, I, Nabuchodonosor, lifted up my eyes to heaven . . . and I blessed the most High, and I praised and glorified Him that liveth forever: for His power is an everlasting power, and His kingdom is to all generations; and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing before Him . . . and there is none that can resist His hand. . . Therefore I, Nabuchodonosor, do now praise and magnify and glorify the King of heaven; because all His works are true, and His ways judgments, and them that walk in pride He is able to abase.”¹ Compare now, my dear brethren, the conceited idea the king first had of himself, with the humble and holy thoughts that now fill his contrite heart. That was the fruit of calamity; “at the end of the days” of my misery, “I lifted up my eyes to heaven.”

Manasses,
and often
the Jewish
people.

And woe to Manasses if he, too, had not been humbled and chastised! He was one of the most impious of the kings of Juda, who not only publicly insulted his Creator by adoring false gods, and building temples to them, but also led into all kinds of vice the people whom he ruled over; he “seduced Juda, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to do evil beyond all the nations:”² so that they became worse than the heathens. God had often spoken to his heart; but he never deigned to listen: “And the Lord spoke to him and to his people, and they would not hearken.”³ And yet, O the patience and long-suffering of the divine mercy! this impious man, sunk in crime, became a holy penitent and a public proclaimer of the divine praises. How was the change effected? The Holy Scriptures tell us that the Lord sent the Assyrians to attack him, and they bound him with chains like a common thief, led him off to Babylon, and threw him into a gloomy dungeon. There, in the darkness of his prison, he began to see what he could not see in the clear light of day: “And after that he was in distress, he prayed to the Lord his God, and did penance exceedingly before the God of his fathers . . . and Manasses knew that the Lord was God . . . and he took away the strange gods . . . and he

¹ Post finem dierum ego Nabuchodonosor oculos meos ad cœlum levavi . . . et Altissimo benedixi, et viventem in sempiternum laudavi, et glorificavi; quia potestas ejus potestas sempiterna, et regnum ejus in generationem et generationem; et omnes habitatores terræ apud eum in nihilum reputati sunt . . . et non est qui resistat manui ejus . . . nunc igitur ego Nabuchodonosor laudo, et magnifico, et glorifico, regem cœli; quia omnia opera ejus vera, et viæ ejus judicia, et gradientes in superbia potest humiliare.— Dan. iv. 31, 32, 34.

² Seduxit Judam, et habitatores Jerusalem, ut facerent malum super omnes gentes.— II. Paral. xxxiii. 9.

³ Locutusque est Dominus ad eum, et ad populum illius, et attendere noluerunt.—Ibid. 10.

repaired the altar of the Lord . . . and he commanded Juda to serve the Lord, the God of Israel.”¹ Woe to the Jews, also, if they had been always left in peace! Oh, how good and how necessary it was for them often to feel the rod of chastisement! What the Holy Scriptures say about them is wonderful. Nearly always, during their periods of prosperity, they rebelled against God, and, as the text says, turned their backs on His law: “They have turned their back to Me,” is the complaint that God makes of them by the Prophet Jeremias, “and not their face.”² But nearly always when they were tried by affliction, they changed about, and did penance: “And in the time of their affliction they will say: Arise, and deliver us.”³

What a fortunate thing it was for David to be tried by afflictions while he was still in the state of sin! He says himself: “For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; I am turned in my anguish, whilst the thorn is fastened. I have acknowledged my sin to thee: and my injustice I have not concealed.”⁴ Mark, my dear brethren, how David calls tribulations first the heavy hand of God, and then a pricking thorn. You may have remarked how, when a person has something sticking in his throat, he works and strains himself to get it out; now, what is the best way of helping him? It is to slap him on the back with the open hand, for thus he will be assisted in his efforts to clear the windpipe of the obstacle that hinders breathing. Now, what David means is this: O my Lord and my God, how would it have been with me, if Thy hand had not so often chastised me! My sins would not have allowed me to draw the breath of love to Thee; but now, praise to Thy mercy, and thanks to Thy chastising hand, I am made right again: “For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me.” Again, he calls tribulation a pricking thorn: “I am turned in my anguish whilst the thorn is fastened.” Why? A person is running at full speed, and suddenly he stops. What is the matter? Oh, he cries, I have got a thorn into my foot, and must stop to take it out. In the same sense David says of himself: I had begun to run in

David and Augustine acknowledge how good trials were for them.

¹ Qui postquam coangustatus est, oravit Dominum Deum suum, et egit poenitentiam valde coram Deo patrum suorum . . . et cognovit Manasses quod Dominus ipse esset Deus . . . et abstulit deos alienos . . . porro instauravit altare Domini . . . praecepitque Judæ ut serviret Domino Deo Israel.— II. Paral. xxxiii., 12, 13, 15, 16.

² Verterunt ad me tergum, et non faciem.—Jerem. ii. 27.

³ Et in tempore afflictionis suæ dicent: surge, et libera nos.—Ibid.

⁴ Quoniam die ac nocte gravata est super me manus tua: conversus sum in ærumna mea, dum configitur spina: delictum meum cognitum tibi feci: et in justitiam meam non absecundi.—Ps. xxxi. 4, 5.

the way of sin; and how far might I not have gone, if something had not occurred to stop me? Now I stand still and cannot go any farther, because Thou, my God, hast placed the thorn of tribulation in my way: "I am turned whilst the thorn is fastened." Woe to Augustine, if he had not been wounded by this thorn! Hear how joyfully and thankfully he addresses God, who chastised him: "Thou, O Lord, wert there mercifully chastising me."¹ Thou wert against me in everything, O Lord, and apparently didst treat me harshly; but in reality Thou wert merciful to me. Thou hast made bitter to me everything that could lead me into sin; Thou hast strewn the way of sinful pleasures with thorns for me; and therefore I praise Thy gracious providence, for I never should have freed myself from the miserable state of sin, if Thou hadst not been thus mercifully cruel to me.

Therefore, woe to the sinner who is left in peace, and is not chastised by God!

And woe to you, O sinner, whoever you are, if during your long-continued habits of sin you do not feel the thorn of adversity and the weight of God's chastising hand! Woe to the sick man, when he is gone so far that the physician says he is to be refused nothing; for that is a sign that there is no hope for him. Unlucky the horse that is allowed to roam about at will. If you see a horse in the field with one foot tied, you know at once that he has an owner, who will come to get him in the evening. But if you see one roaming about without bridle or halter, you at once think that he is of no more use, and that he is turned out to become the prey of the first wolf that sees him. O man, in what a miserable, dangerous state you are, when you live in sin! Yet if you are tied, if you have much trouble to bear, you can console yourself to some extent; for that is a sign that the great Master has still a care for you and your salvation. But if things are prospering with you, and you have nothing particular to trouble you, then, indeed, I am sorry for you, for you are in a bad way. "Sinners," says St. John Chrysostom, "should always be in dread; but more especially when they have nothing to suffer."²

For that is a sign that God is extremely angry with him.

For that is a sign that God is embittered against them, that He has no further care for them, and that He has delivered them over as a prey to the hellish wolf. "Do you wish to know," asks St. Augustine, "how great a punishment it is to suffer nothing?"³ Ask David, and he will tell you: "The

¹ Aderas Domine misericorditer sæviens.

² Semper quidem timere peccantes oportet, maxime vero cum grave patiantur nihil.

³ Vis nosse nulla poena, quanta sit poena?

sinner hath provoked the Lord, according to the multitude of His wrath He will not seek him.”¹ He will allow him to go without taking interest enough in him to inflict salutary punishment on him. If the anger of God were not so great, says St. Augustine, He would not allow the sinner to go unpunished; but because His anger is extreme, He does not punish him.”² One man is given to all sorts of unjust practices, and makes much profit with his ill-gotten gains; another indulges in impurity for years, and yet has the name of being a good Christian; a third has not made a good confession for the last ten years or more, and yet he has nothing special to complain of; things go very well with him. How is that? God is extremely angry with him, and therefore does not visit him with chastisement, and that is a sign that eternal damnation awaits him. Many, says another holy Father, are disobedient like Jonas; but they are not cast into the sea like Jonas. Why? “Because the sea of the bottomless abyss is yawning for them.”³ Many have committed the same and more numerous sins than the Israelites in the desert; but they are not like the Israelites bitten by fiery serpents; why? “Because the worm that dies not is awaiting them.”⁴ Many who lead most wicked lives have, like the rich glutton, a very happy time of it here; why? “Because the eternal flames of hell await them.”

O holy David, what reason hadst thou not to expect this divine anger to fall on thee, when thou didst cry, with a heart full of anguish: “O Lord, rebuke me not in Thy indignation!”⁵ Allow me not to sin and to go unpunished! That my own son persecutes me; that I am driven out of my kingdom; that I am reviled by my own subjects; that Thou visitest my people with famine, war, and pestilence; these are punishments that are bitter enough; yet they are useful for my soul and they will help me to amend. They are punishments that bring me consolation, since they prove that Thou still hast a care for me: “Thy rod and Thy staff, they have comforted me.”⁶ Yes, O Lord, I am ready to suffer more and more of such chastisements; they come from the hand of a loving Father; and therefore I will kiss with thankfulness the hand that thus strikes me. But one thing I

The sinner should deprecate this anger, and beg God to chastise him.

¹ Exacerbavit Dominum peccator, secundum multitudinem iræ suæ non queret.—Ps. ix. 4.

² Ideo non exquirat, quia multum irascitur.

³ Quoniam pelagus eos expectat abyssi sempiterni.

⁴ Manet eos vermis, qui non morietur.

⁵ Domine, ne in furore tuo arguas me!—Ps. vi. 2.

⁶ Virga tua et baculus tuus: ipsa me consolante sunt.—Ibid. xxii. 4.

beg of Thee, O Lord: "Rebuke me not in Thy indignation;" let me not run on in the road of vice without punishing me! This is the divine anger that even innocent and holy souls have feared, although they were not conscious of any mortal sin, so that they often earnestly begged of God to send them tribulations, as a sign that He was still their good Friend; but if they were free from trials for any length of time, they would complain to God, and examine their consciences more carefully, to see if they had not perhaps been guilty of some sin, on account of which He had determined to reward their former good works only in this life.

Therefore God means well with the sinner when He sends him crosses.

See now, my dear brethren, how fortunate in the midst of his misfortune the sinner is, when God chastises him here, in order to bring him to repentance. "Oh, happy the servant," says Tertullian with reason, "whose amendment the Lord insists on, and with whom He deigns to be angry in a fatherly manner."¹ And how wrongly and foolishly we often act by murmuring and complaining on account of misfortune or adversity, and by looking on God as if He were a hard task master, who, through ill-will towards us, takes a pleasure in seeing us suffer! Oh, no! the stripes that we receive from His fatherly hand are all so many proofs of His love. "Esteeming these very punishments to be less than our sins deserve, let us believe that these scourges of the Lord, with which, like servants, we are chastised, have happened for our amendment, and not for our destruction."² So spoke Judith to the citizens of Bethulia, when they were besieged by the enemy, and were in sore distress.

Conclusion and exhortation to bear daily crosses with thankfulness.

Therefore, my dear brethren, no matter how numerous and grievous our daily crosses may be, let us bear them with humility and thankfulness from the hand of our heavenly Father, and at least be resigned to His holy will. He means well with us when He sends us crosses, if we have already committed sin; for He thus enables us to pay, with a light and easy suffering, the debt we have contracted, so that we may not have to suffer the far more grievous punishments of the next life. He means well with us if we are still innocent and have never sinned, (ah, how few there are of whom that could be said with truth!) because by trials He keeps us out of the occasions of sin, and gives us an opportunity of increasing our merit and our eternal glory. He

¹ O beatum servum, ejus emendationi Dominus instat, cui dignatur irasci.

² Reputantes peccatis nostris hæc ipsa supplicia minora esse flagella Domini, quibus quasi servi corripimur ad emendationem, et non ad perditionem nostram evenisse credamus.—Judith viii. 27.

means well with us if he sends us crosses when we are still in the state of sin. which, I hope, is not the case with any one here; because, by sending us crosses, He is trying to bring us back to Himself and to His grace. It is better for us that He should chastise us here and reward us hereafter, than that He should spare us here, and punish us hereafter. Let us not be amongst the number of those wretched mortals who daily groan under the weight of the cross of bitterness and sorrow that they have to bear in the world, and yet lead godless lives. And, unfortunately, amongst the common people who have to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow, nay, even amongst the poorest beggars, who have hardly enough to still the pangs of hunger, there are sometimes found the most abandoned and wicked people, who find in the very means that the good God offers them to be converted and to refrain from sin only an occasion of greater depravity, of robbing and stealing, of swearing and cursing, of blasphemy and despair; and thus, of the crosses that God sends them to bring them to heaven, they make by their perverse wills a road to eternal ruin. Alas, poor souls, if I pity any one, I pity you! You have to suffer here, and to suffer in eternity! You have no consolation here, and you will have none hereafter; you are tormented here, and will be tormented there; here you have a hell, and there hell awaits you also! What a terrible thing!

Ah, Christians, may God keep us from the madness of making such a miserable exchange of one state of misery for another! Let us rather, according to the wish and intention of our heavenly Father, and enlightened by the crosses He sends us, say, when we have sinned, the words of the Prophet Jeremias, “Thou hast chastised me, and I was instructed.”¹ Thou hast punished me, O Lord, and hast enlightened me thereby. I adore, love, and praise Thy goodness and mercy, in having thus awakened me out of the sleep of sin! I now acknowledge and confess with bitter sorrow that I have often and shamefully offended Thee: “I will go and return to my first husband; because it was better with me then, than now.” I will arise and go back to my former Master, with whom I was better off than I now am in the state of sin. If I have trials to bear in His service, I shall at all events have the consolation of knowing that I am His friend, His child, His heir. I resign myself henceforward, O Lord, to Thy fatherly providence, and humbly submit to the cross Thou wishest me to bear! Chastise my body, but spare my soul; act

And to
make use of
them for
repentance.

¹ Castigasti me, et eruditus sum.—Jerem. xxxi. 18.

according to Thy justice with me in this life; but show Thy mercy to me hereafter, that it may be true also of me, that, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Amen.

On the Advantage of Trials for the Just and Pious, see the following fourth and fifth parts.

FOURTEENTH SERMON.

MARY IS THE REFUGE OF SINNERS WHO WISH TO DO PENANCE.

Subject.

Mary assumed into heaven is the sure refuge and helper of sinners who wish to do penance: therefore sinners should have recourse to her, to get the grace of repentance.—*Preached on the feast of the Assumption.*

Text.

Assumpta est Maria in cælum : gaudent angeli.—Holy Church.
"Mary is assumed into heaven; the angels rejoice."

Introduction.

That I readily believe. And good reason you have, O angels, to rejoice and be glad on this day of triumph, on which you receive into your midst your sovereign Queen, whose arrival you had so long expected! Rejoice therefore, and sing a hymn of praise to this ever-Blessed Virgin! But what do we gain thereby? "Mary is assumed into heaven;" our dearest Mother is gone from us, and we, poor orphans, are left behind in this valley of tears; and so, while you rejoice, must we weep and lament, since our Comfortress and Advocate is taken away from us? Yes; so it is: "to thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve; to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears." Yet, what am I saying? Dry your tears, all ye mortals on earth, and rejoice, too, with the angels! "Let us all rejoice in the Lord," as the Holy Catholic Church exhorts us to-day in the Holy Mass, "celebrating a festive day in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, at whose Assumption the angels rejoice, and praise the Son of God." In truth, my dear brethren, we have all, without exception, sinners as well as just, good reason for gladness; for if Mary were not in heaven, the just would not have at the throne of God a Patroness, by whom it is God's will that

they should gain heaven; if Mary were not in heaven, sinners would not have at the throne of God a Refuge and Helper to appease for them the divine anger, and to obtain for them the grace of true repentance and conversion. Sinners, since you are in the majority amongst men, I address myself now particularly to you; if the number and grievousness of your sins deter you from returning to God, merciful as He is, then do not lose courage; rejoice; Mary is assumed into heaven; go to her boldly; she will certainly receive you, if you wish to be readmitted by penance to the friendship of God. This I shall now show in detail, to the glory of this Mother of mercy, to whom, after God, I must confess that I have to ascribe everything that is good in me.

Plan of Discourse.

Mary assumed into heaven is the sure refuge and helper of sinners who wish to do penance: such is the whole subject of this sermon, which shall be partly a panegyric of the Queen of heaven, and partly a source of consolation for sinners who have lost courage. Sinners, have recourse to the Blessed Virgin in order to obtain the grace of repentance. Christians, let us all honor and love her constantly: such shall be the conclusion.

O Mary, Mother of mercy, the gift that we expect from thy generous hands on this, thy glorious day of triumph, on which thou wert assumed into heaven to be the special advocate of sinners with thy Son, is the grace of repentance for sinners, and of true devotion and love of thee for us all. Help us, O holy angels, to obtain this request from your Queen and Mistress, Mary.

Here I take for granted a truth affirmed by all the holy Fathers who have written in praise of the Mother of God, namely, that, in the present arrangement and dispensation of His Providence, God gives no grace to men which does not come through the hands of Mary. There is no mistaking the words of St. Bernard on this point: "God wishes us to have nothing, unless what passes through the hands of Mary."¹ Other holy Fathers call her the neck of the Church, by which all gifts and graces flow down on the mystic body, the faithful, from Jesus Christ, the Head. "If we have any hope, any confidence of salvation, any grace, we know that it flows over on us from her."² All this is truly a gift of the divine generosity, but we must know that we receive it through the hands of the Blessed Virgin. Therefore

The grace of true penance comes through the hands of Mary.

¹ Nihil nos Deus habere voluit, quod per Mariæ manus non transiret.

² Si quid spei, si quid salutis, si quid gratiæ in nobis est, ab ea noverimus redundare.

we cry out to her with the Catholic Church: "Mary, Mother of grace, Mother of mercy."¹ "Hail, our life, our sweetness, and our hope."² From this truth, which I shall prove more in detail on a future occasion, it follows, as a matter of course, that the grace of true repentance for the sinner must necessarily come through the hands of Mary; for if all graces, without exception, are dispensed by her, certainly the grace of repentance is included amongst them.

And there is no grace which she dispenses so readily.

And, indeed, there is no grace that the Blessed Virgin is more ready to bestow, none that her true children, who through weakness have fallen into mortal sin and lost their right to heaven, can expect from her with greater certainty, than the grace to repent and to return to God. This readiness and generosity come, first, from the necessity of this grace, without which all other gifts and benefits of God can be of no use to the sinner, and there is no hope of his eternal salvation. If I have grievously offended God, and do not penance, which I cannot do unless God first gives me His supernatural grace, all is lost for me, and I am doomed to hell; so that, while I am in that miserable state, there is nothing more necessary for me than the grace of true repentance. Again, that generosity comes from the love of Mary for her Divine Son, and from her intense desire to increase His honor and glory, and to extend His kingdom on earth, which is increased by the conversion of sinners, to save whom from the power of the devil, Jesus Christ, Mary's Son, shed His blood, and died a shameful death on the cross. Thirdly, it comes from her ardent desire for the salvation of all men, and from the inexhaustible, innate charity and mercy that she has especially for souls that are going astray; a charity and a mercy that, according to the testimony of the holy Fathers, are so great and wonderful that, dearly as she loves her Son, cruel as was the sharp sword that pierced her heart when she saw Him hanging on the cross, nevertheless, if it were necessary for our salvation and in accordance with the will of our heavenly Father, she is ready to nail to the cross, with her own hands, that Son whom she loves so much, so that we poor mortals might be saved from hell, and become heirs of the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, with reason is she called the Mother of mercy, and not in vain do we cry to her in our necessities, "turn, then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy towards us, O clement, O pious, O sweet Virgin Mary."

¹ *Maria. Mater gratiæ. Mater misericordiæ*

² *Vita. dulcedo. et spes nostra. salve.*

Finally, she is impelled to this mercy still more strongly by what she knows to be the will of her Son Jesus Christ; for He has appointed His Mother as mediatrix between Himself and men, and He has raised her in heaven, above all the choirs of angels and all the elect, as the advocate and patroness of sinners, that she may regain for them what they have lost, and be to them a city of refuge, in which they can be safe from the anger of the divine justice. Long before her birth, our Blessed Lady was prefigured in Queen Esther, who was raised to the throne that she might intercede with king Assuerus for the Jewish people, who were already condemned to death, and persuade him to revoke the sentence against them, and restore them to freedom. Another figure of that powerful advocate for sinners was Abigail who, by offering presents to David, soothed his anger against her foolish husband, the wicked Nabal. A symbol of the necessity of her help for those who are in the state of sin is the ark of Noe, in which alone safety was to be found from the waters of the Deluge. "Who is she," ask the angels in the Canticle, "that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun?"¹ We know that it is the most Blessed Virgin who is alluded to in those words; but why is she compared to the morning rising, to the moon, and to the sun? "The moon shines during the night," says Pope Innocent, "the aurora early in the morning, and the sun during the day."² Mark, my dear brethren, the explanation of the mystery: "the night is the state of sin;"³ "the morning rising is the beginning of penance;"⁴ "the day is the state of sanctifying grace."⁵ Now, Mary is the aurora, the moon, and the sun at once; like the moon, she shines on sinners, that they may not, in the unhappy state in which they are, be hurried before the divine justice, and be cast into eternal darkness; like the aurora, she shines on those who desire to do penance, that they may obtain from God the grace of a true supernatural contrition; like the sun, she shines on the just, that they may be kept from sin, and may persevere in grace.

Jesus Christ, her Divine Son, has confirmed the truth of this to St. Catherine of Siena. "Mary," He says, "is that sweetest bait, by which I attract sinners to Myself."⁶ No living thing is so shy as a fish in the water; the least noise, or the shadow of a

Mary is appointed mediatrix between God and man.

By whom Christ wishes sinners to be converted.

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

² Luna lucet in nocte, aurora in diluculo, sol in die.

³ Diluculum poenitentia.

⁴ Maria est esca dulcissima, qua ad me peccatores traho.

⁵ Nox culpa.

⁶ Dies gratia.

finger is enough to make it dart down into the depths, through fear of being caught; yet, at the same time, there is no animal more easily caught than a fish, if one has only a well-baited hook. The same quality may be observed in sinners; like fish, they swim away from the hand of God into the troubled waters, and hide themselves in the abyss of their vices, and sometimes for whole years they refuse to allow themselves to be caught by the grace of God. God, who is so long-suffering and patient, will not compel them by violence, lest He should lessen His own honor and their freedom and merit; but He wills that they should of their own accord return to Him by sincere penance; and what does He do to effect that? "Mary is that sweetest bait by which I attract sinners to Myself." He uses His Mother's mercy as a bait to bring all those fish back to Him; they have some remnants of devotion and love to the Mother of God left, and so, by her intercession, they receive the grace of repentance, and thus from her hand they get pardon from God.

Before
Mary came,
God was
very severe
with sin-
ners.

Oh, if in former times this Mother of Mercy and refuge of sinners had been in the world, the justice of God would not have taken such fearful vengeance on souls! I shudder and tremble when I read in the Holy Scripture how sinners often fared after the commission of sin, and I must acknowledge that in those days what the Lord said by the Prophet Isaias was quite true: "Hell hath enlarged her soul, and opened her mouth without any bounds;"¹ and has swallowed souls without number. For then, as our Father Cornæus says, "there was not Mary, the Mother of mercy,"² to appease the anger of God, and to rescue many a poor soul out of the state of sin by obtaining for it the grace of repentance, thus saving it from hell. In the very dawn of creation many millions of the princes of heaven rose in rebellion against God by giving way to a single thought; and their offended Creator hurled them all at once into the pit of hell, without allowing them a moment for repentance, and without leaving them any hope of pardon; for then there was not Mary, the Mother of mercy, who perhaps would have obtained for many of those rebellious spirits the grace of repentance.

Against sin-
ful men on
earth.

Later on men began to lead impure lives on earth, and the Lord was so angry with them, that He destroyed the whole earth by a deluge, and hurled down to hell numbers of impenitent souls. Mary, the Mother of mercy, was not there then; if she

¹ Dilatavit infernus animam suam, et aperuit os suum absque ullo termino.—Is. v. 14.

² Nimirum non erat tunc Maria, Mater misericordiæ.

had been, perhaps at her intercession God would have laid aside the rod with which He chastised the world so severely. Later still, fire was rained down from heaven on Sodom and Gomorrha, and those cities, with all their inhabitants who were sunk in impurity, were burned to ashes, while again many sinful souls were cast into hell. The sea swallowed Pharaoh with all his host, while he was in the very act of disobeying the divine command. How often were not the Israelites punished by sudden death immediately after having committed sin? For there was not then Mary, the Mother of mercy, to take the sword of vengeance out of the hand of God, and to procure the conversion and salvation of many a soul.

My dear brethren, if the world still exists in our own days, in spite of the fearful number of sins that are committed in it; if fire does not descend from heaven on many a wicked city; if we are not often exposed to the danger of a deluge, which we so richly deserve; if the earth does not often open under our feet and swallow us up, while we are actually engaged in offending God; if many persons, whose lives are more wicked and brutish than those of any in former times, are not at once struck dead by lightning; if an angry God bears so patiently with the greatest sinner, and waits till the very last moment for him to repent, who is the cause of that? Such is the question asked by Pomerius, an old author, who wrote about the year of Our Lord 490. He says: "Since evils are now continually on the increase in the world, why does God spare it now; for He used to punish far more severely sins far less than those that are committed nowadays?"¹ He answers the question himself by saying: "All this God does on account of the Blessed Virgin."²

That they are not now punished so severely is due to Mary's merciful prayers.

She is the rainbow that God set in the heavens after the Deluge, as a sign that He would nevermore destroy the world by a flood: "My bow shall appear in the clouds; and I will remember My covenant with you . . . and there shall no more be waters of a flood, to destroy all flesh."³ Speaking of this text, Richard of St. Victor says: "Mary is the rainbow;"⁴ and she is placed as a sign of mercy and grace, to show that God will not, as formerly, pour out the vials of His wrath on the

Proved from Holy Scripture.

¹ Cum continuo in mundo accrescant mala; quare parcit nunc mundo Deus? qui olim multo his minora peccata acrius punivit?—Pomer. serm. ii. de B. V.

² Totum hoc facit propter Beatam Virginem.

³ Apparebit arcus meus in nubibus, et recordabor fœderis mei vobiscum . . . et non erunt ultra aquæ diluvii ad delendum universam carnem.—Gen. ix. 14, 15.

⁴ Ipsa est arcus in nubibus.

earth. When a church begins to fall to ruin, my dear brethren, and the roof already shows signs of giving way, the best thing to do is to build an arch under it to support it and to hold the building together. O infinite goodness of God! many a time does the world deserve to be destroyed on account of its sins and vices; but God says: "My bow shall appear in the clouds;" **Mary, the Mother of My Son**, "shall be the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh upon the earth."¹ This is the arch that keeps the world from falling to pieces. With reason does St Fulgentius say, "the heavens and the earth would long since have fallen to ruin, if they had not been sustained by **Mary's prayers.**"²

Sinners
have to
thank her
intercession
that they
are not now
lost, and
have done
penance
Shown by
a simile.

It is this **Mother of mercy** that I and many other sinners have to thank that we are not now in hell, that we have seen how miserable we were when in the state of sin, that we have done true penance, and that we now have a sure hope of heaven. I will here use as a simile a very interesting incident, related by St. **Meliton**, which I read in one of the works of **Thomas à Kempis**: "A certain pious person had trained a pet bird how to speak, and to say 'Ave Maria' whenever a knock came to the door, or when any one spoke to it. It happened one day that its cage was left open through carelessness, and the bird flew away out of the window. When it had been flying about for some time, a hawk attacked it, and was on the point of seizing it, when the poor bird, terrified almost out of its life, uttered its usual cry, 'Ave Maria,' and at once the hawk fell to the ground as if it had been shot, while the other bird returned to its cage." How many of us, my dear brethren, are like this bird? We are kept in a cage, that is, in the bounds of the divine law; but how soon we get tired of confinement! As soon as we find the door open, that is, when the first occasion of sin offers, we fly off at once to seek our freedom; but alas, what a grievous mistake we make; for we fly into the talons of the hellish bird of prey, as often as we commit a mortal sin, and how many times might he not have dragged us down to hell, if an "Ave Maria" had not helped us? One or two "Hail Marys," learned in childhood from pious parents, or in school, or at catechism, and repeated daily through custom, parrot-fashion, or some small remnant of devotion to the Mother of God, inspired by God during youth, and not quite forgotten even

¹ Erit signum fœderis, quod constitut inter me et omnem carnem super terram.—Gen. ix. 17.

² Cœlum et terra jam diu ruisent, si non Maria precibus sustentasset.

while the soul is in mortal sin, may have perhaps often lessened the power of the devil, showed the sinner his danger, and brought him back again among the children of God by true repentance.

Would that we could see the happy souls in heaven, and hear them relate how they attained salvation! How many would acknowledge that they were formerly like the bird that escaped out of its cage, and that some little practice of devotion to the Queen of heaven, which they performed daily, was the means of saving them from the claws of the devil, so that they were enabled to fly into eternal life through the open window, that is by the help of Our Blessed Lady (for St. Bernard calls her a window of heaven)? Such would be the confession of that woman of whom Father Ambrose Cataneus writes, who for years and years had concealed a mortal sin in confession through shame; but when on her death-bed, she prayed only once to the Mother of God, "O Mary, my dear Lady, do thou open my lips;"¹ whereupon she at once awakened, as it were, out of a dream, confessed the sin without the least trouble and with sincere sorrow, and, after having received the last sacraments, went into a happy eternity. There was a bird that had flown to the very gates of hell, and was on the point of being seized by the hellish hawk, and a single sigh to Mary saved her. O Mary, I also cry out, in the name of many sinners who are this very day in the state of sin, and refuse to confess their wickedness, either through shame, or because the habit of a certain vice has become inveterate with them, so that it seems an impossibility to them to be converted, or because they wilfully remain in the proximate occasion of sin, and therefore never do true penance: O Mary, (so you should say every day with me, sinners who are thus tied down by your sins) O dear Mother of mercy, open my lips, which shame has so long closed, that I may at last disclose the secret wounds of my soul in confession, and have them thoroughly healed; break the chains of the miserable habit, that have so long held me captive to Satan; help me to roll away the huge stone from the grave in which I have almost rotted away, that I may forever give up the company of that person who has been the occasion of sin to me, and may return to my God with my whole heart!

As many must confess who are now in heaven.

If the heavens opened, we should see that young man of whom Father Eusebius Nierenberg writes in his "Trophies of Mary." This young man, after having lost all his money at play, had

¹ O Maria Domina mea, labia mea aperies.

denied his faith, abjured God and the saints, with the exception of the Blessed Virgin, whom he would not renounce, and sold his soul to the devil forever. In this desperate state, abandoned by God and man, he happened to enter a church, where he saw an image of the Mother of God, that, as he thought, looked at him pityingly, and said to him: "Alas, unfortunate man, what have you done? But I can help you still." Moved by these words, he fell on his knees, and commended his unfortunate soul to the Mother of God; whereupon he saw the lifeless wooden image turn its face to the Child seated on its arm, and move its lips; and although he heard nothing, he knew at once that Mary was praying for mercy and pardon for him; but the Child turned His face away from His Mother, and this happened a second and a third time. "O Mary," cried out the wretched man, "remember that I did not renounce thee. Pray for me once more." And then he saw the image place the apparently living Child on the altar, and, kneeling down before Him with out-stretched hands, implore His mercy, until at last the young man distinctly heard the words: "Mother, I cannot deny you anything; be it as you wish." The image then took the Child in its arms again, and resumed its former position, while the poor sinner, filled with consolation, repented of his crime with bitter tears, and from that time led a most holy life. There you have another instance of a fugitive bird being saved from the talons of the hellish hawk by Mary.

Shown by a
remarkable
occurrence.

Passing over many other examples of the kind, I cannot help relating one, which suits admirably the simile of the bird that escaped out of its cage, and which drew tears from my eyes when I was reading it. It is related by Theophilus Rainaud, out of a work of Father Ambrose Cataneus, who has written a long account of it in Italian. I will try to give you the gist of it in a few words. In the year 1200, there was in a certain convent a nun named Beatrix, who, through carelessness and the neglect of venial sins, had become cold in the love of God, and, as is generally the case, had gone from bad to worse, until she became quite tired of the convent, and wished to go back into the world. To this end she used the opportunity her occupation as portress gave her, procured a man's clothing, and in that disguise left the convent. As she was passing by the image of the Blessed Virgin, she turned round and said to it: "Mary, I must say good-by to thee now; I must leave thee; but

¹ Mater, nihil negare possum precibus tuis.

do not thou leave me. There are the keys of the convent; keep them; and there is my habit, which I am no longer worthy to wear; do thou give it to some one who is better deserving of it than I am. Good-by, dear Mother; I am going." She made her escape without any one knowing of it, and went off into a foreign land, where she was unknown, and there gave herself up to a life of vice, and thought no more of God or of His holy Mother. After the lapse of many years, a person came to see her one day with whom she had been acquainted when she was still in the convent; but she did not make herself known to him. After some talk, she asked him if he knew such-and-such a convent. "Certainly," he answered, "it is not long since I have been there." "And did you ever hear," she continued, "of a sister in that convent, named Beatrix? What do people say of her?" "Beatrix?" said he; "I know her well; I spoke to her before I left, and recommended myself to her pious prayers." Surprised at this, she asked him again if he was quite certain that Beatrix was still alive. "Not the least doubt of it," answered the man; "she was alive, at all events, when I left, and was mistress of novices: for many years she was portress, and has always been a model of virtue to all her sisters; she is now about thirty-five years of age;" and he then described her personal appearance. The description he gave was so accurate, that Beatrix was astonished, and knew not what to think. At length, driven by curiosity to find out who the strange nun was, she put on her disguise again, and went to her former convent, and asked to see Sister Beatrix. The supposed Beatrix came into the parlor, and the moment the apostate nun looked at her, she saw that she was the exact counterpart of herself. Filled with astonishment and fear, she did not dare to say a word; but the supposed nun first addressed her: "Do you not know me, Beatrix?" she said. "No," answered the latter, "I do not know you." "You are right," replied the other, "in saying that you do not know me, for you lost all memory of me, and shamefully renounced me when you left the convent; but can you not remember to whom you gave up your habit and the keys of the convent?" Here it at once occurred to Beatrix that she had laid those things down before a statue of the Blessed Virgin in her cell. "See," said Mary, revealing herself, "who I am. Immediately on your departure I assumed your appearance, put on your habit, and performed your duties as portress during the whole time of your absence. Not a soul has the least suspicion that

you left the convent; but meanwhile I have so lived that all the sisters have a high idea of your sanctity, and are surprised at the great change that has come over you. Come now and put on your habit again; do penance for your sins, and see that you continue the holy life that I have begun to lead for you." At these words Mary disappeared, and Beatrix, filled with shame and sorrow, put on her habit again, confessed her sins, and at the end of a holy and penitent life left her confessor a written account, confirmed by oath, of all that had occurred, so that after her death he might publish it to the world, to the honor and glory of the most Holy Virgin, the Mother and Refuge of sinners.

Encourage-
ment to
sinners to
fly to Mary
for refuge.

Sinners, what think you of this? Is there any one amongst you who has hitherto despaired of mercy and therefore made no effort to repent, on account of the multitude and enormity of his sins? Ah, let him fly with confidence to the Mother of mercy. If you have but a spark of love and of devotion to Mary left, there is still hope for you, if you are earnestly resolved on doing penance and amending your life. We read in the Book of Genesis, that when Agar, Sarah's maid, was turned out of the house and was wandering about the wilderness in despair, an angel called out to her: "Return to thy mistress, and humble thyself under her hand;"¹ beg pardon for your fault, and she will forgive you. Ah, would that I, too, could cry out like that angel, so as to be heard by all the sinners of the world. "Return to thy mistress, and humble thyself under her hand;" return to Mary, the Mother of mercy; humble yourself and beg pardon for the grievous sins you have committed; you may be certain of a kind reception from her. If she rejects you, then you are the first whom she has rejected; for up to the present no one who has placed himself under her protection has been lost. Go to her, then, at once. Perhaps you do not yet feel any desire to repent and amend; then I beg of you, for the sake of your soul's salvation, to pray, and pray without ceasing to her, that she may soften your hard heart, and obtain for you from her Son the grace of true contrition. Say with the Catholic Church: "O Mary, come to the help of a poor wretch, who is always falling, and who would wish to rise if he could."² O Mary, Mother of mercy, I am a poor bird that has flown even to the gates of hell; save me from the talons of the hellish bird

¹ Revertere ad dominam tuam, et humiliare sub manu illius.—Gen. xvi. 9.

² Succurre cadenti, surgere qui curat, populo.

of prey; torment my soul; leave me no rest by night or by day, until anguish drives me back to my cage, and compels me to submit to the sweet yoke of the God whom I have abandoned!

By way of conclusion I say to all of you, my dear brethren, the words that Father Sebastian a Campo of our Society spoke on his death-bed, to the great comfort and consolation of those who were standing round him: "O children of Adam, serve and love Mary better; for you know not how necessary Mary's prayers are to you:"¹ how necessary, if you wish to live piously; how necessary, if you wish to receive many graces from God; how necessary, if you wish to be eternally happy. Have we hitherto served our Mother? Then let us serve her more diligently. Have we loved her? Then let us love her more earnestly; not like those who honor her with a mere lip-service daily or weekly, while they grieve her by their sinful hearts. Let us love her with an earnest, child-like, constant love, which consists in carefully avoiding all sin, and in following the example of her holy life.

And to the other hearers to be always devout to her.

O Mary, dearest Mother, if I can call thee by that name, must I not love and serve thee with all my heart? For next to God thou art my only hope, my only help and consolation; and I must and do acknowledge before the whole world, that whatever good there is in me I have received through thee! It is through thee that I am still alive, and am not in hell with the demons. In thee, next to God, I place my hopes of heaven, although I have so often barred it against myself by my sins. Henceforward I entrust to thy care and protection all that I have and all that I am. Do thou, O Mother, order everything, my life and the end thereof, according to thy will and pleasure! I renew the promise I have so often solemnly made in thy sodalities, that I wish to be thy servant forever, never to abandon thee, and to do all I can to further thy honor and glory amongst others. Ah, if I could only have the happiness of doing something that is really pleasing to thee! If I were only assured that I have ever during my life done even a single thing to give thee pleasure; then, indeed, would my hopes of salvation be more secured! O Mary, all I ask of thee is to obtain for me this grace from thy Son, that I may love thee more and more, and have a tender devotion to thee! If I should ever again be so unhappy as to lose my God through weakness, by committing a mortal sin, (which

Conclusion and offering of self to Mary.

¹ Filii Adæ, servite et amate Mariam diligentius: nescitis quam vobis necessaria sit Mariæ deprecatio.

mayest thou avert!) ah, then, at all events, do not take away from me my devotion to thee! As long as that remains with me, I can have a great hope of conversion, and consequently of salvation. But if I ever go so far as to forget thee, to receive nothing more from thee, and to have no confidence in, or love for thee any longer; then, indeed, there would be no hope for me any more. Receive me, then, O merciful Virgin, as thy servant. I shall henceforth never allow a day to pass without offering thee my filial service; every Saturday I will observe the evening fast in thy honor, or I will perform some other special work of devotion; every one of thy feast days I will dedicate to thee by a good confession and Communion; never will I look on an image of thee, no matter where it may be, without showing it due honor; and if my first thought on awakening in the morning is for God, my second will be for thee; if my first word is in honor of God, my second shall be, "Ave Maria." Amen.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the Feast of the Visitation.

Text.

Exurgens Maria . . . abiit in montana cum festinatione.—
Luke i. 39.

"And Mary, rising up, . . . went unto the hill country with haste."

Introduction.

Whither so hastily, O most Blessed Virgin? What impels thee to leave thy accustomed solitude, and to journey over the rugged mountains? The answer to this question we have in today's Gospel; and it was given by St. John, who, though hidden in his mother's womb, leaped with joy at the arrival of the Blessed Virgin. For his soul was still buried in the dark night, it was in the state of original sin, and was not in the grace of God; and it was to free that soul from the original stain, and bring it out of darkness to the light of grace, that Mary journeyed in such haste. Hear this ye sinners! If the number and malice of your sins make you afraid of appealing to God, merciful though He is, then hasten to Mary, who is most anxious to save your souls, that are going astray. With her you will be sure of finding grace and a kind-reception; nay, she will hasten out to meet you, and will obtain for you from her Son, whom you have

offended, the grace of true repentance, if you only pray to her earnestly for it, as I shall now show, to the greater glory of this Mother of mercy.

Plan of Discourse.

Mary is a sure refuge and necessary help of sinners who desire to do penance. Such is the whole subject, etc.—Continues as above.

For several panegyrics and moral discourses on the different Feasts of the Blessed Virgin, see the following sixth part.

ON THE HOLY SACRAMENT OF PENANCE.

FIFTEENTH SERMON.

ON THE NECESSITY OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE.

Subject.

The sacrament of penance is a necessary means of salvation to all who have sinned after baptism; from which truth the following, as well as other conclusions, is to be drawn, namely, that he who sins grievously should have recourse to this means as soon as possible.—*Preached on the sixth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Misereor super turbam.—Mark viii. 2.
“I have compassion on the multitude.”

Introduction.

Our Lord is so good and compassionate towards men, that He could not see those who wished to follow Him suffering temporal want, without pitying them; so that He went beyond the bounds of nature, and wrought a miracle in order to feed them, that they might not die of hunger; although He often scourges whole countries with the plague of famine, for the good of souls, that the people may be aroused to do penance for their sins. How much greater, then, must not be the mercy and pity that the same God has towards the souls of men; how much greater must not be His desire to succor them in their spiritual wants, and to give them that on which their eternal salvation depends? How much greater must not His pity be for the poor souls He sees continuing for years and years in the miserable state of sin? Yes, certainly, this is the misery and poverty that move the good God most deeply. I have already spoken of the patience

of God in bearing with the sinner, and I have shown how sinners should take courage from that, to do penance at once and free themselves from the deplorable state of sin. But if they are afraid to approach God, whom they have offended, then they can have recourse to Mary, the Mother of mercy, through whom they will certainly obtain the grace of repentance, if they only desire it sincerely. Now I go on to speak of the means that we must use in order to free ourselves from sin, and to do true penance. Here again we can see how wonderful is the mercy of God to the sinner; for the means that He has prescribed to do penance and to obtain complete pardon is a most easy and advantageous one, namely, the sacrament of penance. The explanation of this sacrament will supply me with matter for several consecutive instructions. It is a subject, my dear brethren, that is useful to all, and one in which most people require some instruction; because, either through ignorance, or through culpable negligence, many grievous faults are committed in this matter, and on account of those faults many souls, although they frequently go to confession, yet remain in the state of sin and are lost eternally. I say therefore,

Plan of Discourse.

The sacrament of penance is a necessary means of salvation to all who have sinned mortally after baptism. From this we shall draw for our instruction, amongst other conclusions, the following, namely, that he who has grievously sinned ought to have recourse to this means at once. There you have the whole subject of to-day's instruction.

Merciful God, we do not ask Thee now to perform a miracle in order to help poor sinners; only move them with Thy ordinary powerful grace, that they may without further delay make use of this necessary means! To obtain this grace from Thee, we fly to Mary, the Mother of mercy and the refuge of sinners. Help us, too, ye holy angels, by your prayers.

I do not now speak of such an absolute necessity, that the sinner under no circumstances can obtain pardon unless he actually receives the sacrament of penance; for not even baptism is necessary in that sense; that is, the baptism of water; inasmuch as he who has not the opportunity of receiving baptism can be cleansed from sin, and save his soul by the efficacy of a perfect love of God, which is called the baptism of desire. Yet the baptism of water is called a necessary means of salvation in this

How the sacrament of penance is necessary to salvation.

sense, that he who has the opportunity of receiving it, and deliberately neglects to avail himself of it, cannot go to heaven. It is the same with the sacrament of penance for those who have committed mortal sin after baptism. If I have sinned grievously, an act of perfect contrition will certainly obtain pardon for me from God; but there still remains the obligation for me to declare my sin in confession, when I have the opportunity of doing so, in order that I may receive sacramental absolution. For, as theologians teach, perfect contrition blots out sin, because it includes an earnest resolve to keep all the commandments, and consequently to go to confession when an opportunity occurs. If I have not that intention, no contrition can help me to obtain pardon of my sins; and if I died without confession and sacramental absolution, because I did not avail myself of the opportunity when offered, I should be lost forever.

This necessity does not arise from a human.

The necessity of confession is not a human invention, or a law prescribed by the Popes, as most heretics and opponents of our holy religion pretend. For these latter look on auricular confession as an insupportable burden, and have therefore made a point of crying it down, that they may be more at liberty to follow their evil inclinations and desires; because there is no doubt that the fear of the shame one feels in disclosing his secret vices is for many a great means of keeping them from sin, while, if there were no such thing as confession, that restraint would be taken away. Heretics themselves have acknowledged this. According to the testimony of Dominicus Soto, the Lutherans of a certain city of Germany once sent an ambassador to the Roman emperor, Charles V. to ask him to use his authority in re-establishing the custom of auricular confession; for they found that, when the people ceased going to confession, vice and sin increased in an alarming degree. But they were treated with ridicule, and looked on as fools for having abolished as a human law that which they themselves were forced to confess was most advantageous for the common good.

But from a Divine Law.

It is not a Pope, or an emperor, but the great God Himself who has placed this restraint on sinful men, and commanded them to declare their sins in confession; and that command He has made so strict, that He has determined in the law of grace not to pardon mortal sin, unless to those who make use of this means, provided they have the opportunity of so doing; and therefore neither Pope nor emperor can dispense any one, or even himself, from the obligation of confession, when mortal sin

has been committed. Jesus Christ promulgated this law to the world, when, after His resurrection, He instituted the sacrament of penance in the words He said to His Apostles, and in their persons to all validly ordained priests: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them: and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained."¹ From the power given in these words it is evident that one must declare his sins to the priest; for how can I forgive or retain, if I know not what sins have been committed? And how can I know that, if the penitent does not declare his sins? It would be ridiculous for the minister of a king to receive full power from his sovereign to decide all disputes amongst his subjects, to condemn, to absolve, to punish, and to reward, if the subjects were not bound to go to the minister and state their case to him. And it would have been just as ridiculous for power to have been given to priests to forgive or to retain the sins of men, unless men were bound to confess their sins to the priests. It is therefore in accordance with a divine, and not a human law, that we are bound to confess our sins. And in order to eliminate all erroneous ideas on this matter, the Church in the General Council of Trent has publicly proclaimed it as an article of faith: "If any one denies that sacramental confession is instituted, or that it is necessary to salvation according to the divine law, or says that it is a mere human invention, let him be anathema."²

And truly, if we consider the matter, we shall see that this law ^{It is a most just law.} which God has imposed on sinful man is a most just one. For what less could the great Monarch of heaven and earth demand from the miserable and presumptuous mortal who has dared to offend and insult Him, than that the latter should humble himself, and candidly acknowledge his guilt before the priest who sits there in God's place, before he receives pardon for his sins? What can be more just than for the sinner to confess that he has offended the Divine majesty, and to ask humbly for pardon? In olden times, among the Romans, if a man was overcome in combat, and wished to make peace with his opponent, he had to throw down his arms, and hold out a palm branch to him as a sign that he acknowledged him as his master, and would never

¹ Accipite Spiritum Sanctum: quorum remisistis peccata, remittuntur eis, et quorum retinueritis, retenta sunt.—John xx. 22, 23.

² Siquis negaverit confessionem sacramentalem vel institutam, vel ad salutem necessariam esse jure divino. . . aut dixerit. . . inventum esse hominum; anathema sit.—Trid. Sess. 14, Can. 6.

again bear arms against him. Now what does man do when he commits a mortal sin? He has with inconceivable audacity taken up arms against the almighty God and rebelled against His authority. Does he wish to be again received into favor by the Almighty? Then, if so, what is more just than that he should throw down his arms, that is, his sins, by humbly confessing them, and thereby acknowledge God as his master, and promise never more to offend Him?

It was in vogue from the beginning. Adam and Eve had to confess their sin.

Do not imagine, my dear brethren, that Our Lord has placed a new burden on us, when He obliges us to confess our sins. From the very beginning He exacted that confession, though not in exactly the same manner as He now does in the sacrament of penance, from those who offended Him, before He would remit their sin and receive them again into His friendship. Consider the example of our first parents in Paradise, after they had eaten the forbidden fruit, and you will see that even they had to confess their sin. They heard God coming towards them, and hid themselves for fear of Him: "And when they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in paradise in the afternoon air, Adam and his wife hid themselves from the face of the Lord God, amidst the trees of paradise."¹ But they could not hide themselves: "Where art thou?"² said God to Adam. But what a strange question for Thee to ask, O Lord! Can anything be unknown to Thee? And since Thou knewest where Adam was, why didst Thou not go to him at once? No, says Eucherius; that was not enough for the Almighty; Adam must come forward, and acknowledge his sin. And he crept out trembling: "I heard Thy voice," he said, "in paradise; and I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself."³ But that is not enough, Adam; you must confess your sin more clearly: "And who hath told thee that thou wast naked?"⁴ You must have been doing something wrong? Yes, O Lord; "The woman whom thou gavest me to be my companion gave me of the tree, and I did eat."⁵ And thus, at last, the confession was finished. But Eve's turn had to come: "And the Lord God said to the woman: "Why hast thou done this? And she answered: the serpent deceived me." How did he deceive you?

¹ Cum audissent vocem Domini Dei deambulantis in paradiso ad auram post meridiem, abscondit se Adam et uxor ejus a facie Domini Dei in medio ligni paradisi.—Gen. iii. 8.

² Ubi es tu?—Ibid. 9.

³ Vocem tuam audivi in paradiso; et timui, eo quod nudus essem, et abscondi me.—Ibid. 10.

⁴ Quis enim indicavit tibi quod nudus esses?—Ibid. 11.

⁵ Mulier, quam dedisti mihi sociam, dedit mihi de ligno, et comedi.—Ibid. 12.

What have you done? I have obeyed him; "I did eat."¹ Mark, my dear brethren, how the Almighty acts as if He knew nothing of the whole matter; and how He examines them both until they confess the truth and declare what led them into sin. He acts, so to say, like a father who questions his child before punishing him, when the latter has committed a fault. Where have you been? he asks, raising the rod. What have you done? Will you not tell me at once? And yet the father may be well aware all the time of everything that has happened.

God acted in the same way with Cain, after the latter had slain his brother Abel. "Where is thy brother Abel?"² asked the Lord, as if He knew nothing about what had occurred. Cain did not wish to confess, but tried to give an evasive answer: "I know not," he said; "am I my brother's keeper?"³ "Why art thou angry?" asked the Lord, "and why is thy countenance fallen?"⁴ But Cain remained silent. At last God asked him, "What hast thou done?"⁵ Dost thou still refuse to answer Me? Then I will say what thou hast done: "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth to Me from the earth."⁶ See what thou hast done: and, "Now therefore cursed shalt thou be upon the earth. . . when thou shalt till it, it shall not yield to thee its fruit."⁷ Tertullian asks here, why did not God curse Adam and Eve, as well as Cain? Because, he says, they confessed their sin;⁸ but He cursed Cain for refusing to acknowledge himself guilty of having murdered his brother.

How difficult the confession was that the Jews had to make in the Old Law! The nature of the sacrifice they had to offer in atonement was fixed according to the grievousness and quality of their sins, and this sacrifice they had to bring to the priest and offer publicly. For instance, he who sinned through culpable ignorance, had to offer a calf; he who did anything against his neighbor, a pair of turtle-doves; he who cursed or swore, a lamb; (if a lamb had to be offered nowadays for cursing, there would soon be a scarcity of lambs in the world!) and so on, for different sins, as you may read in the fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters of Leviticus. Nay, Bellarmine adduces the testimony of the Rabbis to show that they were also obliged to confess

Cain was cursed because he did not confess.

In the Old Law the Jews had to confess.

¹ Et dixit Dominus Deus ad mulierem: quare hoc fecisti? quæ respondit: serpens decept me, et comedi.—Gen. iii. 13.

² Ubi est Abel frater tuus?—Ibid. iv. 9. ³ Num custos fratris mei sum ego?—Ibid.

⁴ Quare iratus es? et cur concidit facies tua?—Ibid. 6. ⁵ Quid fecisti?—Ibid. 10.

⁶ Vox sanguinis fratris tui clamat ad me de terra.—Ibid.

⁷ Nunc igitur maledictus eris super terram. . . Cum operatus fueris eam, non dabit tibi fructus suos.—Ibid. 12.

⁸ Ideo non maledixit ipsum Adam, nec Evam, ut confessione revelatos.

their sins to the priest, that the latter might offer the sacrifice in a certain manner. But even if that was not required, the confession was certainly public enough; for all present might see, from the sacrifice that was offered, what kind of a sin the person was guilty of. So that, if there was no oral confession, there was at all events a confession, and that a public one, by means of the ceremonies the sinner had to go through.

Therefore
confession
is necessary
for the sin-
ner.

Therefore God has always required confession, as a necessary condition of pardon for sin, and consequently for those who have sinned grievously it is a necessary means of salvation, when they have the opportunity. "Let no one," says St. Augustine, "tell me that it is enough for him to repent in his heart, that God, who forgives him, knows what he has done; for if that were the case, in vain would the keys be given to the Church; in vain has Christ said to His Apostles: 'Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.' To act thus would be to make a mockery of the Gospel."¹ Do you wish to know, O sinner, what you have to do? "Open your mouth to the priest; for that alone is the gate of paradise."² If you refuse to do that, or do it not honestly, there is no help for you; you are lost. Do what you will; give all you have to the poor; chastise your body day and night even to blood; fast every day on bread and water; pray as long and as much as you can; weep for your sins until you might bathe in your tears; if you have not the sincere intention of confessing your sins, everything else you do is useless as far as your salvation is concerned; you will be lost forever. St. Bonaventure writes of a religious of his Order who enjoyed a great reputation for sanctity; he was always in prayer, and almost constantly engaged in the consideration of God and heavenly things, so that he hardly ever spoke a word, and even made his confession with signs. On one occasion St. Francis happened to come to the convent in which this religious was, and the other brethren congratulated him on the extraordinary holiness of the latter; but St. Francis said to them: there is not the least sign of sanctity in him; you must know that he is a child of destruction, the devil has tied his tongue, that he may not confess his sins properly, as he ought. And the event proved the truth of these words, for the supposed saint, who was in reality a most wretched

¹ Nemo mihi dicat: ago poenitentiam in corde: novit Deus qui mihi ignoscit: ergo sine causa sunt claves datæ Ecclesiæ? frustramus Evangelium Dei?

² Aperi os tuum sacerdoti; hæc sola est porta paradisi.

sinner, left the Order and came to a miserable end. It is and must be an undoubted truth, taught by the Catholic Church, that the sacrament of penance, when one has an opportunity of receiving it, or otherwise the earnest intention of receiving it when possible, is always necessary for salvation to those who have sinned mortally.

From this we can see how grievously many are mistaken in this matter. First, those who place more confidence in the so-called general absolution, that is given at the hour of death, by priests who are empowered to give it, than in the sacramental absolution, that is received at confession. For I have been told that many, when in danger of death, are more anxious to receive that general absolution, than to confess their sins; and if a person dies suddenly, we sometimes hear people saying, "Thank God! the poor man died a happy death; for, at all events, he received the general absolution." And they think that enough has then been done to ensure the man's salvation. Now, my dear brethren, I must beg of you to attend carefully to what I am going to say, and if you talk to others afterwards about it, to be sure to tell them the honest truth, as you will hear it from me. For, generally speaking, they who seldom come to sermons, and who are most in want of instruction, make a great to-do about what they pick up here and there from others, and get hold of very wrong ideas, as I have often found to be the case. If they took the trouble of coming to sermons they would hear the matter properly explained, and would know how to speak about it. Now mind what I am going to say: I do not intend to speak disrespectfully of the general absolution, for I look on it as a holy, useful, and salutary thing for all dying people, and I advise all who have the opportunity of receiving it not to neglect doing so; and for my part, I hope to have that happiness when I am dying. But to depend more on it than on sacramental absolution, or, what is still worse, to neglect confession, or to put it off to the last moment, and to trust one's hopes of forgiveness and of eternal salvation altogether to the general absolution, that is a grievous mistake that some ignorant people make, and they must be taught to avoid it, in order not to imperil their souls. To put the matter clearly, either the so-called general absolution is a sacramental absolution from sin, and then it cannot be given unless after confession, either by words, or by signs, if the sick person is too far gone to speak; and that is a truth that no theologian has the least doubt of. But every absolution I

Therefore they are wrong who trust their salvation to the so-called general absolution.

receive from any priest who is empowered to hear my confession is a general absolution from all sins; because one mortal sin cannot be remitted without the others. Or else the general absolution is not a sacramental absolution from sin, but merely an opportunity of gaining a special plenary indulgence, which the members of certain religious Orders are authorized by the Pope to grant to those who are in danger of death. In that case there is no doubt that it is most excellent, and is to be eagerly sought for, and thankfully received; but it does not help to the forgiveness of sin, since its only effect is to remit the temporal punishment of sin; nor can that be taken away, until the guilt has been remitted by sacramental absolution received in confession, or otherwise by perfect contrition, when there is no opportunity of confession. This, too, is a truth confirmed by all theologians. Therefore, if the dying person has a mortal sin on his conscience, and has not confessed it, or, in case he has no opportunity of confession, has not made an act of perfect contrition, there is no doubt that he will be lost forever, no matter how many general absolutions he receives, for they are not sacramental absolutions, and cannot free him from the guilt of sin, even if he received them from the Pope himself. Have you understood me clearly, my dear brethren? I take you all to witness that I have not said a word which any sensible man could torture into a condemnation or into an expression of contempt for the general absolution; for I repeat that I look on it as holy, and as most advantageous, and as worthy to be recommended to all Christians. I have merely stated the truth about it, that no one in such an important affair as his eternal salvation may be led into error in the matter. By divine appointment the sacrament of penance is instituted for all those who have sinned grievously after baptism, as a necessary means of salvation, in the sense in which I have already explained the word "necessary." If you refuse to confess the sins you have committed, when you can confess them, you will be lost forever. That is a truth that cannot be called into question.

Or to certain sodalities and confraternities.

Secondly, a still more grievous mistake is made by those who live on in sin, and trust their hopes of salvation to certain sodalities and confraternities they belong to, thinking that, if they are exact in performing the prescribed devotions, they cannot lose their souls, and, as some of them say, that they will be released from purgatory on the Saturday after their death. I strongly recommend you not to trust too much to those things. If you

are not in the state of grace, and do not free your soul from mortal sin before death by a good confession, or, if you cannot confess, by an act of perfect contrition, you will certainly lose your soul, and all your confraternities will not be of the least help to you. Thirdly, more stupid still is the error of those who lead impenitent lives and do nothing to gain their eternal salvation, but employ others in certain circumstances, or, as I have heard, actually give them money to go to confession and Communion for them a stated number of times. What a ridiculous idea to ask others to go to confession for one! It is the same as if I wished to have my own room cleaned up, and ask the maid-servant of another house to sweep out her own room. What good would that do me? If I want my room swept, I must take the broom in my hand and go to work at it, or else have it swept out by another. In the same way, what good can it do your soul if others confess their sins, and thereby purify their consciences? And to ask others to go to holy Communion for me is the same as asking a man to eat for me, when I am hungry. What good would that do my stomach? In the same way, how can it help your soul, if others are refreshed at the Table of the Lord? It is quite a different thing to have Masses said for one's self or for others; for the efficacy of the holy Mass, compared to holy Communion, is infinite as a sacrifice of atonement for living and dead. They who go to confession and Communion can certainly pray for you, that God may give you the grace of repentance, or may help you in a difficulty; but they can do nothing more. If you yourself do not try by sincere repentance and a good confession to recover the grace of God, their prayers in all the Communions they make will do nothing for your salvation, and very little for your temporal prosperity. If you have sinned mortally, you must go to confession, or else you will certainly be lost. Nor is there the least doubt of that.

Finally, it follows from all this that they are guilty of great presumption, and are in a most desperate state with regard to their eternal salvation, who, I do not say put off their confession and repentance to their death-bed, but who are in the habit of going to confession only once or twice a year, or who put off confession for a long time after having committed mortal sin. Foolish people, what are you thinking of? If any here present are in that state, I now speak to each one of them in particular. It is certain that you have to die. This is the first truth, O sinner, and it deserves your serious consideration. It is uncer-

How rash
for those
who are in
the state of
sin to defer
confession.

tain when you will die, whether to-day, or to-morrow, or in a year's time. This is the second truth. It is uncertain how you will die, whether after a long illness, or suddenly, and this latter is often the case. This is the third truth. It is certain that, if you die in the state of mortal sin, you are lost forever. This is the fourth truth. And yet you are not afraid to put off to an uncertain future time the use of the means that is necessary to your salvation? A nobleman was once accused to his sovereign of having committed a certain crime. How, he said (and that was all he alleged in his defence) how can any one believe it? Your majesty sees that I am always happy and contented; and how could I possibly be so, if I were guilty of such a crime? To be every moment in danger of death, and, if in mortal sin, of eternal damnation, who could be happy or joyful under such circumstances? He must, indeed, be a rash and desperate man who would expose himself to such a frightful danger. But you, O sinner, are guilty of that rashness and presumption! You are in such a state, that, if you were to die, and that may happen at any moment, you would be lost forever, and yet you put off your confession for a year, or a month. What am I saying? Can you dare to defer it even for a single day? Are you so insensible to danger, that you can venture to sleep soundly to-night in your present state?

Because
future con-
fession is
altogether
uncertain.

I will go to confession, you say, when I grow old. And who has told you that you will grow old? There is the greatest uncertainty about that. And if you die before you grow old, without having confessed and repented of your sins, you must go to hell for all eternity. That is quite certain. I will go to confession when I have settled this law-suit, or put my business affairs into better order; then I will be more at ease, and have more time to dispose of. Who has told you that you will live till the end of the law-suit, or to put your business into order? That is uncertain. But if you die without confessing and repenting of your sins, you must go to hell for all eternity. That is quite certain. I will go to confession when I am married; I have no time for it now; my head is full of other things. Who has told you that you will live to be married? That is very uncertain. But if you die before confession, and in the state of mortal sin, you are lost forever. That is certain. I will go to confession next Easter, according to my usual custom. So much the worse for you that you go to confession only once a year. I would not give a farthing for confessions that are

made only from one Easter to another. But even supposing you make it all right, who has told you that you will live till Easter? That is uncertain, while, if you die without confession and repentance for your sins before Easter comes, you are lost forever. That is certain. I will go to confession on the next feast of the Blessed Virgin, as I have a special devotion for those feasts. That is very good and edifying; but has any one assured you that you will live so long? Meanwhile, if you die before the feast-day comes without repentance and confession, you will be lost forever. There is no doubt of that. Then I will go to confession next Sunday. Quite right; only be sure you keep your promise. But wait a little. After all, it is uncertain whether you will live till next Sunday, or not; and if you die meanwhile without confession and repentance, you will lose your soul of a certainty. Not, indeed, that you will be condemned to hell because you have not confessed your sins or repented of them before the feast of the Blessed Virgin, or before next Sunday, (because I cannot and will not insist on the obligation of confessing your sins or repenting of them immediately after having committed them, although, on account of the danger, it would be a most advisable thing to do) but you will be condemned to hell on account of the sins that you have committed, and have not repented of sincerely before death. But you say, if there is any danger meanwhile, I can send for the priest and make my confession, or at least I can at once make an act of perfect contrition. How do you know that? Who has told you that you will not die suddenly? or that your last illness will not at once deprive you of speech and understanding? or that the priest will reach you in time? But supposing all that goes according to your wishes, are you sure that God will give you the grace of sincere repentance, and help you to make a good confession, after you have offended Him so long without accepting His invitations to repent? All these things are very uncertain. Then, again, the confession and repentance of those who defer it till their death-bed is good perhaps in only one case out of a thousand; how do you know that you will be that one? That is again most uncertain, nay, improbable. But, no matter in what circumstances, if you die without confession and repentance, you are lost. That is quite certain. Will you, then, trust your salvation to such a treacherous uncertainty?

Ah sinner! no matter who you are, I beg of you, by way of Conclusion conclusion, ~~for the sake~~ and exhor- of your eternal salvation, consider the

tation to
sinners to go
to confes-
sion at once.

state you are in, and how much depends on it. There are few Christians now in hell among the demons, who had not the same intention as you, of confessing their sins at some future time; but they did not do so. And they will all burn in the flames of hell, forever, because they did not confess and repent of their sins, when they could have done so. Therefore say at once earnestly from your heart, I will not wait till old age, nor till Easter, nor till the next feast of the Blessed Virgin, nor till next Sunday; but this very day. "To-day, if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts."¹ To-day the Lord calls me to repentance; now is the time to go to confession; and therefore, as soon as the sermon is over, I will try to remember my sins, and free myself from them by a good confession, that I may certainly be freed from the danger of being lost eternally. Such is now my firm resolution. Ah my God, I tremble when I think of the time that I have spent in sin! How have I dared to pass a single night in such a dangerous state, and to go to sleep knowing that I was Thy enemy, and a rebel to Thy authority? For if death had then suddenly surprised me, which could easily have been the case, I should now be with the demons in hell! How presumptuous on my part to spend whole months and years in such a wretched state, without sincere repentance or confession; while many whose sins were less than mine have been carried off unprepared and are now in hell! Infinite thanks to Thee, O God of mercy, for having borne with me so patiently, and for having given me such ample time for repentance! I am now resolved not to wait a single hour longer; for the present hour may perhaps be my last. I now repent of, and detest with my whole heart all my sins, by which I have offended Thee, my good God, who art worthy of infinite love. I will now free my conscience from them by a good confession, and as long as I live I will be on my guard against offending Thee again, and again falling into that miserable state. Have still a little patience with me, O God of patience, and give me Thy powerful grace to carry out this my resolution! For I am determined to carry it out, and at once. Amen.

¹ Hodie, si vocem ejus audieritis, nolite obdurare corda vestra.—Ps. xciv. 8.

SIXTEENTH SERMON.

ON CONFESSION AS AN EASY MEANS OF SALVATION.

Subject.

Sacramental confession is an easy means of salvation for the sinner: 1. when we consider the effects of this sacrament; 2. when we consider the nature of this sacrament.—*Preached on the seventh Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Attendite a falsis prophetis.—Matt. vii. 15.
“Beware of false prophets.”

Introduction.

The worst of all false prophets is the devil, says St. John Chrysostom. The chief means that he makes use of to ensnare souls into sin is to represent to them the sinful object in a pleasing light, so that they are easily induced to taste the forbidden pleasure, and to commit sin without further consideration. When the sin has been committed, and they wish to free themselves from the tortures of remorse which accompany it, this false prophet again comes forward with all kinds of misrepresentations, in order to make them believe that it is most difficult and almost impossible for them to do penance and to make a good confession; so that sinners are frightened into deferring confession from day to day, and from month to month, and meanwhile they go on adding sin to sin, until their consciences become hardened in wickedness; they find rest and contentment in the state of sin, and finally give up all idea of repentance. Ah sinners, do not believe the traitor! He is the father of lies, and he seeks nothing but your eternal destruction. Go at once to confession, and acknowledge your sins with sorrow of heart. The sacrament of penance, as we have seen in the last sermon, is a necessary means to obtain the forgiveness of your sins and your eternal salvation; and, lest the lying spirit should deceive you, I add that it is a very easy means for him who has sinned mortally. This I shall show to-day, for the encouragement of sinners and to induce them to repent speedily.

Plan of Discourse.

Sacramental confession is an easy means for the sinner, when we consider the effects of this sacrament. That I shall prove in the first part. It is an easy means for the sinner when we consider the nature of this sacrament, as I shall prove in the second part. Therefore, sinners, no matter how grievous your transgressions are, take courage at once, and make use of the easy means offered you. Such shall be the conclusion.

To which may you, Mary Mother of Mercy, and you, holy guardian angels, help us by your intercession with Our Lord.

Confession is an easy means, when one considers the evil from which it frees him.

But how can I say that confession is an easy means for the sinner? What could be more difficult to any decent, respectable man, than to betray himself, to disclose with the utmost minuteness to another his own wickedness and the hidden deformities of his heart? Easy indeed! It might be easy enough for pious souls, who go to confession every week, and have nothing to tell but half voluntary distractions in prayer, slight fits of bad temper, carelessness in speech, a few idle words here and there, and similar imperfections. Yes, it may be easy enough for them; but for the sinner who has far more grievous matter to tell, whose sins are almost countless, who is buried in vice of all kinds, who has grown old in wickedness, and has to give an account of years of a vicious life, for him to kneel down and go over his sins one by one, according to their different natures and as they were committed in thought, word, or deed: the very thought of it is enough to make one shiver. A more terrible rack could not be invented for any malefactor, than the confessional is in such circumstances for the sinner. No; say what you will; it is a most difficult means to adopt. True, if we consider the matter superficially, and as it is apt to appear at first sight, it will seem difficult; but think, O sinner, what a terrible burden it frees you from; how fearful the evil from which it releases you, and you will have to acknowledge that the difficulty you will find in it is small indeed.

A sick man thinks it easy to take the bitterest medicine, if it will restore him to health.

A sick man does not think it very agreeable to take medicine; its bitterness causes him disgust; but when he is suffering from a virulent fever, he is ready to take anything that will cure him and restore him to health. If a single draught, as bitter as gall, could save him from the danger of death, not to speak of its restoring him at once to perfect health, oh, he would say, how fortunate I am in being cured so easily! What a good thing

it is that my doctor is so skilful, that he can cure me at once of such a dangerous and painful illness. Other sick people have to be tortured by burning and cutting; and I, too, would willingly have suffered the same torture, in order to regain my health; but now, thanks be to God, I have come through it very easily. Mark, my dear brethren, how the sick man looks on the bitter and disgusting medicine as an easy and agreeable means of recovery, when he thinks of the danger from which it frees him.

O sinner, in what a dangerous state you are when you are in mortal sin! Hear how one who was a sinner like you, king David, cries out to God from the bed of his sins: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak: heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled, and my soul is troubled exceedingly. Turn to me, O Lord, and deliver my soul: O save me, for Thy mercy's sake. For there is no one in death that is mindful of Thee; and who shall confess to Thee in hell?"¹ There is a description of a lamentable state indeed, and it is the state in which you are; for you are suffering from an illness that will certainly bring you to eternal death, unless you are cured. Do you not understand what it is to be an enemy of the almighty God, to be separated from God, your sovereign Good, and to live under God's hatred and malediction? Such is your condition at present; you are a bond-slave of the cruel demons who are eagerly awaiting but a sign from their Creator to hurry you down to the abyss of hell. You have no more claim to the kingdom of heaven; the only reward you are entitled to is eternal confusion, eternal hunger and thirst, eternal stench, and the eternal flames of hell. See now if there is anything too difficult for you to do, in order to be freed from such a dangerous illness, and, so to speak, from such an endless evil. If it were necessary, in order to obtain the forgiveness of your sins, that you should give away all you have and in future beg your bread from door to door; if it were necessary for you to fast every day on bread and water, to have but one hour's sleep at night on a hard bed, to live in a cave amongst wild beasts, to beat your breast with a stone, to tear your flesh with iron spurs, and to continue that mode of life till you die: O great and infinite God, it would certainly be but right that I, a miserable worm of the earth, who have dared to offend Thy

The sinner suffers from a dangerous illness and ought to take any medicine that will cure him.

¹ Miserere mei, Domine, quoniam infirmus sum; sana me, Domine, quoniam conturbata sunt ossa mea, et anima mea turbata est valde. Convertere, Domine, et eripe animam meam, salvum me fac propter misericordiam tuam. Quoniam non est in morte qui memor sit tui; in inferno autem, quis confitebitur tibi?—Ps. vi. 3-6.

infinite Majesty, should perform all those austerities during my whole life, in order to appease Thy anger against me; it certainly would not be an excessive satisfaction, nay, it would not be enough to compensate for the insults I have offered Thee. And if I had to lead a life of such mortification till the last day, I should still look on it as a great favor to be thus enabled to escape the fire of hell, which is long since due to me, to free my soul from sin, even if I had committed but one, and to regain Thy grace and favor and my forfeited right to eternal happiness. Have not the blind heathens of former times cut themselves most cruelly with knives, and offered their own children to be burnt in sacrifice, in order to atone for their transgressions, and to deprecate the wrath of their dumb idols and the devils that dwelt in them?

Much more should he be willing to use such an easy means as confession.

But, O God of goodness and mercy, how easy it is to appease Thee! How cheaply we can purchase Thy grace and the pardon of our sins! How little Thou requirest of us in satisfaction for the insults we have offered Thee! How small is the price we have to pay to be saved from hell, and to gain all the happiness of Thy kingdom! If I have, as is, alas, the case, offended Thee a hundred thousand times, if my sins are more numerous than the drops of water in the sea, what is required to regain Thy grace? Nothing but to confess my sins with true sorrow to one man; and if I do that, my sins disappear at once; the flames of hell are extinguished as far as I am concerned; I again become Thy friend and beloved child as before, and a lawful heir to the kingdom of heaven Thou hast prepared for me. Remember, this, O sinners; no matter how often and grievously you have offended the great God; all that He requires of you, in order to forgive you, is that you truly repent of your sins and make a good confession. If you had offended a mere mortal like yourselves, could you offer him a smaller satisfaction than this? Should we not, then, rejoice and thank God, for having supplied us with such an easy means of getting rid of such a great evil, of throwing off the load of our sins, of escaping hell and gaining heaven?

Shown by a simile.

Father Paul Segneri, in his book called "The Christian Man," relates that, while a peasant was once sleeping in a field, a poisonous adder crawled down his throat and entered his stomach. We can easily imagine the torture that the poor man suffered from his unwelcome guest. But what hope was there of relieving him? If the adder bit him, there was an end of him at

once. He was fortunate enough to come across an experienced doctor, who suggested a plan to free him from his torment. And what was that plan? He made the peasant stand on his head, with his feet in the air, while he held a bowl of milk before his open mouth. The plan succeeded admirably; the adder, attracted by the milk, came out through the man's throat and fell into the bowl. If that story is true, the means by which the man was freed from his misery, was easy enough. A similar means, it seems to me, has been provided by the heavenly Physician, the good God, to save the sinner from eternal death, for in His mercy He has instituted the sacrament of penance for that purpose. It is far too mild a comparison to say that mortal sin is like a poisonous serpent; yet this is the simile the Holy Ghost Himself uses by the Wise Ecclesiasticus, when he warns us all to "flee from sin as from the face of a serpent."¹ But, unfortunately, how often does it not happen that men daily swallow down these poisonous adders and serpents, not by chance, or through misfortune, but in their waking moments, well knowing what they do, with the full consent of their will, nay, with joy and pleasure, as if they were swallowing a most agreeable food or drink; and they fill themselves therewith to repletion! But how these serpents bite when the pleasure of sin is passed away, they can speak of who have ever been in the unhappy state of sin. And if the poisonous reptile remains quiet in the conscience, there is no hope for the life of the soul. What is to be done? What medicine is to be used against the monster of sin? The heavenly Physician has provided us with a most easy and agreeable one in the sacrament of penance. The poor sinner has nothing to do but to stand on his head, that is to humble himself, to open his mouth, confess his sin, and thus easily and gently, without doing himself the least harm, get rid of the poisonous adder he has swallowed. Could the almighty God have invented an easier means of curing the sinner and saving him from the danger of eternal death?

Again, a medicine is called easy when, although it is bitter, yet it is sure to bring back health. If doctors only knew where to find such medicines, there would not be so many poor, sick people confined to their beds for so long; but how often the doctors are obliged to consult and to study for days and days, before they are able to discover the nature of the illness they are called on to cure? How many bitter draughts must not the patient drink,

Confession is an easy means, also, because it will surely heal the maladies of the soul.

¹ Quasi a faele colubri fuge peccata.—Eccclus. xxi. 2.

which, instead of giving him relief, only make him worse? And even when they have discovered the proper medicine, what a long time it takes before the cure is finally effected, and the sick man completely restored to health? Consider the example of the leper in the Gospel of St. Matthew. "Lord," he sighed, "if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean."¹ And what did our compassionate Lord do? "And Jesus, stretching forth His hand, touched him, saying: I will. Be thou made clean."² Hardly had He spoken these words, when the man's illness disappeared at once: "And forthwith his leprosy was cleansed."³ If we had been present on that occasion, my dear brethren, and had seen that sudden cure, what would we have thought of it? Would we not have cried out in astonishment, a miracle, a miracle? Blessed be Thy goodness, O God of mercy; for Thou workest a similar miracle every day for the salvation of souls. Am I suffering from a spiritual leprosy, so that I am sick to death? Have I been in that woeful state for thirty, forty, or more years? Thou hast prepared for me in the sacrament of penance a medicine that will cure me perfectly the first time I take it? The moment I confess my sins, and hear the words of absolution, the cure is completed; forthwith my leprosy is cleansed. From being sick unto death, I have become fully restored to health, as if nothing had ever been the matter with me; from being Thy hated enemy, I have become Thy just and holy friend, and Thou assurest me that Thou wilt never for all eternity remember my sins again. And is that the means that I look on as too hard and disagreeable?

Because it
is always at
hand.

Finally, in a dangerous illness, one has not always a doctor at hand. He is sent for two, three, four times, and is not at home; frequently he cannot come because he is engaged elsewhere; and when he does come, he prescribes a costly medicine, that entails a great deal of expense; a long time is required to prepare it at the apothecary's, etc. All these circumstances increase the difficulty of the cure. You are helped much easier and quicker, O sinner, when you are suffering from a spiritual malady. All you have to do is to come and acknowledge your sins in confession, and you are cured. The medicine does not cost you a farthing; you get absolution for nothing; no more time is required than is necessary for the priest to pronounce the sacramental words; and nearly everywhere you go, you have

¹ Domine, si vis, potes me mundare.—Matt. viii. 2.

² Et extendens Jesus manum, tetigit eum, dicens: Volo. Mundare.—Ibid. 3.

³ Et confestim mundata est lepra ejus.—Ibid.

all these opportunities at hand. Pitiful was the state of the paralytic man at the pool in Jerusalem; he was lying there for thirty-eight years, and had no one, on account of the great crowd of sick people that thronged the place, to put him into the water; therefore he said to Our Lord: "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pond; for whilst I am coming, another goeth down before me." This pond was a figure of our sacrament of penance. Sinners, can you, too, complain that you have no man to whom you may confess your sins? no man who can absolve you from them? In truth, Christ could have given that power to no one but His vicar on earth, or at most to only one priest in every principal city of the world, so that a long journey would be necessary in order to get forgiveness of our sins. But Our Lord did not confine His mercy within such narrow limits. Every Catholic town throughout the world is full of approved priests, who can, and, if we go properly to work, will help us in this matter.

"I have no man" to help me. Such might be the complaint of those poor Catholics who have to live amongst infidels, or Turks, or heretics, and who, through want of a priest, have no opportunity of confessing their sins for a whole year. But you, O sinner, who are living in a Catholic country, have you any reason to make a complaint of that kind? You are living amongst men who can and will heal you, when and as often as you please; there are priests enough about you; our churches and confessionals are open to you morning and evening, that you may enter them whenever it suits you; we invite you, we call out to you to come; come back, we say, and be reconciled to God; no one will be turned away. Here the subject and the superior are on the same footing; the servant is the same as his master; the beggar, as the rich man; the stranger, as the well-known friend; here all are alike. If you send for us, we are ready to go and hear your confession; if you come to us, we await you with readiness; nor do we demand any other reward, but the consolation of having done our duty, purified your soul from sin, saved you from the slavery of the devil, and made you a child of God. But alas, there is many a confessor who with just reason might exclaim of many a sinner, in the words of the paralytic man, "I have no man" who is willing to be helped and healed by me! I sit in the confessional and wait anxiously

Especially
in Catholic
countries

¹ Domine, hominem non habeo, ut, cum turbata fuerit aqua, mittat me in piscinam; dum venio enim ego, altus ante me descendit.—John v. 7.

for those who are grown old in sin, to heal them and save them from hell, but they do not come; they are afraid to put in an appearance, and that frequently because they exaggerate the difficulty of the means appointed for their cure, and so despair of it. But is that a difficult remedy which heals so quickly and so surely? which costs so little, and is ready at any moment? and, most of all, which heals such a dangerous and grievous illness? Do you, I say, look on that means as too difficult? Then, if so, you do not know the misery of the state in which you are; you do not understand what it is to be saved from eternal flames; nor do you attach any importance to your salvation. But let us consider the matter more closely. In what does the imaginary great difficulty consist? I have proved that it is easy for one who has sinned grievously to receive the sacrament of penance when we look at its effects; for it frees the sinner from an immense evil quickly, surely, and easily, and the opportunity of receiving it is always at hand. And I add now that the sacrament of penance is an easy means when we consider what it is in itself, in its own nature, as I shall show in the

Second Part.

Everything necessary for the sacrament of penance is easy.

What is required on the sinner's part to receive the sacrament of penance is the examination of conscience, a true sorrow for sin, a firm purpose of amendment, the confession of his sins, and the fulfilment of the penance enjoined him. That is all. And what terrible difficulty is there about it? The examination of conscience? What is easier than for me to remember what I have been doing for many years against God and His law? I know that there are some anxious souls who torment themselves about this examination; but they give themselves much more trouble than they need about it; I will speak on this matter on a future occasion. Perhaps the sorrow for past sin, or the purpose of amendment, is the difficulty? But these things are in the power of my own free will, with the help of God's grace, which is never wanting to me, if I earnestly desire it from the good God. If I am only sincere about changing my sinful life, there is nothing easier than to repent of and detest that by which I know I have offended so good a God, and deserved hell fire. In the Old Law, if a sinner wished to obtain forgiveness, he had to excite a perfect sorrow through the motive of a perfect love of God; but now, in the sacrament of penance, the good God is

satisfied with an imperfect sorrow, which requires far less trouble than the first, so that the Lord receives His rebellious children back again into His favor, even when they return to Him through love of their own interest, that is, through fear of eternal punishment and hope of an eternal reward. Is the difficulty perhaps in the performance of the penance enjoined? But how could that be? It is the practice of most confessors nowadays, and that, too, with good reason, to impose such slight penances, that, when compared with the sins for which they are imposed, they hardly deserve the name of penance.

So it seems, then, that the whole of the terrible difficulty consists in the confession of one's sins? Yes, this it is which makes many a one shudder, fills him with fear and anguish, so that he can hardly articulate, while he trembles in every limb of his body, especially when he has very shameful or disgraceful sins to confess. This it is that people fear, as if it were a burning furnace, through which they had to go to a painful death. But let us consider the matter reasonably, and we shall see that the cause of this anxiety is merely imaginary, and, therefore, that the difficulty is not a real one, and, at all events, is not half so terrible as people think. For, when I am going to confession, even if I have the most horrible sins to tell, who is to be my accuser? I myself, and no one else. Who is he to whom I have to make my accusation? A man like myself. What sort of a sentence have I to expect? If I do my part all right, none but a favorable one, by which I shall be justified and declared innocent. Ought not this help to console me, and to lessen the shame I imagine I must feel?

The greatest difficulty is to declare one's sins.

For, in the first place, what could be more advantageous or consoling for me, than that I myself should be my own accuser? If I had to listen to others making charges against me, and disclosing all my disgraceful actions to a judge in the presence of others; then, indeed, I should have cause to blush for shame; for my accusers might exaggerate my guilt through malice, hatred, envy, or vindictiveness. But as it is, I am my own accuser, and that, too, of my own free will, through love of God and the desire of saving my soul. I am the only one to say a word against myself, and implicit confidence must be placed in what I say, nor shall I be under any necessity of appealing to any one else. There are no witnesses required, no counselors; the whole affair is conducted between me and my judge, and the examination and sentence are kept a profound secret,

But this is easy, because the sinner is his own accuser.

so that no one can have the least knowledge concerning them.

Because the judge is a man like himself. Again, who is the judge to whom I must acknowledge my sins? He is a poor mortal like myself. If God were to send an angel, or a seraph down from heaven, to hear my confession, in visible shape, then, indeed, I might have reason to feel anxious and afraid; because the angel would not have a frail nature like me, nor flesh like me, nor would he be subject to sin and passion like me, nor would he ever have experienced the weaknesses, and the allurements and temptations to sin which assail me; and therefore he could not have such great pity for me. But the good God has appointed as my judge one who is in all respects like myself, who has the same nature, the same inclinations, miseries, weaknesses, and is exposed to the same temptations that assail me, who can sin as I do, and perhaps has committed more numerous and grievous sins than I have; so that he can and must have compassion on my frailty. Hence St. Paul says, by way of consolation, to all sinners: "Every high-priest taken from among men is ordained for men in the things that appertain to God . . . who can have compassion on them that are ignorant and that err: because he himself also is compassed with infirmity."¹ Besides (so each of you may say to himself), I can choose whom I will among those who are empowered to act as my judges; I can select one who does not know and has never seen me; I am not obliged to tell him my name; I can go to him early in the morning or late in the evening, so that he cannot see me; and, if I wish, I can cover my face.

To whom he has to confess his sins but once, and that under strict secrecy. To this judge I must declare the sins I have committed, and that but once during my whole life; for when I have once confessed them properly, I shall never be obliged to confess them again. In addition to that, the good God has taken such great care of my good name, that He has bound this judge under pain of hell fire to the strictest secrecy, so that in no imaginable circumstances, not even to save his life, nor to ensure the happiness and prosperity of the whole world, to save many thousand souls from eternal damnation, can that judge ever reveal a single sin he hears from me, either by word or sign, to others; and not only that, but he is not allowed to speak of it to myself, unless he has first asked and obtained my permission to speak with me outside of confession, after he has given me absolution, of what

¹ Omnis namque pontifex ex hominibus assumptus pro hominibus constituitur in his, quæ sunt ad Deum . . . qui condolere possit iis qui ignorant et errant: quoniam et ipse circumdatus est infirmitate.—Hehr. v. 1, 2.

I have told him. So that my sin is better hidden with him, than it is with myself; for I might make it known to others, through talkativeness, or in confidence, or in order to humble myself, whilst my confessor dare not attempt such a thing. My conscience may often reproach me with the sins I have committed; my confessor can never do so. This is an undoubted fact, my dear brethren, and there is neither law, nor dispensation, nor power in the whole world, which can ever free a confessor from this obligation of silence. How could the good God have made confession easier or more consoling?

Finally, he who is appointed by God as my judge holds the place of God, not to condemn, but to absolve me; not to reject, but to receive me; and when I have finished my accusation, and am otherwise in the proper dispositions, the sentence that I have a right to is my justification, and it is passed in these words: "I absolve thee;" I declare thee free from all thy sins; that is to say, I remit all the debt you have contracted with God; I loose the chains that bound you in the slavery of the devil; I open the dungeon in which you were imprisoned, and allow you to go forth free; I blot out your name from the book of eternal death, and write it in the book of eternal life; you may now go in peace, for I declare you innocent and holy; and I acknowledge you as a beloved friend and child of God, and as a lawful heir of the kingdom of heaven. All this is comprised in my sentence, "I absolve Thee." Therefore I must be convinced that the sacrament of penance is not, as some imagine, a hard and difficult, but rather an easy and most consoling way of escaping eternal damnation, of gaining the happiness of heaven.

Oh! if all malefactors could thus easily satisfy human justice, if they had nothing more difficult to do than the sinner who gets pardon in the sacrament of penance, would any of them have reason to complain of undue severity? But it is quite different with them. For instance, a man is suspected of murder; he is arrested at once, dragged through the public streets in presence of all, and thrown into prison. There he has to remain sometimes for months, without comfort or consolation, until sufficient evidence regarding the crime has been collected; and at last, when he is almost worn out by his confinement, he is brought to trial. If he persists in denying the crime, he has to suffer a torture that is often more painful than death itself; if he confesses his guilt at once, he is again thrown into prison, heavily ironed, and has nothing but the sword or the wheel to

Because his sentence is absolution and justification.

Malefactors are treated far more severely by human justice.

expect as the reward of his confession. So severe is human justice with evil-doers. And now, O sinner, compare these two, the manner in which God acts towards the sinner in the sacrament of penance, and that in which the justice of men acts towards malefactors, and then, if you can, you may complain of the severity and difficulty of the sacrament of penance. If the murderer, after his arrest, had nothing else to do but to declare his guilt to a respectable man in strict secrecy, in order to be set at liberty, do you think he would be likely to make a great difficulty about it? On the contrary, he would face his judge joyfully, and at once make the necessary confession, before the whole town, if required.

Therefore the sinner cannot complain of the difficulty of confession.

And Thou, O great Monarch of heaven and earth, requirest from the malefactor who has dared to offend Thee twenty, fifty, a hundred, a thousand times, and to put to death Thy beloved Son, each time, as far as in him lay; whom Thou hast at any moment in Thy hands, and canst condemn to hell at once after he has sinned; from him, I say, Thou requirest nothing but that he should confess his sins to a man like himself, who holds Thy place, and who may be utterly unknown to him, and confess them with sorrow, under a pledge of the strictest secrecy! And still he complains that Thou art too severe with him, and is frightened by the difficulty; he bears about the heavy burden of his sins from year to year, from one Easter to the other; or, at all events, he does not make his confession honestly. Terrified by an imaginary difficulty, he conceals, through shame, a certain secret sin, and adds to his guilt and to the eternal punishment that awaits it by sacrilegious confessions and Communions. What could be more reckless or foolish than such conduct?

And should at once make use of such an easy means, and return to so good a God.

Come sinners, I conclude, in the words of St. Paul to the Hebrews, "Let us go therefore with confidence to the throne of grace; that we may obtain mercy, and find grace;"¹ that is, let us approach the sacred tribunal of penance, and, without shame or fear, but with penitent hearts, confess our sins candidly. Let us imitate that notorious murderer in Spain. Augustus had published a reward of ten thousand crowns to him who should take the murderer living or dead. When Caracota (as the murderer was called) heard of this, he began to think of some plan of escaping the pursuit of such a powerful enemy. What did he do? He disguised himself, went to the emperor and humbly

¹ *Adeamus ergo cum fiducia ad thronum gratiæ, ut misericordiam consequamur, et gratiam inveniamus.*—Heb. iv. 16.

acknowledged all his crimes, trusting in his sovereign's goodness and in his own humble confession to obtain pardon. Nor was he disappointed, for the emperor not only forgave him, but also richly rewarded him. O sinner, what a terrible punishment has been decreed and published against you by the almighty God, from whose hauds it is impossible to escape! All creatures are in readiness and await only a word from their Creator, to deliver you up to His vengeance, and if you are once arrested and brought before His judgment-seat, there is no hope of your escaping the sentence of eternal condemnation. Therefore, while you still have time, you should fly to the throne of His mercy, and humbly confess your guilt, and promise amendment with sincerity, and you will find that you have to deal with a far more merciful Judge, than Augustus was towards the murderer. Do not complain that this voluntary confession is too hard for you. When the Prophet Eliseus told Naaman to go and wash seven times in the Jordan, in order to be cured of his leprosy, the latter was dissatisfied with the remedy proposed to him. But his servants said to him: "Father, if the prophet had bid thee to do some great thing, surely thou wouldst have done it; how much rather what he now hath said to thee: Wash and thou shalt be clean?"¹ Let you and me, O sinner, take those words to ourselves! If the Lord God had required of us to suffer the torments of hell till the last day, in order to obtain forgiveness of our sins, and to escape eternal fire, certainly we should submit to the condition with joy; much more, then, should we be ready to avail ourselves of the sacrament of penance, that easy means that He has prescribed for us, saying to us, go, and declare your sins only once to the priest, and they will all be forgiven you? For my part, O Lord, I can only stand amazed at Thy incomprehensible goodness and mercy, in pardoning so easily a miserable worm of the earth like me, who have so often and grievously offended Thee! No man on earth, if I had insulted him, would be willing to make friends with me again on such easy terms. And on account of this goodness of Thine, I now, with a heart full of sorrow and repentance, hate and detest all my sins; I submit to Thy sweet yoke; I will go and confess my sins candidly, as they are on my conscience, and for the remainder of my life I will love and praise above all things the Lord who has freed me by such an easy means from such a

² Pater, etsi rem grandem dixisset tibi propheta, certe facere debueras; quanto magis quia nunc dixit tibi: lavare, et mundaberis?—IV. Kings v. 13.

grievous evil, and has again received me into His friendship; and that I will do with full confidence that I shall one day love and bless Him forever in heaven. Amen.

SÉVENTEENTH SERMON.

ON THE EFFICACY OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE.

Subject.

1. In the sacrament of penance the sinner receives back at once all he had lost by sin. 2. He receives more than he had lost, and becomes spiritually richer, than he ever was in the state of innocence.—*Preached on the eighth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Fodere non valeo, mendicare erubesco. Scio quid faciam.—
Luke xvi. 3, 4.

“To dig I am not able, to beg I am ashamed. I know what I will do.”

Introduction.

This unjust steward represents the sinner who by mortal sin is guilty of unfaithfulness to his Lord and his God, and squanders all the precious treasures and goods of his soul, so that he is reduced to the extremity of spiritual poverty, and can neither dig nor beg; that is, he cannot do anything meritorious of eternal life, either by his prayers and good works, or by the trials and crosses he has to suffer while in the state of sin, as I have elsewhere explained. Oh! if he were only so provident as that steward, who found a means of gaining friends for himself to whom he might apply for help in his poverty; and for that he was praised by his master, inasmuch as he had acted wisely. But many sinners will say, “What shall I do,” in order to make good the losses I have sustained? I will give you the best possible advice; go like the steward, and call together your Master’s debtors; that is, recall to mind all the sins you have committed, acknowledge them penitently in the sacred tribunal, and thus you will make good your losses; nay, you will become richer than you were before, and you will gain credit and praise with the almighty God for having acted wisely, as I shall show

to-day, in order to supply sinners with an additional motive for speedy repentance. The sacrament of penance is a necessary means for sinners; it is also a very easy means, as we have already seen; and it is, moreover, a most advantageous, efficacious means. Why? Because

Plan of Discourse.

In the sacrament of penance the sinner receives back at once all he had lost by sin, as I shall show in the first part. In the sacrament of penance he receives more than he had before, and becomes spiritually richer than ever he was in the state of innocence. That I shall prove in the second part. Therefore, sinner, delay no longer; decide at once, like the steward, and say, "I know what I will do;" I will immediately confess my sins.

O merciful God! give to all Thy grace that they may arrive at this conclusion; we ask it of Thee humbly, through the intercession of Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

I have said on another occasion that we should not deplore too much the loss of a thing that cannot be recovered or replaced; for our sorrow in that case would be unavailing and useless. For instance, the death of a dear friend is a sorrowful occurrence; but why should I give way to immoderate grief on account of it? Can I bring back my departed friend, even if I wept tears of blood for him? Therefore, in such a case, prudence dictates to me that I should submit humbly to the decrees of Providence. It is done, and there is an end of it. Lord, may Thy holy will be done in all things! In the same way one might say to me, what is the use of my being sorry for my sins? Will all my contrition make them as if they had not been committed? There they are, and there they must remain. True; if I were to weep the ocean full of tears, I could not get rid of the fact that I have sinned. For all eternity it must remain true that I have despised my Sovereign God, and grievously offended Him. For all eternity Adam must acknowledge that he has transgressed the divine command, and brought misery on all his descendants; for all eternity Peter must acknowledge that he denied his Master most disgracefully three times; and Magdalene must confess that she was the greatest sinner of the place in which she lived. Yes, my dear brethren, in so far neither sorrow, nor resolution, nor confession, nor penance is of any good. But it is one thing to make a sin as if it never had been committed, and another, to make good the loss and damage caused by it. A

It is true that by confession we cannot make sin as if it never had been committed.

woman cannot recall her deceased son or husband to life by weeping for him; but if thereby she is enabled to bear her sorrow and desolation better, or to make good the loss she has suffered, then, indeed, she would have every right to weep as much as she likes.

Yet we can
recover all
we have
lost by sin.

And that is what the sinner can effect by confessing his sins with proper sorrow; for thereby he can recover what he has lost, and that as completely and quickly as if he had never sinned. Ah sinners, think of what a fearful loss you suffer, in that unhappy moment when you commit a mortal sin, even if it is only in thought; and then you will have some idea of the great benefit to be derived from the sacrament of penance! You have lost, as far as in you lies, for all eternity, the supreme and infinite Good, God himself, and His favor and friendship; you have lost, and for all eternity, the life of your immortal soul; you have lost, and for all eternity, all the infused supernatural virtues and ornaments of your soul, with the exception of the virtues of faith and hope, unless you have sinned grievously against those virtues. You have lost, and for all eternity, the merits you had heaped up during your life by your good works and by the trials you bore; you have lost, and for all eternity, all right to the heavenly joys that were prepared for you; you have lost, and for all eternity, the rest, repose, and peace of your conscience. I will say nothing more now of the endless evil in which you have deliberately involved yourself. From this evil, as we have seen already, you can be freed, and can completely recover all you have lost, the very moment you make a good confession and receive sacramental absolution from the priest who sits in the sacred tribunal in the place of God.

The sinner
recovers
God, whom
he had lost.

And first of all, you have again as your loving friend the God whom you had lost, and who, while you were in the unhappy state of sin, not merely refused to recognize you, but even pursued you with the bitterest hatred, and looked on you with disgust; and He loves you now as much, and is as favorable to you, as if you had preserved your baptismal innocence and had never done anything to offend Him. "He will turn again," says the Lord by the prophet Micheas, "and have mercy on us: He will put away our iniquities, and He will cast all our sins into the bottom of the sea."¹ A stone that is thrown into the depths of the sea is never seen again; and so, when sins, no

¹ Revertetur et miserebitur nostri: deponet iniquitates nostras, et projiciet in profundum maris omnia peccata nostra.—Mich. vii. 19.

matter how grievous they are, are once washed away in the precious Blood of Jesus Christ, they are buried and sunk forever out of the sight of God, as if they had never been committed. Nay, as a proof of His having completely forgiven them, the good God will not allow them to remain any longer in His memory. Hear the consoling words He speaks by the Prophet Ezechiel: "But if the wicked do penance for all his sins, which he hath committed . . . living he shall live, and shall not die. I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done."¹ But how can that be? Can the Almighty forget what He once has known, or can His knowledge be changed? St. Thomas answers this question. There is one kind of forgetfulness, he says, by which one is unable to recall what he knew before, and this cannot be in God, who of necessity must know all things from eternity to eternity by an unchangeable knowledge. There is another kind of forgetfulness by which one gives no outward sign of what he knows, and acts as if it were altogether unknown to him; and it is in this sense that God is said to forget the sins of those who truly repent.² As far as their guilt is concerned, they are no longer remembered against the sinner; God shows him as much love and favor as if he had never been guilty of the least transgression; and if he who has been forgiven in the sacrament of penance should be so ungrateful as to fall again into the same mortal sins, those that he has got rid of by a good confession would never be held up against him, as far as their guilt is concerned; nay, if he is lost forever on account of the new sins he has committed, the former ones, for which he obtained forgiveness, would not be taken account of in his punishment. They are forgotten, and will remain so forever. And therefore the sinner is just as high in the favor and friendship of God, as if he had never committed a single mortal sin. O Christians, what a consolation for me and for all those who have sinned grievously!

In the second place, you were bearing about in your body, while in the state of sin, a soul that was disgusting and abominable in the sight of God, according to His words to the Prophet Ezechiel, "The soul that sinneth, the same shall die."³ The beautiful life, that consists in sanctifying grace, is given back

The sanctifying grace, that was lost, and infused virtues are restored.

¹ Si autem impius egerit poenitentiam ab omnibus peccatis suis, quæ operatus est . . . vita vivet et non morietur. Omnium iniquitatum ejus, quas operatus est, non recordabor.—Ezech. xviii. 21-22.

² Et sic Deus dicitur oblivisci peccata eorum qui vere poenitent.—St. Thom. in c. 16 Apoc.

³ Anima, quæ peccaverit, ipsa morietur.—Ezech. xviii. 4.

to you when you have received absolution in the sacrament of penance; and you are again clothed with the precious garment, which compels God to love you when He sees it on your soul, and which you must necessarily take with you into heaven, if you die in it. We have a figure of this in the Prodigal Son. When he returned to his father, full of repentance, and acknowledged his fault, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee," the father cried out at once, full of joy, "Bring forth quickly the first robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet . . . let us eat and make merry, because this my son was dead, and is come to life again; was lost and is found."¹ By the ring on the hand and the shoes on the feet, we are to understand the other ornament of the soul, that is, the different supernatural virtues that were infused in baptism, which follow and wait, like courtiers, on sanctifying grace as on their queen; these, too, are all restored to you in the sacrament of penance.

And all the
merits
previously
gained.

Thirdly, you must know that all the merits of the good works you performed while in the state of grace are completely lost the moment you commit one mortal sin; and while you are in the state of sin, they are of no more use to you than a defaced coin that has no value any longer; so that, if you were to die in that unhappy state, you would not receive the least reward for all your good works, even if you had surpassed in holiness the Blessed Virgin herself. The sacrament of penance is that most fortunate transaction by which you can make good all those immense losses, and restore your former good works and merits to life again, so that you are just as rich in merits as you were before you committed a single mortal sin, and those merits, even down to the value of one "Our Father," will all be written down to your credit and to your eternal glory. And this is in accordance with the general teaching of theologians, and is partly founded on the promise made by God to the Prophet Joel. After the Lord had said: "Be converted to me with all your heart,"² He adds: "And I will restore to you the years which the locust and the bruchus, and the mildew, and the palmer-worm hath eaten;"³ that is, I will restore to those who do penance all the fruits they collected while in the state of

¹ Pater, peccavi in cœlum, et coram te. . . Cito proferte stolam primam, et induite illum, et date annulum in manum ejus, et calcamenta in pedes ejus. . . manducemus et epulemur, quia hic filius meus mortuus erat, et revixit; perierat et inventus est.—Luke. xv. 21-24.

² Convertimini ad me in toto corde vestro.—Joel. ii. 12.

³ Et reddam vobis annos, quos comedit locusta, bruchus, et rubigo, et eruca.—Ibid. 25.

grace, and which were eaten away by sin. In the same way, too, we must understand the words of the Prophet Jeremias, "Convert us, O Lord, to Thee, and we shall be converted; renew our days as from the beginning;"¹ that is, the good we have done before we sinned shall be ours again, and all our former good days shall be reckoned to our credit.

Finally, the sacrament of penance brings back to us the peace of mind and repose of conscience we had lost. Certain and in-

The torment of a bad conscience shown by similes.

fallible is the truth that the Holy Ghost has spoken by the Wise Ecclesiasticus: "A wicked heart shall be laden with sorrows."² Nor can it be otherwise. An honest man who has got into debt and is pressed by his creditors on all sides, but has not the means of paying them, must be necessarily troubled by many painful and uneasy thoughts; he has no rest, either day or night, and is always thinking of his debts; ah, he says to himself, would that I were able to pay off everything! Hardly does he dare to venture out into the street, lest he should meet one of his creditors. With good reason was it once said of a man who was deeply in debt, I should like to see the pillow on which that man can sleep at night; meaning thereby that it was impossible for such a one to enjoy his night's rest. But if some good fortune falls to his lot, if, for instance, he inherits a large sum that enables him to pay all his debts; what profound peace of heart he at once enjoys! The sick man who is suffering from an internal abscess can hardly bear the pain it causes him; every position he assumes causes him new torture; nor can any medicine help him until the abscess breaks, and he is freed from it altogether; then it seems to him that he has received a new life. What must be the thoughts of a malefactor who is lying in prison waiting for sentence of death to be passed on him? His imagination during the day, and, if he can sleep at all, his dreams during the night, are employed about nothing but gibbets and wheels, as if he were already suffering the tortures of a disgraceful death; if he hears the bolt stirring on the door of his prison, a cold sweat breaks out all over him; now, he thinks, they are coming to bring me to the gallows. I once saw a man who was told that he had to die. How the poor wretch raved and stormed! He seemed to me like a wild animal shut up in a room, clawing and leaping about the walls and windows trying to get out; he tore at his chains,

¹ *Converte nos, Domine, ad te, et convertemur: innova dies nostros, sicut a principio.*—Lament. v. 21.

² *Cor nequam gravabitur in doloribus.*—Eccles. iii. 29.

in the hope of breaking them; he sprang up from the ground as if he would try to leap through the ceiling, and threw himself on the floor as if he wished to burrow through the stones and hide himself under them. What joy would not that poor wretch have felt, my dear brethren, if I had freed him from his chains, and opened the door of his prison, so that he might go free? But how much greater would not his joy have been, if I could have told him that his life was spared by his sovereign, and that he was at full liberty to go wherever he pleased?

The sinner
had lost all
peace of
conscience.

Sinner, if you consider the matter in the proper light, you have reason to experience a much greater joy when you have made a good confession and have been absolved from your sins. While you were in the state of sin, you were a debtor to the almighty God, who had you completely in His power, and you owed Him as many millions as you had committed sins; for when you pray to the Lord, you say, "Forgive us our trespasses," or our debts. Nor had you a farthing in your possession to pay them; your own conscience was the importunate creditor, that kept constantly crying in your ear, "Pay what thou owest." How have you been able to find any rest while in such a state? You were suffering from an internal abscess, the pain of which must have taken away all pleasure from you, unless you were quite hardened; and, indeed, we read of St. Catharine of Siena that she was supernaturally enabled to perceive the foulness and stench of the ulcers of impurity on the souls of those who were addicted to that vice, and the sight and smell of them caused her the utmost disgust. How could you live in such a state? You were in prison, under the yoke of the devil, bound hand and foot, and the sentence of eternal death had been already passed on you; how could you continue in that state, without suffering constant fear and anxiety? Say what you will, it is impossible for you, unless you are a hardened sinner, to have rest or pleasure in it. The very stones must have pitied king David, if they could have heard him moaning, in the bitterness of his anguish, "There is no health in my flesh, because of Thy wrath; there is no peace for my bones, because of my sins."¹ So much did the debts he had contracted trouble him. "My sores are putrefied and corrupted, because of my foolishness."² And therefore, "I am become miserable, and am bowed down even to the end; I

¹ Non est sanitas in carne mea a facie iræ tuæ; non est pax ossibus meis a facie peccatorum meorum.—Ps. xxxvii. 4.

² Putruerunt et corruptæ sunt cicatrices meæ a facie insipientiæ meæ.—Ibid. 6.

walked sorrowful all the day long;”¹ so much pain did he feel from the hidden sore of his conscience. “I am afflicted and humbled exceedingly; I roared with the groaning of my heart;”² so much was he tortured by his imprisonment and by the fear of eternal death. Other sinners have been known to take their own lives, either by hanging, or cutting their throats, or drowning themselves, and their only reason for doing so was to get rid of the tortures of conscience, which had become insupportable. “Who hath resisted Him, and hath had peace?”³ Such is the question that the patient Job asks all sinners without exception. Nor is there one of them all that could say, I have done so.

Now, what is to be done by one who is in this miserable state, in order to regain the wished-for peace and repose? Answer us, O penitent David, for you have had experience of it; tell us how you acted in your trouble and anguish! “I said, I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord: and Thou hast forgiven the wickedness of my sin;”⁴ and thus I have again found peace of heart. It is by the confession of our sins, my dear brethren, that we receive the writing sealed with the precious Blood of Jesus Christ, to prove that we have had all our debts remitted by the Almighty forever; by confession we get rid of the foul sore of sin; by confession our chains are broken, we are liberated from the slavery of the devil and restored to the freedom of the beloved children of God. Hence, as a matter of course, when the cause of our fear, anxiety, and trouble has been removed, our minds must enjoy a great peace and contentment. I call as witnesses to the truth of this all those who have been great sinners, and who have freed themselves from their sins by a good confession. How did you feel when you came out of the confessional, and had performed the penance imposed on you? Must you not acknowledge that it seemed as if a heavy mill-stone had been removed from your necks; and as if the heavens looked brighter than before? You went to sleep with hearts filled with joy and peace, and you got up in the morning with the sweet assurance that you were among the friends and children of God. It is evident, then, that, if one wishes to have true repose

This he gets back in confession.

¹ Miser factus sum, et curvatus sum usque in finem; tota die contristatus ingrediebar.—Ps. xxxvii. 7.

² Afflictus sum, et humiliatus sum nimis; rugiebam a gemitu cordis mei.—Ibid. 9.

³ Quis restitit ei, et pacem habuit?—Job. ix. 4.

⁴ Dixi, confitebor adversum me injustitiam meam Domino; et tu remisisti impietatem peccati mei.—Ps. xxxi. 5.

and enjoyment on earth, one must seek it in a good conscience.

Therefore penance is a very efficacious means.

Thus, O sinner, you have received back in the sacrament of penance everything without exception that you had lost by your sins. "O excellent virtue of penance! O salutary unction!"¹ cries out, with reason, St. Thomas of Villanova. O golden tears! O sweet repentance! O much-to-be-desired confession! Who should not hasten to thee with joy and pleasure! Come, O sinners, and try it but once, and learn what a happy and salutary thing it is to be freed from the burden of sin! Come, repent of and confess your sins, and you will receive back all the good things you have so shamefully lost. But why do I say you will receive back what you have lost? It will be with you as with the Hebrews when they were freed from the slavery of Egypt: "He brought them out with silver and gold,"² says the Psalmist David, which they took from the Egyptians by the command of God; so that they went away richer than when they came. So also, I say, it will be with the sinner in the sacrament of penance; not only will he get back all he had lost; but he will become richer in his soul than he ever was before; for he will have more graces and blessings after confession, than he ever had in the state of innocence. This I shall briefly explain in the

Second Part.

By confession the sinner is made spiritually richer than ever he was before.

And are we, then, to sin boldly in order to become richer in graces and merits after confession? By no means; that does not at all follow from what I have said. To sin, and to have been guilty of sin, brings neither grace nor merit; for, as we have seen already, it is the canker-worm that gnaws away all our merits and mortifies them; and, moreover, what is still worse, the good works we perform in the state of sin are of no value whatever as to eternal merit or reward. It is one thing to become richer by penance than one was before having sinned, and another to become richer than one would have been if one had never sinned. Therefore I say, by way of warning, to each and every one the words of the Prophet Jeremias: "Know thou and see that it is an evil and a bitter thing for thee to have left the Lord thy God."³ But yet I say also, to the greater glory of the divine mercy and by way of encouragement to sinners, that they may repent more speedily, when sin has,

¹ O eximia poenitentium virtus! O unctio salutaris!

² Eduxit eos cum auro et argento.—Ps. clv. 37.

³ Scito, et vide quia malum et amarum est reliquisse te Dominum Deum tuum.—Jerem. ii. 19.

unfortunately, once been committed, it is penance and confession which bring back all that was gained before in the state of grace, and add a new gain to it. Hence we should at once resolve to make use of such an efficacious means, and to make a good confession of all our sins. And how can the repentant sinner become richer after confession, than he was before?

First, along with the graces he had before, he receives by the efficacy of the sacrament, through the merits of Jesus Christ, a new degree of sanctifying grace which he never had before, so as to strengthen him against future temptations, and prevent him from falling again into sin. You see, therefore, that he has already gained by the sacrament of penance something he never had before. But perhaps you will think that is not much. Oh, I answer, in the words of our dear Lord to the Samaritan woman, "If thou didst know the gift of God."¹ If you only knew the value of this grace of which we are now speaking! Sanctifying grace is such a great and precious treasure, that the least degree of it is far more valuable than all the riches of the earth. All the wisdom, beauty, health, nobility, wealth, and power of all who ever were, are, or will be on earth, nay, all the excellences of the angelic nature, are not to be compared to the smallest point of sanctifying grace, which, when it clothes the soul, makes it pleasing to God; so that, if it were necessary, in order to gain the least part of this grace, that the world should be destroyed, the heavens convulsed and turned into chaos, and all the wonders of nature that the Almighty has created reduced to nothing, this loss, enormous as it would be, could not for a moment be compared with the worth of the grace thus gained. Because all those things are but natural, while sanctifying grace is supernatural, and, as St. Thomas teaches, is a participation of the divine nature. What do you think of it now? Is it only a small gain that is secured by penance? If it brought nothing else but this grace alone, it would be well worth our while to have frequent recourse to it, with hot tears of sorrow for our sins.

For he receives an increase of sanctifying grace.

The second advantage to be derived from the sacrament of penance is that the sinner who has been guilty of grievous transgressions, when he has once been converted, and has repented of and confessed his sins, is, generally speaking, more on his guard in future and is more humble and earnest in the

He becomes more humble and zealous in the service of God.

¹ Si scires donum Dei.—John iv. 10.

divine service, than he was before, and has a greater love of God than when he was innocent. For the remembrance of his deplorable fall, and the thought that he so often merited the pains of hell, must necessarily make him humble; while the recollection of the divine mercy, that has received him so lovingly to grace after so many grievous sins, must soften his heart, inflame it with a greater love for so good a God, and with a determination to be more diligent in the service of God; while he will be more earnest in his efforts to avoid, not only mortal, but also even venial sin, than he was before to avoid mortal sin alone. That is the meaning of those words of Our Lord in the Gospel of St. Luke, "I say to you that even so there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance."¹ But how is that? is the question asked by theologians; has God more pleasure in a penitent soul than in an innocent one? and, in fact, more pleasure than in ninety-nine just souls that have never offended Him? The state of innocence, answers St. Thomas of Aquin, is in itself a more perfect and happy state, and is more pleasing to God; yet the penitent sinner is in so far more pleasing to God, "because, generally speaking, penitents become more cautious, humble, and fervent."² Never did Magdalene love Christ more tenderly, than when she repented of and confessed her manifold sins; never was Peter more humble and fervent in procuring the glory of his Divine Master, than after he had denied Him, and bewailed his denial with bitter tears.

And is
therefore
more loved
and prized
by God.

From this it follows that he who does penance sincerely is loved more tenderly by the almighty God. St. Gregory explains by a simile the words of Christ that I have just quoted; a general, he says, thinks more of a soldier who, having first fled from the enemy through fear, afterwards, in order to wipe out the memory of his cowardice, fights with the utmost bravery, than he does of one who has always remained faithful to his colors, but has never done anything remarkable. Again, a peasant takes more pleasure in the field that formerly produced nothing but thistles and thorns, but which he has now made to bring forth excellent crops, than in one that was always fruitful, although never in an extraordinary degree. In the same way God has frequently more pleasure and joy in a converted sinner, who had indeed formerly abandoned Him, but now stands by

¹ Dico vobis, quod ita gaudium erit in cælo super uno peccatore penitentiam agente quam super nonaginta novem justis, qui non indigent penitentia. — Luke xv. 7.

² Quia plerumque penitentes cautiore, humiliores, et ferventiores resurgunt.

Him all the more heroically; who was before an accursed soil covered with weeds and brambles, but is now cleansed and produces excellent fruits of good works; greater joy, I say, has God in such a one than in an innocent, just man, who never offended Him grievously, and never showed any extraordinary zeal and earnestness in His service. Palladius tells us of a person who lived a solitary life in a convent, but having formed an attachment for a person of the opposite sex, was guilty of many sins against holy purity; that, after she had done penance, and had devoted herself altogether with the greatest humility to the service of the sick, Our Lord said to a certain priest, "She pleases Me better in her repentance, than she did in her virginity."¹

Finally, as a consequence of this, since God loves more tenderly those who are more inflamed with love for Him, it is generally the case that, as the repentant sinner becomes more humble and zealous in the divine service, so he also receives more graces, favors, and benefits from God, than many others who never offended Him grievously and do not serve Him with so much zeal. For God acts very differently from the great ones of earth; if any one offends one of the latter, no matter how long or how humbly he asks for pardon, even if he obtains it through the intercession of some one in power, it will be a long time before he can expect to receive any special mark of favor from the offended person; "*Manet alta mente repostum:*" the great ones of earth are slow to forget an injury; nor can any amount of subsequent services wipe out the memory of it. "Is that the way with my God?" asks St. Peter Damian; "no: perish the thought: for it is His custom to honor penitents more than the innocent."² For when He has forgotten forever all the sinner's former offences He shows him the same favor as He does the innocent; and consequently, if the sinner loves and serves Him better, He is more loving and generous to him than to the innocent. Again the parable of the Prodigal furnishes us with a figure of this. On the return of his undutiful son, the father prepared a splendid banquet to welcome him, a thing he had never done for his other son, who had always been obedient to him, and who made it a subject of bitter complaint: "Behold, for so many years do I serve thee, and I have never transgressed

And generally gets more graces from God than many innocent people.

¹ *Magis mihi placuit in penitentia, quam in virginitate.*—Pallad. cap. 139.

² *Numquid ita Deus meus? absit; consuevit enim honorare penitentes magis quam innocentes.*

thy commandment, and yet thou hast never given me a kid to make merry with my friends; but as soon as this thy son is come, who hath devoured his substance with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.”¹ Magdalene, formerly a public sinner, was the first among the holy women; Peter, who had denied his Master three times, was the first among the Apostles, according to the Holy Scriptures, to be honored by a visit from Our Lord after His resurrection; Paul became a great and wonderful saint, after he had persecuted the Church. Read the Lives of the Saints, and you will find many instances of penitent sinners being richer in the graces of prophecy and miracles than others who had never sinned grievously. I hope, on a future occasion, to speak of these more at length, to the greater honor and glory of the divine mercy.

Conclusion
and exhortation
to have recourse
at once to such
a useful
means.

O Christians, what a good and merciful God we have to deal with! If a criminal who is already under the gallows thinks it the greatest happiness to hear that his life is spared, how would he not exult with joy if he learned, moreover, that he was to be raised to a throne? But a far greater happiness is given to us by the sacrament of penance; for not only are our lives spared, that we had forfeited eternally; not only do we get back all we had lost; but, besides, we become, by sanctifying grace, children of the almighty God, and heirs to an eternal kingdom; nay, we are higher in the favor of Our Lord than we were before. Is it possible, then, that there can be sinners who are afraid of confession? Who prefer to wallow like beasts in the filth of sin, rather than to sit on thrones of honor? Who prefer to die an unhappy death and go to hell, rather than gain endless treasures and riches by such an easy and efficacious means? Ah, rash mortals! how long will you, then, continue to rob your God of the joy He would have in your conversion, and yourselves of such a great good? “For Christ we beseech you,” I say to you in the words of St. Paul, “be reconciled to God;”² do not wait any longer, but try at once and see how sweet and merciful the Lord is to those who have Him as a friend.

Consolation
for converted sinners.

And you, converted sinners, who have already, by a good confession, laid aside the heavy burden of your sins, and are sometimes oppressed and filled with anxiety at the recollection of your former crimes; be consoled, be of good courage, and rejoice

¹ Ecce tot annis servio tibi, et nunquam mandatum tuum præterivi, et nunquam dedisti mihi hædum ut cum amicis meis epularer; sed postquam filius tuus hic, qui devoravit substantiam suam cum meretricibus, venit; occidisti illi vitulum saginatum.—Luke xv. 29-30.

² Obsecramus pro Christo, reconciliamini Deo.—II. Cor. v. 20.

in the Lord! “The wickedness of the wicked shall not hurt him,” such is the assurance the good God Himself gives you, “in what day soever he shall turn from his wickedness.”¹ No; you are now beloved and prized by God, and, if you wish, you may be even more loved and prized than if you had never sinned, as I have already shown. Let us all, then, come to this conclusion: to serve henceforth the good God, who, as we must acknowledge, has been so merciful to us, with more care, humility and zeal, and to love Him above all things, constantly, to the end of our lives. Yes, O my God, the special mercy Thou hast shown me deserves that I should make this resolution! Help me by Thy grace to keep it! Amen.

¹ *Impietas impii non nocebit ei, in quacumque die conversus fuerit ab impietate sua.—*
Ezech. xxxiii. 12.

ON THE EXAMEN OF CONSCIENCE BEFORE CONFESSION.

EIGHTEENTH SERMON.

ON THE PRAYER OF THE SINNER WHO IS ABOUT TO GO TO CONFESSION.

Subject.

The sinner who wishes to return to God by a good confession must pray to God with humility.—*Preached on the tenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Percutiebat pectus suum, dicens: Deus, propitius esto mihi peccatori.—Luke xviii. 13.

“He struck his breast, saying: O God, be merciful to me, a sinner.”

Introduction.

What cannot humble prayer obtain from God? A great, public, and notorious sinner gains more by simply striking his breast, and heaving a penitent sigh, with the few words, “O God, be merciful to me a sinner,” than the proud Pharisee with all his fasting, alms-deeds, and other good works. “I say to you,” such is the testimony Our Lord gives on the matter, “this man went down into his house justified rather than the other.” Sinful Christians, there you have a true pattern of a penitent! You must imitate the public sinner, if you are really determined to get rid of the filth of your sins by a good confession, and to return to God with your whole hearts. The examen of conscience, supernatural sorrow for your sins, an earnest and fixed purpose of amendment, the candid confession of all grievous sins to the priest, and the performance of the penance enjoined

can you: these, as you know, are all necessary to a good confession. But there is another thing that must precede them, or else it will be very difficult to perform them properly. What is that? Humble prayer to God for the grace of true repentance, as I shall now show.

Plan of Discourse.

The sinner who wishes to return to God by a good confession must pray to God with humility. Such is the whole subject of the present instruction. Therefore, sinners, pray with the publican, "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Pray also, ye just, that you may preserve the grace of God. Such shall be the conclusion.

We all beg of Thee, O Lord, through the merits of Mary and of our holy guardian angels, to grant to sinners the grace of true repentance, and to the just the grace of perseverance.

It is an article of faith taught by the Catholic Church against the error and heresy of Pelagius, that no one can do the least good work deserving of a supernatural reward, unless he is helped first by the grace of God, no matter what he may do with his own natural powers. This truth is founded on the words of Our Saviour in the Gospel of St. John, "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine; so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. For without Me you can do nothing."¹ "Blessed be God!" cries out St. Augustine, "who in these words instructs the hearts of the humble," that they may not be exalted by their good works, but humbly ascribe every good thing that is in them to the grace and mercy of God; "and stops the mouths of the proud,"² who attribute everything to themselves and to their own strength, as if they required no help from any one. "Hear, ye proud ones," so he addresses the Pelagians; "have you understood those words? Christ, the Son of God, says: 'Without Me you can do nothing.' He does not say, 'without Me you can do only a little,' but, nothing, not even the least thing, can you do without Me."

No one can do any good work without a previous grace of God.

Now, if this is undoubtedly true of the just man who is in the state of grace and is a friend and child of God, how much less, then, can the sinner who has lost sanctifying grace do penance and recover the friendship of God by his own efforts, unless he is urged thereto and assisted by the grace and help of the mer-

Much less can the sinner do penance.

¹ Sicut palme non potest ferre fructum a semetipso, nisi manserit in vite; sic nec vos, nisi in me manseritis. . . . Quia sine me nihil potestis facere.—John. xv. 4, 5.

² Corda instruit humilium; ora obstruit superborum.

ciful God? If, when I am standing upright and firmly on my feet, I cannot take a step forward without the divine assistance, how much more difficult must it not be for me to rise again without that assistance, when I have fallen down on the ground? No; neither of the two is possible; and therefore, according to the decree of the Council of Trent, "if any one says that a man can believe, hope, love, or repent properly, without the previous inspiration and assistance of the Holy Ghost. . . . let him be anathema."¹ Mark the words, "do penance properly." The traitor Judas did penance, as the Gospel says: "Judas . . . repenting himself, brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and ancients;"² full of sorrow, he confessed his sin. "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood."³ But his repentance was not of the right sort, and it did not obtain for him the forgiveness of his sin; it was a mere natural sorrow, that deprived him of all hopes of happiness, and reduced him to despair. "He departed, and went, and hanged himself with an halter."⁴

Man can sin
by his own
strength,
but not rise
again.

Thus we see that man can sin and grievously offend God by his own natural powers; but without the previous help and supernatural grace of God, he cannot rise properly from the state of sin. The reason of this is evident. I can, for instance, put out my own eyes, and make myself stone-blind; but can I restore my sight? No; that exceeds the powers of nature. I can throw myself from a height to the bottom of an abyss; but when I am lying down there, can I come out without help? That is impossible; my only chance is for some one to lower down a ladder or a rope, by which I may climb to the top. I can allow myself to be bound with an iron chain, or to be locked up in a dungeon; but can I loose the chain, or open the door of my prison, unless some one gives me a key for the purpose? I can take away my own life by violence; I can hang myself, or pierce my heart with a dagger (and would to God that there were not many rash mortals who thus put an end to themselves)! but when I have thus taken away my life, can I restore myself to life again? No; none but the almighty God can do that.

Because he
takes away

It is just the same with the sinner, my dear brethren. What do you do, unhappy mortal, when you break the commandments

¹ Si quis dixerit, sine præveniente Spiritus Sancti inspiratione atque adiutorio hominem credere, sperare, diligere, aut poenitere posse, sicut oportet. . . . anathema sit.

² Poenitentia ductus retulit triginta argenteos principibus sacerdotum et senioribus.--Matt. xxvii. 3.

³ Peccavi, tradens sanguinem justum.--Ibid. 4. ⁴ Abiens laqueo se suspendit.--Ibid. 5.

of God by committing a mortal sin? You deliberately put out your own eyes, and deprive yourself of the light of your soul. Hear what the Prophet Sophonias says: "They shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord."¹ They will stumble from one fault into another, as St. Jerome says on this text; they will fall from one sin into another, when they have lost grace, and have become blind and perverse in their judgment and understanding, so that, for a momentary satisfaction of their wicked and brutal appetites, they are ready to sacrifice the eternal joys of heaven, and to change them for the torments of hell. And how can you recover your sight? Who can restore it to you? No other but He of whom the holy Evangelist St. John says: "That was the true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world."² He it is who wishes to be appealed to in the words of the blind man, "Lord, that I may see."³ Hear how St. Augustine, in his soliloquy with God, describes how he was healed of his former spiritual blindness: "Late have I known Thee, O true light."⁴ A thick cloud of vanity had obscured my sight, so that I could not see the Sun of justice and the Light of truth; I was wandering about, an unhappy child in the midst of darkness. I was pleased with my blindness, because I knew not the light. I was blind and loved my blindness, and wandered from one obscurity into another. "Who led me forth? Who took me by the hand to rescue me? Who was it that restored me to sight? It was Thou, O Lord my God, who art full of mercy and forgiveness."⁵ I sought Thee not, and Thou didst seek me. Thou hast called out from on high to my heart, in a clear and penetrating voice, let there be light; and there was light. The dark cloud that was blinding me disappeared, I saw Thy light, heard Thy voice, and said: "Truly, Thou art my God, who hast called me out of the darkness and the shadow of death into Thy wonderful light; and behold, I see."⁶ "Thanks to Thee, who hast enlightened me."⁷ "I should have been always blind, if it were not for Thee. For there is no light but in Thee."⁸ "I thank Thee for

by sin the
light that
God alone
can restore

¹ Ambulabunt ut cæci, quia Domino peccaverunt.—Soph. i. 17.

² Erat lux vera, quæ illuminat omnem hominem venientem in hunc mundum.—John i. 9.

³ Domine, ut videam.—Luke xviii. 41.

⁴ O lumen verum, sero te cognovi.—St. Aug. Soliloq., c. 33.

⁵ Quis inde me eduxit? Quis accepit manu meam, ut inde me educeret? Qui est ille Illuminator meus? Tues, Domine Deus meus, misericors et miserator.

⁶ Vere Domine tu es Deus meus, qui eduxisti me de tenebris, et umbra mortis, et vocasti me in admirabile lumen tuum: et ecce video. ⁷ Gratias tibi, illuminator meus.

⁸ Quia illuminari non poteram sine te, et non est lux extra te.

having enlightened and redeemed me.”¹ So far St. Augustine.

He has cast himself into an abyss from which God alone can free him.

And what have you done besides, unhappy mortal, when you sinned grievously? You deliberately cast yourself down into the depths of the abyss, of which the wise Man says in the Proverbs, “The wicked man, when he is come into the depth of sins, contemneth.”² And how are you to come forth out of that abyss? Ah, to no purpose would you strive; you would be lost and buried forever, if God did not stretch forth His hand to you and help you by His grace. “The deep hath closed me round about,” such is the lamentation of the disobedient Jonas, “the sea hath covered my head; I went down to the lowest parts of the mountains; the bars of the earth have shut me up forever.”³ What are you to do, unfortunate Prophet? to whom will you fly? “Thou wilt bring up my life from corruption, O Lord, my God;”⁴ such was his confident appeal to heaven. It is Thou, and Thou alone, who canst draw me out of this abyss. Like to this is the sigh that I hear king David utter: “Out of the depths I have cried to Thee, O Lord.”⁵ Unhappy man, that I am; where am I? Into what a fearful abyss I have cast myself! From these depths, out of which I cannot help myself by my own strength, I sigh and weep, and call out to Thee, O Lord, “Lord, hear my voice.”⁶ Nor will I cease crying, until Thou hast heard me. There is no hope for you, O sinner, but in the help of the Lord!

He has bound himself with chains which only God can loose.

Besides, you have fettered yourself in this abyss with so many chains, and have shut the door so fast on yourself, that you have made it almost impossible for you to come out; as the penitent David again deploras: “The cords of the wicked have encompassed me,”⁷ so that, even if I wished, I could not free myself. To break these chains, to open the door of this prison, is in Thy power alone, who sayest in the Apocalypse: “I have the keys of death and of hell,”⁸ and who hast said to Thy Apostle, Peter, “I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.”⁹ “And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in

¹ Gratias tibi ago, illuminator et liberator meus.

² Impius, cum in profundum venerit peccatorum, contemnit. —Prov. xviii. 3.

³ Abyssus vallavit me, pelagus operuit caput meum; ad extrema montium descendi; terræ vectes concluderunt me in æternum. —Jonas ii. 6, 7.

⁴ Sublevabis de corruptione vitam meam, Domine Deus meus. —Ibid.

⁵ De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine. —Ps. cxxix. 1.

⁶ Domine, exaudi vocem meam. —Ibid. 2.

⁷ Funes peccatorum circumplexi sunt me. —Ibid. cxviii. 61.

⁸ Habeo claves mortis et inferni. —Apoc. i. 18.

⁹ Tibi dabo claves regni cœlorum. —Matt. xvi. 19.

heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven.”¹

The mention of St. Peter's name reminds me of a strange thing that occurred to him; he was lying in prison at midnight, bound with heavy chains, and guarded by two soldiers, and was to be led out to execution on the following morning; under these circumstances he slept as peacefully as if he had not the least danger to fear. “Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and the keepers before the door kept the prison.”² But, Peter, is this a time for sleep? The executioner has his sword ready, and he will soon come to take your life; and yet you sleep as quietly, laden with your heavy chains, as if you were in a comfortable bed! A striking picture, my dear brethren, of the sinner who, laden with his crimes, as with so many chains, lies bound under the yoke of the devil, and must expect at any moment to hear that he is to be led out to eternal death; and yet he sleeps while in that state, he eats and drinks, and talks and laughs, as if he had nothing to fear. What lamentable blindness and stupidity! But to return to Peter; what happened to him? “Behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him; and a light shined in the room; and he, striking Peter on the side, raised him up, saying: Arise quickly. And the chains fell off from his hands.”³ And the angel led him through the soldiers out of the prison. Again a striking picture of what occurs when the sinner returns to God. If the angel had not awaked Peter, he would have slept on; and even if he had awoke of his own accord, he would not have been able to free himself from prison. In the same way, there is no one whose soul is fettered by mortal sin who could even think of repenting, unless the light of grace first shone on him; and if he formed a thousand wishes to be converted and do penance, he would not be able to fulfil one of them by his natural powers alone, unless the angel of the Lord, that is God's powerful grace, first burst his chains and freed him from the slavery of the devil.

St. Anselm once met in the street a child who, to amuse it-
self, had tied a string around the feet of a sparrow, so that, when
the bird flew up into the air, seeking its liberty, the child could

Shown by a
simile.

¹ Et quodcumque ligaveris super terram, erit ligatum et in cœlis: et quodcumque solveris super terram, erit solutum et in cœlis.—Matt. xvi. 19.

² In ipsa nocte erat Petrus dormiens inter duos milites, vinctus catenis duabus, et custodes ante ostium custodiebant carcerem.—Acts xii. 6.

³ Ecce, angelus Domini astitit, et lumen refulsit in habitaculo; percussoque latere Petri exoltavit eum, dicens: surge velociter. Et ceciderunt catenæ de manibus ejus.—Ibid. 7.

pull it back; this the child did several times to its great amusement. The holy man saw what was going on, and felt great pity for the unfortunate bird; ah! he said, I wish the string would break, so that the bird might fly away. At last the thread did break, and the bird escaped, whereupon the child commenced to cry bitterly, while Anselm, on the contrary, was highly delighted. His companions were amazed that such a great man, and an archbishop to boot, could take such interest in mere child's play, as to give evident signs of its exciting in him both joy and sorrow. But he said to them, were you looking at what the child was doing with the bird? Do you know what I was thinking about? That this is just the way in which the devil plays with many men; for when he has bound them fast in his chains, he drags them down at pleasure into one sin after the other; and there is many a one who is given to impurity, injustice, drunkenness, cursing, and swearing that knows the unhappy state in which he is, and sometimes cries out, ah, would that I could free myself from this evil habit! He is then like the sparrow, and tries to fly into the air; but the devil, by means of long-continued habit, drags him back again into his former sins of drunkenness, theft, or impurity. In a word, he will not be set at liberty, until a special grace of God bursts his bonds; and then he can joyfully sing, with the penitent David: "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,"¹ without whose help we and all poor sinners should still be in the clutches of the devil.

He has murdered his soul, and God alone can restore it to life.

Finally, unhappy mortal, when you commit a mortal sin, you cruelly murder yourself, inasmuch as you take away the life of your poor soul. "I am straitened on every side," said the chaste Susanna, when she fell into the hands of the godless elders; "for if I do this thing it is death to me;" if I consent to your wishes, I shall have to suffer death; "and if I do it not, I shall not escape your hands."² What dost thou say, Susanna? "It is death to me." No; the contrary is the case. If you consent to the will of those wicked men, your life will be spared; but if

¹ Benedictus Dominus qui non dedit nos in captivum dentibus eorum. Anima nostra sicut passer erepta est de laqueo venantium; laqueus contritus est, et nos liberati sumus. Adjutorium nostrum in nomine Domini, qui fecit cælum et terram.—Ps. cxxiii. 6-8.

² Angustiae sunt mihi undique; si enim hoc egero, mors mihi est; si autem non egero, non effugiam manus vestras.—Dan. xlii. 22.

you do not consent, they have threatened to accuse you as an adulteress, that you may be stoned to death. No; said the wise and holy woman; if I do as they ask me, and commit sin, it will be the death of my soul, "But it is better for me to fall into your hands without doing it, than to sin in the sight of the Lord." I would rather die a thousand times, than sin before the Lord, and thereby inflict eternal death on my soul. Mark, O sinner; your soul is dead; who will, who can recall it to life again? Ah, that is not in your own power. That requires the almighty power of God. If He by His grace does not call you forth, like another Lazarus, from the grave of sin, you are and must remain dead forever. There is no other means for you to regain life, but the help of God.

From this it follows, in the first place, that he who is guilty of grievous sin is most presumptuous; for he deliberately places himself in a state from which it is impossible for him to free himself, in order to save his soul, by his own unassisted efforts. For, on the one hand, when God is forsaken by man, He is not bound to give him the grace of true repentance; and, on the other hand, no man can repent sincerely without that grace. Hence St. Thomas of Aquin, answering the question whether it is just that he who commits but one mortal sin, which may consist in a mere momentary desire wilfully entertained, should be punished by the fire of hell for all eternity, says that it certainly is a just and righteous punishment; and in addition to other reasons, which I will explain on some future occasion, he gives this one for his answer: namely, that man, when he sins, commits the sin forever, and, as far as he can, makes the resolution to remain in sin for eternity;¹ and therefore it is right that his punishment should be eternal. But how can that be? Nearly all who sin, unless they have become quite desperate, intend doing penance afterwards, and freeing themselves from the state of sin. True; but whence has a man the assurance that he will be able to do penance? According to the Angelic Doctor, he places himself in a state from which he cannot be freed, unless by the divine assistance,"² and God is not bound to give him that assistance. To explain his meaning, the same holy Doctor makes use of the simile of the man who wilfully casts himself down into an abyss. If you know, he says, that you cannot possibly come out again,

Hence he who commits sin acts foolishly.

¹ Sed melius est mihi absque opere incidere in manus vestras, quam peccare in conspectu Domini.—Dan. xlii. 23.

² Quia homo in suo eterno peccavit.

³ Ponit se in statu a quo erui non potest, nisi divinitus adjutus.

unless some one brings you a ladder, can it not be said of you, with truth, that your intention was to remain there during your life? There is not the least doubt of it; although you may have said to yourself that you would wait for some passer-by to help you. For how do you know that the man will come, or that he will help you? You act just as foolishly and presumptuously when you cast yourself into the deep abyss of mortal sin.

Shown by
an example
by way of
simile.

Some peasants once revolted at Antioch, and threw down the statues of the emperor, for which crime the judge sentenced them to a cruel death; but, as St. John Chrysostom relates, a wise old man stood up and calmed the judge's anger with these few words: "it is true that the statues were thrown down, but they have been put up again."¹ A great crime has certainly been committed against the emperor; but his statues are now in the same position they occupied before. But if you put to death human beings, who are made to the image of God, "how will you be able to restore them to life again?"² How will you be able to raise up that which is thrown down, and to bring the dead back to life? A very sensible argument, indeed! Would that all men made use of it in matters which concern their spiritual welfare! All worldly goods, O Christians, are merely perishable earthen statues, which can be replaced if they happen to be lost or destroyed; but that most beautiful image of the Blessed Trinity, which is impressed on your soul, if it is once destroyed by sin, how can it be restored again? It is infallibly true that you are not able to restore it by your own efforts. Therefore consider well what you are about, and say with Susanna it is far better for me to die a thousand times, than to drag my soul down to eternal death by even one mortal sin.

Secondly,
he who de-
fers pen-
ance runs
a great risk.

It follows, in the second place, that the sinner acts most rashly towards his poor soul, when he defers repentance, although he has received good inspirations, thoughts, and graces from the good God, to induce him to amend his life. For he does not know whether he will ever again be offered the help that God now offers him. It is the same as if he said: I know, O Lord, that Thou wilt now restore my sight, and that if Thou dost not do so, I shall be in darkness forever; but I do not wish to see the light as yet; if Thou offerest it to me at some other time, I will accept it. Thou stretchest out Thy beneficent hand to help me out of the depths of the abyss, into which I have wilfully

¹ Statuæ quidem dejectæ sunt; rursum tamen erectæ fuerunt.—St. Chrysos. Hom. 17 ad pop.

² Quomodo rursum poteritis commissum revocare.

cast myself, but Thou mayest go away now; I prefer to remain here a little longer; hereafter, when it suits me better, Thou canst return and help me out. Thou art willing to break the chains that keep me bound in the slavery of the devil; but I do not wish to be set at liberty now; hereafter, when I shall have changed my mind, Thou mayest do what Thou art willing to do now. Thou desirest to free my soul now from eternal death; but I do not wish to live at present; at some future time Thou canst render me that service, and help me to arise from the grave. Ah, presumptuous mortal! how can you dare to entertain such thoughts? "To-day, if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts."¹ Now, at this moment, if you hear the voice of God calling to you, do not close your ears, but accept the proffered grace, for it may never be offered you again.

Finally, the truth I have undertaken to prove follows, namely, that he who is in the state of sin must humbly beg of God the grace of true repentance and conversion, so that what he is unable to do by his own natural powers may become possible to him by the help of divine grace. It is true that, as I have often said before, the merciful God is always ready and willing to give to the sinner who earnestly wishes to repent the necessary grace to enable him to do so, and He has assured us of that with an oath by the Prophet Ezechiel: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live."² Mark the desire that the Lord has to help all sinners; so great is it, that He calls it His life, as it were. If a man does anything very willingly it is said to be his life; thus, eating and drinking is his life; hunting is his life; study is his life, etc., and the meaning of that is, that the man finds his greatest pleasure in those occupations. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way." My greatest pleasure, My life, is to help him and show him mercy. That I say, is quite true; but God does not force His help and grace on any one who does not wish to receive them. He desires to be asked for them; "ask, and you shall receive,"³ He says. Sometimes the Lord knocks uninvited at the door of our hearts; He gives the sinner powerful inspirations and graces to urge him to repent, so that his heart is filled to overflowing with contrition

Lastly, the sinner must humbly beg of God the grace to repent.

¹ Hodie, si vocem ejus audieritis, nolite obdurare corda vestra.—Ps. xciv. 8.

² Vivo ego, dicit Dominus Deus, nolo mortem impii, sed ut convertatur impius a via sua, et vivat.—Ezech. xxxiii. 11.

³ Petite et accipietis.—John. xvi. 24.

and sorrow, although he never asked those graces from God, and was actually continuing to commit sin, without the least thought of repentance. Such is the experience of many who happen by chance to read a spiritual book they have picked up somewhere, or to hear a sermon, when mere curiosity, if not a worse motive, has induced them to go to church. But these cases are, so to speak, miracles and wonders of the divine mercy; and it would be great presumption to expect anything of the kind in one's own case. As a general rule, God gives His grace to those who are prepared to receive it; the first grace is usually a salutary thought and desire of the sinner to be converted; from this desire springs the impulse to pray humbly to God for the grace of true repentance; but if that prayer is neglected, the other graces are withheld, and frequently they are never offered the sinner again.

Conclusion
and exhortation
to sinners to
pray humbly
for the
grace of re-
pentance.

Therefore, pray, O sinners, pray humbly and fervently, like the publican in to-day's Gospel, knowing that you cannot do anything of yourselves, "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Pray, not only in the ordinary way, before confession, that you may know the number of your sins; but, what is more important, pray for true contrition and sorrow, that you may return to God with all your heart. And you especially, obdurate sinners, who have neither wish nor desire to do penance, and who think it impossible to give up your sinful habits and to amend your lives, do not allow yourselves to get into such a desperate state that you forget prayer altogether. Send up your sighs to heaven, and cry out daily with the blind man, "Lord, that I may see." Stupidly and blindly have I been wandering for a long time on the way to eternal darkness; and I have no one in the whole world to show me the way to heaven, but Thee, O true Light of my soul! Lord, I beg humbly for this light, that I may see, and know the danger of the state in which I am; that I may see and know the grievous malice and deformity of my sins; that I may see and know what a great and infinite God I have insulted and offended, what a great and infinite good I have lost forever, and that I may at once repent with my whole heart. Cry out, with the penitent David, "Out of the depths I have cried to Thee, O Lord: Lord hear my voice;" I am lying at the bottom of an abyss from which I cannot save myself, unless Thou stretchest forth Thy hand to help me." "Let Thy ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication."¹ Say, with the same David: "The cords of the wicked have encompassed me;"

¹ *Flant aures tuæ intendentes in vocem deprecationis meæ.*—Ps. cxxix. 2.

I wish. O Lord, that I could fly up to Thee! But I cannot; Thou must help me! Send Thy holy angel to fill my heart with trouble and anguish, until my chains are broken and I regain the freedom of Thy beloved children! With the patient Job, look towards your Redeemer and cry out to Him for help: save me, O Lord, for my soul is dead and putrefying in the filth of sin; restore it to life. In the boundless treasury of Thy graces, Thou surely hast one that is powerful enough to soften my hard heart, and to breathe the breath of life into my soul. Be merciful to me, a sinner, that I may not die impenitent! So you should pray if you are still in the state of sin and feel no desire to repent; and you should also be diligent in hearing sermons, for the good God is specially generous with His graces when the faithful are assembled to hear His word.

And you, just souls, learn from what has been said to be truly humble of heart. Do not imagine that, if you have been hitherto free from mortal sin, or have committed less sin than others, that this is to be ascribed to your own natural strength. The same God, whose grace is necessary to enable the sinner to do penance, must also help us not to fall into sin. All of us, without exception, must pray daily, "lead us not into temptation," that is, help us, O Lord, that we may not be separated from Thee and Thy friendship by any temptation; keep us from those occasions and allurements in which Thou foreseest that our weakness would lead us into sin. Think and say often, with humility and thankfulness, if Thou, O Lord, hadst not preserved me in so many dangerous occasions of sin, if Thou hadst not borne me in Thy hands by Thy powerful grace, into how many grievous sins might I not have fallen? And therefore I say, with Thy servant Augustine, "I attribute it to Thy mercy and grace that Thou hast freed me from my sins, and that I have avoided whatever evil I have not committed."¹ Nor will I cease, as long as I live, to implore Thy grace and mercy, for I am in the greatest need of them, weak mortal that I am, every moment of my life, to avoid falling into sin, and I will pray with Thy holy Church, "May Thy grace, O Lord, always prevent and follow us, and grant that we may be always intent on good works, through Jesus Christ, Our Lord."²

To the just
to pray to
be kept
from sin.

¹ Gratia tuae deputo et misericordiae, quod peccata mea solvisti; gratia tuae deputo et quaecunque non feci mala.

² Tua, nos quaesumus, Domine, gratia semper praevenerit et sequatur, ac in bonis operibus jugiter praestat esse intentos, per Dominum nostrum Jesum Christum.

NINETEENTH SERMON.

ON THE NATURE OF THE EXAMEN OF CONSCIENCE.

Subject.

He who wishes to make a good confession, must, 1. examine his conscience himself, and, 2. must examine it with proper diligence and care.—*Preached on the eleventh Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Surdos fecit audire, et mutos loqui.—Mark vii. 37.

“He hath made both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak.”

Introduction.

What a multitude of deaf and dumb there are in our days in the Christian world! For, my dear brethren, sinners are often deaf, and will not hear anything of repenting of and confessing their sins; and they are often dumb and do not confess their sins at all, or else do not confess them properly. Almighty God, Thou art the only One who canst make the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak; ah, pierce, we beg of Thee, by Thy powerful inspirations and graces the hearts of all sinners, that they may now open their ears, and loosen their tongues, that they have wilfully made dumb, to confess their sins as they ought, that they may be freed from them. This is the request that I again, in the name of God, make of all sinners: return to God now at least; do penance and confess your sins; but as we have seen in the last sermon, first you must humbly beg of God to give you the grace of true repentance. I continue my explanation of the different requisites that are necessary for a good confession. After the light of the Holy Ghost has been implored by fervent prayer, the next thing is the examen of conscience, or the effort to find out what sins we have committed. The defect of this requisite is the cause that many a confession is not made properly. I shall now explain the nature of this examination.

Plan of Discourse.

He who wishes to make a good confession must examine his conscience himself; such will be briefly the first part. He who wishes to make a good confession must examine his conscience

with proper diligence and care; such will be the second and longer part.

That all this may be done, we beg Thy light and grace, O Lord, through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary and of the holy guardian angels, so that all sinners may sing Thy praises with gratitude, and acknowledge that Thou hast made the deaf to hear, etc.

In the first place, then, it is necessary that he who wishes to make a good confession should examine his conscience himself; and that is required by the nature and properties of the sacrament of penance, which has been instituted by Our Lord as a kind of judgment. In civil courts of justice, no one is questioned unless he has been caught in the act of committing a crime, or has been accused by some one else; otherwise the accused need not confess his guilt, nay, he can deny it unless it is proved against him. It is quite different with the sacrament of penance; the criminal must accuse himself, without being questioned, or put to the torture, or having his crime proved against him; and of his own free will he must make known his own secret and hitherto unknown evil deeds. He is at the same time a poor sinner, his own accuser, and the witness against himself; and the judge who is sitting there in the place of the almighty God has to pronounce sentence only on what the penitent accuses himself of. But how can a man accuse himself, when he does not know what he has been guilty of? And how can he know that unless he has thought of, and examined into, and remembered what he has done against the law of God? From this it is evident that they act very wrongly and foolishly who rush into the confessional without any preparation, trusting solely to the questions of the confessor. Would it not be a foolish thing for you to accuse a man in judgment, and to say to the judge, this man has committed a great crime; you must ask me what he has done? What could you expect as the result of an accusation of that kind? Still more unreasonable is your conduct when you go to confession and say to the priest, Father, I have sinned; please question me. You yourself must declare in what and how often you have sinned. The priest is not sitting there to ask you questions, but to hear what you have to say against yourself. He is not sitting there to accuse you, but to judge you according to the sins you confess to him, and, if you are worthy, to give you absolution from them.

The nature of the sacrament of penance requires that the penitent should first examine his conscience.

Unless he is
incapable of
so doing.

It may sometimes occur that through weakness, or illness, or stupidity, or simplicity, one cannot undertake the examen of conscience, or knows not how to set about it; in a case of that kind charity obliges the confessor to help his penitent as far as possible and to supply for his incapacity by asking him questions. But God does not require much in the way of examination from people of the kind; and therefore theologians say that it is enough for an ignorant, uneducated man, who cannot recollect anything particular, to excite himself to sorrow for all his past sins, and to be prepared, when he enters the confessional, to answer all the questions put to him by the confessor, and to declare honestly what has been his condition, occupation, and mode of life hitherto. But when a man has common sense enough in matters relating to his family, or business concerns, and can remember the good or the evil that others have done him, if he were to pretend ignorance or forgetfulness in what concerns the all-important business of his soul, and to say, I cannot remember anything, Father, please question me; such conduct, as St. Bernard says, would be nothing but carelessness with regard to knowing his sins;¹ and therefore he would not fulfil the commandment of God that St. Paul makes known to us in the words, "Let a man prove himself,"² and examine his own conscience.

He who
does not ex-
amine his
conscience,
but depends
on the ques-
tions of his
confessor,
runs the
risk of mak-
ing a bad
confession.

Besides, it is a well-known and undoubted necessity that one should confess all his sins (that is to say, all his mortal sins that have not yet been properly confessed), declaring their number, along with the circumstances that notably aggravate their guilt, or at least those circumstances that change their nature; and if even one of them is omitted through culpable ignorance or wilful negligence, the confession and the absolution are null and void. But how can you reasonably expect to escape the danger of making an invalid confession, if you do not examine your conscience, but leave the whole matter to your confessor? Must he guess what you have done against the commandments of God, and how often and how grievously you have sinned? Do you wish to act like King Nabuchodonosor, who expected his sooth-sayers to tell him what he had dreamt? "I have dreamed a dream," he said to them, "and am troubled in mind and know not what I dreamed . . . therefore tell me the dream and the interpretation thereof."³ A ridiculous thing

¹ *Sciendi incuria.*

² *Probet autem seipsum homo.—I. Cor. xi. 28.*

³ *Vidi somnium, et mente confusus ignoro quid viderim . . . somnium igitur, et interpretationem ejus, indicate mihi.—Dan. ii. 3, 6.*

certainly for the king to ask, and therefore the sooth-sayers said to him: "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will declare the interpretation of it."¹ You must first tell us what you have seen in your dream; for it is not our duty to find out that, and then we will explain to you what it signifies.

I have sinned, you say to your confessor; Father, please question me. And what is he to question you about? How does he know what you have done? Has he seen your thoughts during the week, month, quarter, or half year that has elapsed since your last confession? Has he heard all you have said during that time at home and in company? Has he been here, there, and everywhere with you, like the omnipresent God Himself? Generally speaking, he does not even know who you are; he has never been in company with you, and perhaps has never seen you before; he knows nothing of your secret desires and inclinations, nothing of the occasions, temptations, and allurements to sin in which you may have been; nothing of your good or evil habits; nothing of those with whom you associate, nor of your business or occupation, etc. Now, all these circumstances may be the occasion of different vices and sins, and they must be examined and inquired into according to the number and gravity of the sins committed. For it is not enough merely to go through the commandments of God and of the Church; but each one has to pay particular attention to his state and occupation, because, generally speaking, there is a difference between the sins committed by married people and those who are unmarried; by masters and mistresses, and by servants; by officials and superiors, and by subjects and inferiors; by merchants and shop-keepers, and by tradesmen and laborers; by citizens in the town, and by peasants in the country, etc. For the different states of life have their separate duties and obligations, and their separate dangers and occasions of sin. But how can one who knows nothing whatever of your affairs guess at, or find out by questions, what you have in the depths of your conscience? You have quite enough to do to find out all about it yourself, and to get a clear idea of what you have done against God and your neighbor in thought, desire, word, and deed; is not that so? How, then, can you imagine that you will be able, when your confessor asks you one or two questions, to remember at

Because the confessor cannot know the penitent's mode of life.

¹ Rex somnium dicat servis suis, et interpretationem illius indicabimus.—Dan. ii.

once all those circumstances of place, time, opportunity, and company, so as to answer the questions properly, and say with certainty, yes, I have done that; no, I have not done that; I have committed that sin so and so often, etc.? Even if you are asked a hundred questions, and have given a hundred answers, how can you trust to those answers, which must be very uncertain, for the validity of the absolution you expect to receive? Are you not thus running the risk of nullifying the holy sacrament of penance, and dishonoring it by a grievous sacrilege? If you leave out a mortal sin, and it is hardly to be expected that you should not under the circumstances, whose fault is it? Your own; because you did not examine your conscience as you should have done; and your ignorance is the result of a culpable negligence, which will not excuse you before God. Therefore one should examine his conscience before confession; and, as the forgiveness of sin depends on it, this examination must not be made lightly and in a superficial manner, but with due care and diligence. This we shall see in the

Second Part.

A simile to explain the amount of diligence required.

A judge who has been commissioned by his sovereign to try a certain individual who has been accused of a crime does not fulfil his duty by merely examining the matter cursorily; for such carelessness on his part would show that he does not wish to find out the guilty person. It is not, however, easy to decide the exact amount of diligence that he must employ; all we can say is that it must be a reasonable diligence, such as is suited to the nature of the crime, to the place in which it was committed, to the time required for investigating the matter, and to the expenses that have to be incurred; and further, it must be such as will seem sufficient to any sensible man who understands the matter. For instance, a murder has been committed in a town, and some persons were witnesses of it; now he who has to examine into the affair goes about the streets and asks every one whom he happens to meet if he has not heard who is the guilty person. There are some who say they know nothing about it, while others profess to know all about it. But he does not make any further inquiries. Do you think he has done his duty? No, certainly not; no sensible man would say that he had. Why so? Because he should have first sent for those who were present at the murder and have questioned them as witnesses. Again, if he knows who the criminal is, he sends an

officer of the law to apprehend him; the officer goes to his house and looks for him in the room he usually occupies, but not finding him there, goes away and makes no further search. Do you think, my dear brethren, that enough diligence has been used to bring the murderer to justice? No; there is not the least doubt that the judge has neglected his duty. And what should he have done? He should have caused the gates of the town to be closed, so as to prevent the criminal from escaping; and then he should have gone with soldiers, and have searched every corner of the criminal's house, and also of every house in the neighborhood where he could have suspected him of hiding; and that search should be continued for some days. If, in spite of all these efforts, the judge does not succeed in finding the murderer, then every sensible man must say that, at all events, he has done his duty, and that he could not have been expected to employ greater diligence. But why? He might have spent months in searching out every corner in the whole town; and then, certainly, he would have taken more trouble in fulfilling his duty. True the trouble would have been greater; but there was no reason for his taking it, since the crime of one man is not a sufficient reason for keeping the gates of the town closed for such a long time, nor for going to the expense of searching every house, and that, too, to the great inconvenience of the people. Due proportion being observed, the same is to be said of the examination of conscience before confession. No general rule can be laid down with regard to the amount of time and care that are to be employed therein, for penitents differ in their conditions and capabilities, and some require more time and care than others. According to circumstances each one must employ what can be called, in the general acceptance of the term, a reasonable diligence. The Council of Trent says distinctly that diligence should be used in the examen of conscience; "all mortal sins that one finds on his conscience after a diligent examination must be declared in confession."¹ And farther on, speaking of the obligation of confessing all mortal sins, it says, "which occur to the memory after due and diligent reflection."² But the Council does not say what particular amount of time or diligence is required.

¹ *Oportere omnia peccata mortalia, quorum post diligentem sui discussionem conscientiam habent, in confessione recenseri.*—*Trid.*, sess. xiv., c. 4.

² *Quorum memoria cum debita et diligenti præmeditatione habeatur.*—*Can.* 7.

The length of time to be employed shown by another simile.

The safest rule to follow, and one generally prescribed by theologians, is, for one to employ as much time and diligence, according to his state of life, as all sensible people would employ in any other matter of great importance. To make this clearer, I will explain it by a simile. You have an important account to render in which there is question of a large sum of money; if you give in your accounts every week or fortnight regularly, the matter is easy enough, and does not require much trouble on your part; all you have to do, is to look at your account-book, and you will see it all at a glance. But if it is many months, or even years, since you squared up your reckoning, and if, moreover, you have allowed things to get into disorder through carelessness, or if you have otherwise been prevented from keeping your books properly, and if, at the same time, the master who demands the account is a very exact and careful man, while you yourself must acknowledge that all your interests are completely in his hands, how would you act? Would you think an hour or even a whole day too much to spend in putting the matter into order? My opinion is that whole weeks and months would hardly seem long enough to you; and meanwhile you would give up all other business, and would tell your servant not to allow any one to interrupt you. In a word, you would strain all your powers of memory and understanding to set matters right, especially if your master kept on urging you, in the words of the rich man in the Gospel, "give an account of thy stewardship."¹ So it is with you, O sinner, when you are preparing for confession. You are about to undertake a great business on which the happiness of your soul for all eternity depends, and if you make a grievous and culpable error in your accounts, you will certainly be ruined. Is this matter perhaps of less importance to you than your temporal and transitory prosperity? Are not worldly goods worth less than nothing when compared to the treasures of your immortal soul? He who demands the account from you is the great God Himself; is He, perhaps, less experienced in His own affairs, less exacting in His claims, less just and powerful in His punishments, than a mere mortal? Hear what He says of Himself by the Psalmist. "The searcher of hearts and reins is God."² "I will search Jerusalem with lamps,"³ He says by the Prophet Sophonias; so

¹ Redde rationem villicationis tuæ.—Luke xvi. 2.

² Scrutans corda et renes Deus.—Ps. vii. 10.

³ Scrutabor Jerusalem in lucernis.—Soph. i. 12.

exact is He. Our Lord, exhorting us not to fear man, but God alone, says of Him that He “can destroy both body and soul into hell,”¹ so powerful is He. This is the Lord who calls out to you, when you are about to confess your sins, “give an account of thy stewardship;” give an account of how you have spent your time hitherto, of the use you have made of the powers of your soul and of the senses of your body; of how you have fulfilled the obligations of your state of life; of what you have thought, spoken, done, and omitted; of what you have gained, and of what you have squandered. Give an account of how it has been with your conscience during the past. What must you do, O man; how have you to set to work?

Are your accounts clear, correct, and in good order? (I am speaking now of those Christians who, although they have often sinned grievously in the past, yet have made a good confession, and are now trying with all possible care to serve God, so that, at all events, they do not commit deliberate mortal sin, examine their consciences every evening before retiring, and go to confession every week, or fortnight) are your accounts, I say, in good order? If so, then you need not be afraid. You need not spend much time, nor be too scrupulous in examining your conscience before confession; if you happen to commit a mortal sin, there is no danger of your forgetting it. As to venial sins, you are not bound to tell them in confession; so that, even if you forget them by the thousand, or deliberately refuse to mention them, that does not interfere with the validity of your confession; all you have to do is to mention some sin of your past life, for which you can excite yourself to sorrow, and your confession is valid, your account is approved of by the almighty God, who signs it by giving you the grace of the sacrament. There are many who make a great mistake and cause themselves unnecessary anxiety by the useless trouble they take in the examination of their consciences, so that they turn the confessional into a rack to torture their souls, and make the sweet burden of Jesus Christ insupportable. These people, although they cannot remember having committed any mortal sin since their last confession (and they go regularly and frequently during the month), yet spend half and even whole hours sometimes thinking of what they will say; so that, when the day for confession comes they have no time to hear a sermon, or to do any other good work. They spend the whole morning, almost, in preparing for confession; they pry

Those who live piously and confess often can and should make their examen short.

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

into all their thoughts, words, and actions; they make sins where there is no sin at all, and they doubt about everything; perhaps, they say, full of fear and anguish, I have sinned by that thought, by that word I let drop. They have a hundred perhappes, one after the other, and there is not the least foundation for one of them, while, the more they try to examine their consciences, the more disturbed they become; and at last they are obliged to acknowledge that, after having spent hours in all sorts of distractions and fancies, they are just as wise as before, and have not learned anything about the state of their consciences.

That they may not omit a great deal of other good works.

And what have they been doing all the time? To speak plainly, they have been frittering away their precious time to no purpose; and if they have nothing else to accuse themselves of, they might well mention that in confession. Sometimes, by their over-anxiety, they lose an opportunity of hearing a sermon, which might do them good their whole lives long (on one occasion only Thomas was not present when his divine Master visited the Apostles; oh, what a great loss he suffered thereby! If he had been present with the others, he would not have sinned by incredulity), or they lose holy Mass, or hear it without attention or devotion, and thus lose an opportunity of receiving many graces and merits. The most useful, necessary, and excellent preparation for confession is a lively faith, a great hope and confidence in God, a true sorrow for sin, a firm purpose of amendment, a careful examination and selection of the means and manner in which one may lead a better life, lessen one's daily faults, serve God with more zeal, do more good works, and have more will to do them. That is what most of the time should be spent in. But it is what they think of least of all; or else they make themselves incapable of it by their long and scrupulous examen of conscience, and when, after a great deal of trouble, they have learned off by heart some doubts suggested by their scruples and a few daily faults that they knew as well before as after the examen, then they strike their breasts a few times, make an act of contrition mechanically out of their prayer-book, and think that now everything is in proper order, their accounts with God are settled, and away they rush into the confessional. In olden times God commanded Moses to place a number of looking-glasses around the foot of the laver that was used in the tabernacle: and they were to be women's looking-glasses, too, that is, the clearest of all: "He made also the laver

of brass, with the foot thereof of the mirrors of the women.”¹ The Lord wished those mirrors to be quite clean, so that the priests, when washing, could observe the least speck of dirt. What would we have said if we could have seen one of those priests covered with dirt, and spending a long time looking at himself in the glass, but not doing anything to clean himself, and at last going away in the same state in which he came? We should certainly have thought that the priest was not in his right senses. And we may form the same opinion of those who spend a long time in contemplating and considering their daily faults, which are the spots that soil their souls, but take little or no trouble to wash them away by being truly sorry for them. True contrition for sin, and a firm purpose to amend our lives and to lessen the number of our sins, should and must be our chief occupation before confession. Another evil effect of that too protracted examination of conscience is this, that the mind gets so wearied and fatigued, that there is very little devotion in the preparation for and thanksgiving after holy Communion, which should otherwise be the proper time to unite one’s self with God, and to amass rich treasures of grace. You see now what they gain by their scrupulosity. It is sheer nonsense, I say, and I repeat what many holy and learned men have said before me, that they who conscientiously try to avoid all grievous sin, or who go to confession every week or fortnight, especially when, besides that, they are in the habit of making the evening examen of conscience, take far too much time, and act unreasonably, if they spend half an hour, or even a full quarter of an hour, in the examen before confession. Cabrena says distinctly that they should not spend longer than it takes to say the psalm “Miserere;” and if the persons are scrupulous, they should not take even that long. If you have committed a fully deliberate venial sin, confess it if you wish, and have done with it; if you do not remember any sin, then you can confess your daily faults, into which you usually fall; but you can recollect them better while you are going to church, than by making them the subject of a scrupulous examen; and, as we have seen already, you should mention some sin of your former life that is known to your confessor, and awaken a heartfelt sorrow for it and renew your resolution against it. In that way you can employ your time far more profitably in the service of God, than by losing it in a useless examen of conscience.

¹ *Fecit et labrum æneum cum basi sua de speculis mulierum.—Exod. xxxviii.8.*

The contrary is required of grievous and inveterate sinners.

Ah! some will say, that is just what I want! If the time it takes to say a "Miserere" is long enough for the examen, then I have managed matters very well hitherto; I do not care to bother my head with long discussions of conscience before confession. But softly, friend; who are you who make that boast? Are you one of those of whom I have just spoken? If such be the case you are right enough, go on as you are going. But are you one of those whose accounts are not in order? I am speaking now of those tepid Christians, who sin by wholesale and lead careless lives, who pay little attention to their souls, go to confession one, two, three, or four times a year, and meanwhile commit sin whenever the occasion offers, without much hesitation; allow full liberty to eyes, ears, tongues, hands, thoughts, and desires; seldom or never examine their consciences; easily forget their sins, and the number and circumstances of them; or, if they go to confession every month, commit sins that are of a peculiarly dangerous character, and are likely to be the occasion of more sin; such as a long-continued habit of this or that vice, in which they show no signs of amendment from one confession to another; sins of injustice, scandal, detraction, vindictiveness, and enmity; habitual drunkenness; continual dissensions between married people or neighbors, all of which can be the occasion of many sins to others; an impure attachment to a certain person, which places one in the proximate occasion of sin, and gives rise to thousands of sinful thoughts, desires, words, and deeds, by day and night. Are you, I say, one of those people? If so, then it alters the question altogether. You and such as you require a far longer time and much more care and diligence in examining your conscience before confession, in order to satisfy your obligation and to square your accounts with God. Would you think a whole day too much to spend in bringing such an account as yours into order? But what do I say? A day? You will not even spend an hour in it; you sit in the church for a quarter of an hour or so, and go through the commandments of God in a kind of a way, go into the confessional when your turn comes, rattle off a dozen mortal sins more or less, and then expect to get absolution. How is it possible for you, in such a short time, to have a clear knowledge of the many sins you have committed in thought, word, and deed? But if you have forgotten some and do not tell them, do you think that your forgetfulness will excuse you before your Judge? I for my part do not think so, for your own laziness is in fault, and your confession and repentance

are worth nothing. Therefore you must spend more time in the examen of conscience, and must employ an amount of diligence proportionate to your state and occupation and to the nature of your sins.

How is that to be done? God Himself tells us by the Prophet Jeremias: "He shall sit solitary and hold his peace, because he hath taken it up upon himself."¹ That is, he will sit in solitude and silence, because he has raised himself in thought above himself. Mark the words, "he shall sit solitary." You have, namely, to sit in judgment on yourself. When we think of our sins, self-love often makes us try to excuse them instead of condemning them, so that we absolve ourselves before the priest gives us absolution, and endeavor to lessen the actual malice and gravity of our sins, attributing them to weakness or forgetfulness, or blaming others for them; and therefore we do not excite ourselves to proper sorrow for them. In the examen of conscience one must not act the part of advocate and patron for himself, but rather that of a just judge, who honestly and thoroughly examines the matter as it is in itself. "He shall sit solitary;" that is, you must put away all other cares and occupations, and be as if you were quite alone in the world with God, and had nothing else to do but to render Him the account of your conscience. "And hold his peace," that is, you must reduce to silence your evil inclinations, which will try to persuade you, by all sorts of false arguments, that this or that is not a sin, or at least not a grievous sin, a danger to be guarded against especially in things to which we are greatly attached; for in such matters we do not, as a rule, examine ourselves very strictly; we mention them only in a general way in confession, and, if we are in doubt, do not ask, lest we should have to give up something we are fond of doing, or do something we have a dislike for. We act like those sick persons who do not allow the doctor to know anything of the hidden cancer or ulcer they are suffering from, lest they should have to bear the pain of having it cut or burnt out. But more of this on a future occasion. "Because he hath taken it up upon himself:" finally, you must take up the yoke and raise yourself above yourself, by examining accurately into all you have been doing in the past.

The penitent David brings forward another simile on this subject: "And I meditated in the night with my own heart," he

How these latter must examine themselves.

And sweep out their consciences like David.

¹ *Sedebit solitarius et tacebit, quia levavit super se.*—Lament. iii. 28.

says, "and I was exercised and I swept my spirit."¹ What do you do when you wish to sweep out your room, so as to have it perfectly clean? You go through every corner of it; you put all the chairs and tables to one side, and move the furniture, so that no dust may remain concealed behind it. So must you act, sinner, if you wish to do sincere penance; enter the chamber of your conscience; seek out all its hidden recesses; examine, as far as you can, all your thoughts, desires, words, and actions, to see if you can detect a mortal sin in any of them. Move all the chairs and tables; that is, consider the habits, business, and occupations that engage your attention from morning till night, the places and houses you frequent, the company you keep, the obligations of your state and how you have fulfilled them, so as to see whether and how often you have sinned against God and your neighbor, and what effects, injury, or scandal have followed from those sins, which you foresaw and could easily have prevented. If, on account of a long-continued habit of a certain vice, or the occasions in which you are placed, you cannot find out the exact number of times you have sinned, then try to recollect how long you have been addicted to that vice, and how often you fell into sin probably during the day. Above all, as we have seen in the last sermon, call upon God for light and help; say, with the penitent David: "Who can understand sins?"² I have sinned, O Lord; I have sinned grievously; I have sinned often; but how can I find out the number and nature of my sins, unless Thou comest to the assistance of my memory? "O my God, enlighten my darkness."³ Thou hast numbered all my steps, and hast written down all the movements of my heart; enlighten, then, my understanding, that I may know all my sins, repent of them, confess them properly, and not commit them again. In that way you will make a good examen before confession, and even if a mortal sin should escape your memory, or you cannot say the exact number of times you have sinned, your forgetfulness will then be inculpable, and will not be attributed to you, so that you will be validly absolved from all your sins.

Repentance
for previous
faults in this
respect and

O my Lord and my God, would that I had always acted in that way! I must confess my great carelessness in this respect. Perhaps some of my confessions are written down in Thy book as

¹ *Meditatus sum nocte cum corde meo, et exercitabar, et scopebam spiritum meum.—Ps. lxxvi. 7.*

² *Delicta quis intelligit?—Ibid. xviii. 13.*

³ *Deus meus, illumina tenebras meas.—Ibid. xvii. 29.*

invalid, and Thou wilt bring them up against me hereafter. Merciful God, pardon me the sins I have left out in confession! If I knew them now, I should willingly confess them with the utmost exactness. I repent of each and every one of them with my whole heart, because I have thereby offended and despised Thee, my God, who art worthy of all love. Henceforward I will sit in judgment on myself with more care and diligence, and, that I may not have to spend a long time in examining my conscience, I will watch more carefully over all my actions, I will go to confession frequently, at least every fortnight, make my examen every evening before retiring to rest, and, above all, be on my guard against ever offending Thee by a wilful and deliberate mortal sin; so that on the day of judgment I may be able to present my account in good order, and show that it has been properly signed by Thee in all my confessions. Give me Thy grace to this end, O God of Goodness! Amen.

purpose of
amendment.

TWENTIETH SERMON.

ON CANDOR IN THE EXAMEN OF CONSCIENCE.

Subject.

1. Some, when examining their consciences, make themselves out to be more guilty than they really are. 2. Many make themselves out to be more innocent than they really are. Both are wanting in candor towards their souls.—*Preached on the twelfth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Viso illo præterivit.—Luke x. 31.
“Seeing him, passed by.”

Introduction.

To come at once to my subject. As the priest and the Levite acted in the parable of to-day’s Gospel, so do many sinners act nowadays when they wish to purify in the sacrament of penance their souls, which are represented by the poor traveller who fell into the hands of robbers. That poor man could not heal himself; he had to trust to the charity of another; but the sinner must heal himself in the sacrament of penance with the help of God. Yet, I repeat, he acts sometimes like the hard-

hearted priest in the Gospel, who, “seeing him, passed by,” and went on his way, without doing anything for the unfortunate man who was lying half dead and covered with wounds. It is especially when examining their consciences that sinners are guilty of imitating the conduct of the priest; they look at their consciences in a superficial manner, and pass over many mortal wounds, which they do not discover nor bring to light; and that because, as we have seen in the last sermon, they do not employ sufficient care and diligence. But there is another fault which is the occasion of many sins being passed over, namely, the want of candor in the examen of conscience.

Plan of Discourse.

In this way a fault is committed through excess by those who, in the examen, look on themselves as more guilty than they really are: those I shall deal with in the first part. A still more grievous fault is committed through defect by those who look on themselves as more innocent than they really are. These latter I shall deal with in the second part of to-day’s instruction.

Enlighten us by Thy grace, O God, that we may correct both faults; we ask it of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

The examen
of con-
science must
be candid.
Explained
by a smile.

In a court of justice both the judge and the accuser must be on their guard against calumniating the accused. They must not impute to him, through falsehood and malice, a crime of which he is innocent; nor must they accuse him on mere suspicion and without sufficient proof; nor have recourse to false arguments to make a minor crime appear greater than it is, and deserving of death. For if mere suspicion, envy, falsehood, and malice were allowed to influence a judge, then every honest man might be arrested as a malefactor. The same care, candor, and honesty must be used in the examination of our consciences before confession; for the sinner is then his own accuser. You must therefore be on your guard, O sinner, against wronging yourself, or accusing yourself falsely of sin, through fear, anxiety, unfounded doubts, or mere suspicion; nor must you make great sins of small ones, nor certain of doubtful ones, lest you should accuse yourself to your judge of crimes of which you are not guilty. “I was exercised, and I swept my spirit,”¹ says David of himself, as we have seen in the last sermon. Mark the word, “swept,” my dear brethren; it means in the Hebrew, “I looked

¹ *Exercitabar, et scopebam spiritum meum.*—Ps. lxxvi. 7.

at myself," and its signification here is, "I looked at myself in my spirit." This simile is admirably suited to our subject; for when you are trying to recollect your sins, says St. Augustine, your conscience must resemble a mirror, which represents all objects that are held before it as neither greater, nor smaller, nor more beautiful, nor more ugly than they are in themselves. There are mirrors so made as to represent the object in different colors, although the latter may be snow-white; mirrors that are cut in such a way as to multiply the object, so that, when one looks into them, he sees himself twenty, thirty, or fifty times; mirrors that make the object much greater than it really is, so that, when you look at yourself in them, you appear to be a monster, your head is like a giant's, your eyebrows are like trees, your eyes like two large globes; in a word, they make you appear a monster, although you are not in reality a whit altered in stature. It seems to me that many, especially pious and conscientious Christians, stand before mirrors of that kind when they are making the examen of conscience before confession; their consciences are of such a nature that they make what is good appear bad, what is small, great, and what is only one, they multiply indefinitely in number.

And, firstly, there are those who, when they have done any-thing, no matter what, without the least thought or suspicion of sin, and hear afterwards, in a sermon or elsewhere, that it is unlawful, become at once troubled and anxious. Alas, they say to themselves, what have I been doing all this time? And I never even confessed it. What am I to do? Thus they at once condemn themselves of sin, although they are perfectly innocent, and consider themselves bound to declare it in their next confession. But what are you thinking of? You are guilty of calumniating and detracting yourself; for, even if what you did were the greatest sin in the world, you did it through inculpable ignorance, since you had no suspicion at the time that it was unlawful; and therefore you are not guilty, because what is done with a good conscience cannot be afterwards made bad by any subsequent knowledge one gains regarding it. Therefore it is not matter for confession. But if you are nevertheless bent on accusing yourself of it, which is quite unnecessary, and is a waste of precious time, then, at least, you ought to add (and you are bound in conscience to add) that you did it with a good conscience, so that the judge, who is sitting there in the place of the almighty God, may not look on you as guilty of a sin of

They err who consider what they do through inculpable ignorance.

which you are innocent, and may not be deceived in his judgment about you by yourself.

And also they who, through anxiety, imagine themselves to be guilty of sins of which they are innocent.

Again, there are scrupulous people who are incapable of forming a sound opinion in those matters concerning which they are scrupulous. If, when preparing for confession, they look over the ten commandments, or the table of sins in their prayer-books, they think they are guilty of every one of them, although there is not the least foundation for a supposition of the kind; and, brooding over their fancied guilt, they fix it firmly in their imagination, until at last they look on it as an undoubted fact. A certain priest of our Society once told me that he had to do elsewhere with a penitent of that kind, who was utterly unknown to him, and who spent quite an hour in the confessional telling the most horrible sins, amongst which were witchcraft, and sorcery, and hatred of God. "A cold perspiration," said the priest, "began to pour down my forehead, my hair stood on end with horror, and I was in a most frightful state of uncertainty as to how I was to deal with a penitent of that kind, and to dispose him to sincere sorrow for his sins, when, after a long time spent in questioning him, I found that the whole thing was mere imagination and the result of groundless anxieties, so that my only difficulty then was to find in that most innocent soul sufficient matter for sacramental absolution."

Those who make mortal out of venial sins.

The third class consists of those who make mountains out of mole-hills, and mortal sins out of venial, certainties out of doubts, and even vices out of virtues. They look on all impure thoughts that come into their heads, even against their will, as so many mortal sins; every thought against faith, although they reject it at once, they put down immediately as a sin of heresy; a want of confidence in God they consider blasphemy; a suspicion against their neighbor, as a rash judgment, and every feeling of vexation in their daily crosses, as impatience and despair. The more they brood over those things, the more do they become persuaded that they are guilty; and as there is no counting the thoughts that come into their heads, so it seems to them that their sins are beyond numbering; like people who blind themselves by looking too long at the sun, they make themselves almost incapable of looking at the matter in a reasonable light. Scrupulous people of that kind, since they cannot form a sound judgment of their own actions, must spend a very short time in the examen of conscience, and, according to the general teaching of theologians, should never accuse themselves of

mortal sin, unless they are infallibly certain, without any previous examen of conscience, that they have really committed a wilful, deliberate, grievous sin; nay, so certain must they be of their guilt, that they must be prepared to swear to it, if necessary, before God and the priest. If they refuse to do that, all the mortal sins they accuse themselves of are mere imagination. Therefore, whenever a doubt occurs to them as to whether they have done this or that, or consented to bad thoughts or not, they can and must, without further examination, at once conclude they are no guilty, and reject all their anxious doubts as mere nonsense, because the devil seeks, by means of those doubts, to disturb their minds and to prevent them from having real devotion. There is only one cure for such scrupulous people, and that is, that they always go to the one confessor, who must be an experienced man, and obey his directions blindly and humbly; if they refuse to do that there is no help for them in their misery. So much for those who, through excessive anxiety, make themselves out to be more guilty than they really are. But I fear that the number of the other class of penitents is much greater, namely, of those who, through carelessness of their salvation, when examining their consciences, look on themselves as more innocent than they really are in the sight of God, and thereby run the risk of never making a good confession, and so expose their souls to the greatest danger. These latter require a longer instruction and exhortation; and we shall devote to them the

Second Part.

Just as there are mirrors which make small things appear great, and beautiful things ugly, so there are others made in such a way as to cause things that are really large to appear quite small, nor is the error in the thing itself, but in the glass which represents it, just as, when you look through the wrong end of a telescope, high mountains seem to be small hills, and lofty towers, mere pillars. Again, no matter how good and true a mirror is in itself, if you go too close to it, so as to breathe on it, you will darken it so that you will not be able to see anything. The consciences of many sinners, when they are preparing for confession, are like those mirrors; they look on grievous sins as venial, and on venial sins as no sins at all. They approach too close, so that they see their sins only darkly; that is, they argue too much with their consciences, seeking all

Others
make light
of really
grievous
sins.

sorts of pretexts to excuse themselves from certain sins, until at last they persuade themselves that there is no harm in them.

They are, first, those who think nothing of bad thoughts and desires.

And they are, first, those sinners whose consciences are callous, so that they do not feel the sins they commit, unless they do something very bad in outward act. These people examine themselves only on the actions they do against the commandments; they make nothing of thoughts and desires, of secret pleasure, of looks and words, and do not even count them as sins, although in reality they may be grievously sinful, especially in the matter of impurity, or hatred and revenge, even before any outward act is committed. But such people trouble themselves little about that. As long as they cannot satisfy their bad desires, either through want of the opportunity which they sought for, or because they have changed their intention, they consider that they are free from sin; or else, if they do take notice of such thoughts, they seek to excuse themselves by saying that they had no bad intention. But what a lame excuse that is! To entertain impure thoughts for instance, deliberately, and wilfully to adhere to them, if only for an instant, knowing them to be evil, is already a mortal sin, no matter whether there is or is not the intention of doing an unlawful action. This is the undoubted teaching of all theologians.

Who excuse and do not examine sins to which they are attached.

There are others whose evil inclinations and desires blindfold their consciences, so that they now and then cannot see or acknowledge their sins and the malice of them; and this is especially the case in sins of habit, or in vices to which they are much attached. For instance, a man thinks of nothing all the day long but how he may make some temporal profit, so as to become rich; he does not trouble himself to ask whether the means he makes use of to that end are lawful or not; as long as he can make the profit, he is satisfied. Another centres his thoughts altogether on pleasure; he is always trying to satisfy his sensuality, and he takes it for granted that whatever helps him to this end is lawful enough; he frequents all sorts of company without the least scruple; he laughs, jokes, and amuses himself with persons of the opposite sex, whenever opportunity offers, and he allows full liberty to eyes, ears, hands, and tongue. Now in all this there is evidently danger of sins of all kinds; nay, humanly speaking, it must be that he offends God in different ways. I will say nothing of the sins that are committed by those who have an impure attachment for each other. Nevertheless, when it comes to the examen of con-

science before confession, those people close their eyes to all these sins ; they do not look into the mirror properly, lest they should awaken the worm of conscience, and be disturbed in their pleasures by its gnawings ; they resemble those parents and heads of families who connive at the faults of their children and servants, and excuse themselves by saying that they do not wish to disturb the peace of the household.

A little boy is sent to school to learn to read ; the school-master speaks to him in a friendly manner, and begins to teach him the ABC. Look here, my boy, he says, this letter is A ; now say it after me, A. The child looks at him and says nothing. Come now, you are not dumb, continues the teacher, you surely can pronounce the letter ? But the little fellow remains obstinately silent. The teacher then shows him all the fine pictures he will give him if he is a good boy ; but to no purpose. At last he takes down the rod and holds it up before him. Come, he threatens, if you do not say the letter at once, I shall have to punish you. But neither kindness nor threats can induce the little boy to say a single letter. After school the other children ask him why he was so stubborn. Oh, he answers, if I said A, I should have to say B and C, and so it would go on, until I should have to learn grammar, syntax, and all the rest of it ; and there would be nothing but study for me for the next six, seven, or eight years ; therefore I thought it better not to begin at all, and so put an end in time to all the bother. That is the way with those so-called penitents ; they will not say A, lest they should have to say B. If I begin, they think, with this matter, and examine myself carefully on it, I shall find out a great many things that I have hitherto taken no notice of, my peace of mind will be gone, and I shall have to speak of them in confession ; perhaps my confessor will look on them as mortal sins, and if he does, I shall have to give up what I have been so long accustomed to, and to make a change in my mode of life that will not at all suit me. It is better therefore to put a stop to the matter at the very outset ; and after all, there is nothing so very bad in those things ; I never really looked on them as grievous. Then they go to confession and tell other faults and sins, which they find not much difficulty in avoiding ; but they say nothing about those which excited their anxiety. When they have done that three or four times, they begin to believe in earnest that there is nothing wrong in those actions. But how badly they will fare when the

That they may not be obliged to abstain from them. Shown by a simile.

divine Judge Himself will examine their consciences and probe their hearts to the very depths!

Those who think that what others do cannot be wrong.

The third class consists of those who, as it were, hang up a curtain before their consciences, that they may not see and have to acknowledge themselves guilty of certain sins. A doubt, and that, too, not always an unfounded one, occurs to them sometimes, as to whether their mode of life, of dress, of behavior in company, is quite in accordance with the law of Jesus Christ or not; and then the custom of the world comes in most conveniently as a curtain with which to hide the whole affair, so as to keep their conscience quiet about it. "They that fear the Lord," says the wise Ecclesiasticus, "shall find just judgment, and shall kindle justice as a light. A sinful man shall flee reproof, and will find an excuse according to his will;"¹ that is, according to the commentators, he will try to excuse what he wishes to excuse. But what excuse will he find? Will he try to compare himself to just and pious men? No; for their lives would condemn his. He compares himself rather with those who resemble himself, and who follow the vain customs of the world. The Gospel of Christ calls out to him often, and so do the holy Fathers with the doctrine they have left behind them, and preachers and confessors with their exhortations and instructions; even his own uneasy conscience calls out to him also, if he will only hear it, this or that is not lawful; it goes directly against the principles of the Gospel of Christ. And what answer does he make? Oh, he says, others do the same; it is the custom of the world! This or that confessor does not look on it as a sin; other confessors say nothing whatever about it; there can be no great harm in it therefore. Thus they throw a veil over their consciences and, when examining themselves before confession, do not even think of looking into those matters, and they go with many others along the road which worldly vanity, in direct opposition to the Christian law, has made for them. But, you who act in this manner, wait till you come to the end of that road; you will find that it leads to where many like you have gone already. The door by which the chosen children of God enter heaven is, you must know, very small and narrow; many, indeed, are called to enter thereat, but few will be admitted; "few there are that find it."² When your Judge shall demand

¹ Qui timent Dominum, invenient judicium justum, et justitias quasi lumen accendent. Peccator homo vitabit correptionem, et secundum voluntatem suam inveniet comparationem.—Eccius. xxxii. 20, 21.

² Pauci sunt qui inveniunt eam.—Matt. vii. 14.

a strict account from you, bring forward your excuse, "others did the same; it was the common custom in the world," and see what it will profit you. The question will then be, not what others have done, but what you yourself have done; not how others have lived, but how you yourself should have lived with others. "Thou shalt not follow the multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou yield in judgment to the opinion of the most part, to stray from the truth."¹ Will you, then, lose your soul for the sake of others, who also lose theirs?

There is another class of penitents who do not find out all their sins when preparing for confession, because they look only at one half of themselves in the glass, like one who holds a mirror so that he can see into it with only one eye; thus the half of his face is hidden from him, nor has he any idea of what it is like. They first examine how they have offended God in thought, word, or deed, since their last confession; but they never think of seeing how they have fulfilled the duties and obligations of their state of life, so that they often leave out grievous sins, which they could and should have known. A pious and zealous priest, hearing once the confession of a great emperor, said to him: "I have now heard the sins of Charles; let me hear those of the emperor also." The same might be said to many when they are examining their conscience before confession.

I have thought of my sins, says some superior, magistrate, or official. What do you mean? You have thought of the sins of the man; but you must also think of those of the superior, and see how you have fulfilled the duties of your position; whether you have done justice to all, protected poor widows and orphans, punished notorious vices, and abolished abuses, as you are bound to do according to your office; whether you have always striven for the honor of God and the good of the community; whether you have trampled on human respect and spoken when you were bound to speak; whether you have ever revealed what you were bound to keep secret. These and similar matters also belong to the examen of conscience and to the tribunal of penance.

I have thought of my sins, says the lawyer. Very well; but you must also examine how you have performed the duties of your profession. Have you encouraged your clients to useless and unjust litigation, in order to make money out of them? Have you protracted unnecessarily a suit that you could have

They who do not examine themselves on the duties of their state.

Such as superiors.

Lawyers.

¹ Non sequeris turbam ad faciendum malum, nec in iudicio plurimorum acquiesces sententia; ut a vero devias.—Exod. xxiii. 2.

settled at once with a few words of good advice? Have you accepted bribes from your opponent to the damage of your client's interests; or, when a bribe was not offered you, have you taken no interest in his just case? Have you undertaken so many cases that you could not devote proper attention to any of them, or have you advised the parties to compromise after having known for certain that one of them had lost his case? Have you the knowledge and capacity requisite to your profession? All these things, as well as the question of making restitution for the harm you have perhaps done to others, are matters for confession.

Shopkeepers
and
tradesmen.

I have thought of all the sins I committed since my last confession, says the merchant and shop-keeper. Yes? And have you also examined how you have conducted your business? Are your weights and measures just? Have you sold old and damaged goods at a high price to the inexperienced, as if they were new and uninjured? Have you had recourse to lies and false oaths in order to sell your goods? All these things must be mentioned in confession, as well as the time and the number of times, how often and how long you have been practising them. I have thought of my sins, says a tradesman. Have you done honestly and properly the work entrusted to you? Have you asked for more material than was necessary to complete the work; or kept any considerable amount of what was over without the knowledge and consent of the owner? Have you bought from children or servants things that you might easily know were stolen. Have you allowed your workmen to work on Sundays and holydays, when there was no necessity? Have you thought of all this before confession?

Married
people and
heads of
families.

Husbands, wives, fathers, and mothers of families, you have finished your examen of conscience, have you not? But I am afraid that many sins, which you should have thought of first of all, have escaped your memories. How have you observed the mutual obligations of your state, according to the exhortation of St. Paul? What care have you bestowed on the spiritual welfare of those subject to you? How have you looked after your children? Are you training them properly, and sending them to catechism and to sermons? Are you watchful over all their actions, so that you know where they go, whom they speak to, what company they keep, how they live, and whether they fear and love God? What example do you give them? What do they see in you and hear from you during the day? How do

you look after their temporal wants? Do you squander in drinking or gambling, in useless entertainments, or in dressing above your state, what you should spend on them? Do you keep them busy at some work befitting their state, or do you allow them to spend the day in idleness? Do you permit them to go to parties in which their precious souls can easily be exposed to danger? Do you give proper food and wages to your servants and laborers? All these things belong to the examen of conscience. But the obligations of particular states of life are seldom brought before the mirror; the sins committed against them are hidden in the depths of conscience; they are rarely made the subject of serious consideration, and therefore the accusation in confession is not complete.

Further, people, generally speaking, examine the sins they have committed themselves. But wait a while, before you declare them in confession. What about the sins of others which you have occasioned or might have occasioned by impure conversation, by indecent signs and laughter, by immodesty in dress, by keeping improper pictures or statues in your houses or gardens, and thus running the risk of exciting impure desires and thoughts in the minds of those who see them; by selling, lending, or borrowing impure books and love-tales, that are liable to put bad thoughts into the minds of those who read them; and by any immodesty in dress, such as one has often to complain of being compelled to witness in the streets; nay, there are mothers who even suckle their children in public (what can the passers-by think of them?); by urging others to excessive drinking; by giving bad advice or encouraging others to sin; by doing a sinful act in presence of others; by cursing or swearing before children or servants and so teaching them that hellish language? These are the sins from which the Prophet David so often prayed to be delivered: "From those," the sins "of others spare Thy servant." When the Germans in olden times had conquered the Hungarians, and were cutting down their enemies remorselessly, the trumpeters and drummers began to cry out, why do you kill us? we have done nothing to harm you; we have only blown our trumpets, or beaten our drums. Surely, our breath cannot have hurt you? We have not drawn the sword against any of you. No matter, was the answer of the victors; you deserve death more than any of the others. because your music encouraged them to fight, so that you have

Those who do not examine the sins they cause others to commit.

¹ Ab attentis parce servo tuo.—Ps. xviii. 14.

sharpened their swords and spears against us. All who give scandal or occasion to sin are the drummers and trumpeters of hell; but how few there are who think of this when they are preparing for confession! I have done no harm, they say. Yes; you have done no harm to yourself, I grant; but how many sins have you not caused others to commit, and thus waged war against God by their means? All these are on your conscience, and you must confess them if you are in earnest about your conversion.

Those who pay no attention to sins of omission.

Finally, it is not enough to examine yourself on what you yourself have done to offend God, and on what you have caused others to do; you must not forget also to give an account of what you have left undone. For instance, you could and should have given your neighbor here and there a friendly warning, have kept him away from evil, urged him to good, or prevented him from doing or saying something sinful; but you have not done so. You had now and then an opportunity of saluting in a friendly manner or doing a service to a person who has injured you, but through hatred you did not avail yourself of it. You could have paid your debts at the proper time, or have given your laborers the wages due to them, or have made restitution of ill-gotten goods; but you did not do so. You might have given alms to the poor and needy according to your means, and have practised the works of Christian charity towards your neighbor; but you neglected doing so through avarice or sloth. These are the omissions that Jesus Christ will bring forward, on that last terrible day, against the wicked: "For I was hungry, and you gave Me not to eat."¹

Hence, many make had confessions, through culpable carelessness in the examen of conscience.

Ah, my dear brethren, what a fearful number of sins thus remains hidden in the conscience, because, through carelessness and culpable ignorance, people wish to know nothing about them! They look in the glass with but one eye. To many penitents one might say with truth what a doctor once said to a young man who showed him a small sore on his finger, and complained of the pain it caused him; ah, my friend, said the doctor, who knew by the color and the pulse of his patient that the latter was suffering from a dangerous illness, the evil is not in your finger alone; the chief cause of your suffering is hidden from you; your blood must be purified and your stomach put into order, or else we shall soon have to carry you to the grave. In the same way, there are many who come to the spiritual phy-

¹ *Esurivi enim, et non dedistis mihi manducare.*—Matt. xxv. 42.

sician and show him some trifling sores that trouble them; that is, they confess merely their daily faults. But if the priest could see into their consciences, might he not say to each of them, poor soul, your evil does not consist merely in what you have told me; what you have still kept back, and concealed from yourself, will be the cause of eternal death to you, unless you repent of and confess it. "Son of man," said the Lord to the Prophet Ezechiel, "dig in the wall."¹ "Go in and see the wicked abominations which they commit here."² My child, the priest might say, dig in the wall, examine the hidden recesses of your conscience, and there you will find a mass of abominations that you have not wished to see hitherto. You will see many sins of your own, which have been hitherto concealed from your eyes by an inordinate love of creatures, by your evil desires, and by all sorts of empty pretexts and excuses. You will see many sins of which you were the occasion to others by the scandal you gave them. You will see many omissions of the good that you were bound to do. Do you think, perhaps, that in the Day of Judgment you will be able to justify yourself from all these by saying, I have not known anything about those sins; I did not think that this or that was a grievous sin; I did not look on it as necessary to examine my conscience about those things? You did not wish to know, is the answer your Judge will give you; you did not wish to acknowledge your misdeeds; you have not examined your conscience with candor; your ignorance was wilful and culpable; true, your confessor, either because he knew nothing of your secret transgressions, or had not the courage to warn you about them, has often pronounced over you the words, "I absolve thee from thy sins;" but I, who know the secrets of the heart, and search the reins, I said at the time, "I condemn you on account of your sins."

But, my dear brethren, before it comes to that with us, let us make a better resolution; let us in future, whenever we go to confession, act with candor in the examen of conscience. What is the advantage of deceiving ourselves in a matter which so closely concerns our eternal salvation? What is the good of trying to make ourselves appear more innocent than we really are in the sight of God? Let each one, says St. Gregory, when he is examining his conscience, act as if he were making an inquiry against a stranger, nay, against his greatest enemy; so

Conclusion and resolution to examine our conscience with candor before confession.

¹ *Fill hominis, fode parietem.—Ezech. viii. 8.*

² *Ingrederere, et vide, abominaciones pessimas, quas isti faciunt hic.—Ibid. 9.*

that he may pass over nothing, and excuse nothing that he can with truth bring against himself. Ah, God of goodness and mercy, I say again, for my part, with Thy penitent servant David: "The sins of my youth and my ignorances do not remember."¹ "From my secret ones cleanse me, O Lord, and from those of others spare thy servant."² Pardon the sins of which I have in any way been the occasion by scandal-giving. "Send forth Thy light and Thy truth;"³ enlighten me with Thy light and in Thy truth, that I may know all the sins of my past life, repent of them with all my heart, confess them properly, do penance for them, avoid them in future, and love, praise, and serve Thee with all the greater fervor. Amen.

¹ Delicta juventutis meæ et ignorantias meas ne memineris.—Ps. xxiv. 7.

² Ab occultis meis munda me, et ab alienis parce servo tuo.—Ibid. xviii. 13, 14.

³ Emitte lucem tuam et veritatem tuam.—Ibid. xlii. 3.

ON SORROW FOR SIN.

TWENTY-FIRST SERMON.

ON THE NECESSITY AND NATURE OF SORROW FOR SIN.

Subject.

1. The most necessary part of the sacrament of penance is true sorrow for sin. 2. In what this sorrow consists.—*Preached on the thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Ite, ostendite vos sacerdotibus.—Luke xvii. 14.
“Go, show yourselves to the priests.”

Introduction.

Sinners, there is no other means for you to clean your souls, if they are affected with leprosy, that is, with the stain of mortal sin, and to receive forgiveness from the God whom you have offended, but to “show yourselves to the priests,” to examine your consciences with candor, and to confess your sins fully. But wait a little; after all, the examen of conscience and the confession of one’s sins are not enough; that which is chiefly required before confession is to have a true sorrow for sin, and it is that in which most people are wanting. This I shall now undertake to explain, and I say, without further preamble,

Plan of Discourse.

The most necessary part of the sacrament of penance is true sorrow for sin; this I shall show in the first and longer part. In what this sorrow consists, I shall explain in the second part.

O Mary, refuge of sinners, and you, holy guardian angels, you know that I and all your children cannot give you greater pleasure than when we repent of our sins, so that we may love

you with pure hearts; obtain for us, then, from God the grace to do that.

Sorrow for sin is a condition of forgiveness required by God.

There is no doubt that that means is the most necessary to a given end, which God requires to that end; which is alone capable of attaining that end; without which all other means are useless, and which cannot be replaced by any other means. Such, my dear brethren, is to him who has sinned grievously the necessity of true sorrow, in order that he may obtain forgiveness and save his soul. For, in the first place, even little children learning the catechism know that the chief part of the sacrament of penance is sorrow for sin. God is the Lord of all His graces, which He distributes as He pleases; now He has determined not to forgive any one his sins, under any circumstances, unless he is truly sorry for them. "This," says Tertullian, "is the price for which God is willing to give us pardon."¹ And that, too, with perfect justice; for, as theologians teach with St. Thomas, "mortal sin is a turning away from the Creator, and a turning towards creatures,"² by which, namely, man, of his own free will, abandons God, whose grace and friendship he despises, and, for the sake of some brutal lust, or temporal gain, or vain honor, attaches his heart to creatures. This is what the Lord complains of by the Prophet Jeremias: "Thus saith the Lord: What iniquity have your fathers found in Me, that they are gone far from Me, and have walked after vanity? . . . They have turned their back on Me and not their face."³ Therefore, in order to be freed from sin and to recover the grace and friendship of God, the man who has been guilty of such wickedness and presumption must turn round the other way, that is, by another act of his free will, he must abandon creatures and turn towards his Creator; that is what he does when he is sorry for his sins.

And most justly, too.

And what less could God require as an atonement for the insult offered Him, than that he by whom He has been offended and abandoned should at least feel grieved and sorry for his crime? For not to repent of the insult offered would be in fact a fresh act of contempt towards the grace of God, and an evident sign that no value is attached to it, inasmuch as the loss of it does not even cause regret. It is acting towards God as if

¹ Hoc pretio nobis Deus veniam adjicere instituit.—Tertull. de penit.

² Est aversto a Creatore, et conversio ad creaturam.

³ Hæc dicit Dominus: quid invenerunt patres vestri in me iniquitatis, quia elongaverunt a me, et ambulaverunt post vanitatem? . . . verterunt ad me tergum, et non faciẽm.—Jerem. II. 5, 27.

I were to say to a great lord whom I have offended, forgive me for what I have done; I am not sorry for it, nor do I make any promise that I will not do it again. In that way I should provoke the lord to be still more embittered against me, instead of receiving me again into his favor. When the emperor Hadrian heard that Tavianus, who had fallen into disgrace with him, was not disturbed thereat, and showed little regret for it, he caused him to be at once beheaded for despising the emperor's favor. It is, then, an undoubted fact that God will not pardon sin, either in or out of the sacrament of penance, unless the sinner is sorry for what he has done, and that it would not even be becoming His divine Majesty to do so.

Secondly, sorrow for sin, when it arises from a perfect love of God, is such a powerful means of obtaining forgiveness that it at once justifies the sinner, even without any other means, and makes him a friend of God. In the Old Testament this perfect sorrow was the only means of obtaining pardon for one who had sinned mortally. In the New Law, if I have no opportunity of confession, either through want of a priest, or because I am in danger of death, if I make an act of perfect contrition, I am again a friend of God, even if I were the greatest sinner in the world, and the kingdom of heaven belongs to me as my lawful inheritance. Nor is any examen of conscience or of the number and nature of my sins required for this; it is enough if I am heartily sorry, from a motive of perfect charity, for having offended God. Even when I have an opportunity of confessing my sins, and intend availing myself of it, the moment I make this act of perfect sorrow, before I receive absolution, or tell my sins to the priest, or even examine my conscience, all my sins are at once forgiven, although the obligation of confessing those sins and receiving sacramental absolution for them still remains, because the law of God requires it. From this alone it is evident that it is the most necessary condition to ensure forgiveness; for, if all other means fail, it alone has the power of fully reconciling me to God.

Thirdly, the same necessity is still more evident from the fact that without this sorrow all other means are useless, as far as the obtaining pardon for sin is concerned. You may have spent a whole year in examining your conscience, and searching out its most hidden recesses, and writing out all your sins with their number, nature, and circumstances; you may have confessed all those sins with the greatest candor and humility, and with great

Perfect sorrow reconciles the sinner with God, although all other means are wanting.

Without sorrow, all other means together are useless.

shame and mortification on your part, to a most learned, experienced, and pious priest; he may have given you sacramental absolution and all imaginable indulgences as well that it is in his power to give; you may have performed your penance, and done other voluntary penitential works besides; you may have, moreover, the earnest purpose of never again offending God by mortal sin during your whole life; but if true sorrow alone is wanting, or if the sorrow you have is not as it should be, then all your labor is in vain; not one of your sins is forgiven; you are not absolved from them; you are as you were before, a child of reprobation, an object of the divine malediction. Even the baptism of water, although it has the power of cleansing the soul from all stain of sin, and all punishment due to sin, so that, if one died immediately after having received it, he would go at once to heaven, even that cannot help an adult who has sinned grievously to obtain forgiveness, unless he first hates and detests his sins by an act of at least imperfect sorrow; such is the teaching of the Council of Trent. Therefore, my dear brethren, neither examen of conscience, nor confession, nor absolution, nor satisfaction, nor penance, nor holy baptism itself in the case of an adult, nor all the other means that God has appointed for the forgiveness of sin, are of the least use, if true sorrow for sin is wanting.

All the other parts of penance may be replaced by something else.

Finally, its indispensable necessity for the sinner is evident from the fact that there is nothing which can replace it or do its work. If, through inexperience, or inculpable ignorance, one has not properly examined his conscience, so that he has forgotten many grievous sins, provided he has otherwise done his best according to his ability, his sins will nevertheless be forgiven, for the goodness of God will take his inexperience and ignorance into consideration, and will make good his defects. Again, if through the same causes he has not confessed all his sins, without any fault on his part, provided he has otherwise done his best to prepare for confession, his sins will be forgiven him, the absolution he receives will be valid, for his ignorance excuses him, and he is bound to nothing further than to confess those sins the next time he goes to confession, if he remembers them. If he has not received absolution validly, either because the priest is not approved by ecclesiastical authority for hearing confessions, or because the priest, through wickedness, has not had the proper intention when giving absolution, nevertheless, if he has a perfect sorrow for his sins, God Himself will absolve

him; or else, if his sorrow is imperfect, he can be absolved by another priest, the next time he goes to confession. If he has forgotten his penance, or has not been able to perform it, he is no worse for that; the guilt of sin is taken away from his soul; for his incapacity excuses him. Nay, if through weakness or illness one cannot examine his conscience, nor declare his sins in confession, nor fulfil the penance enjoined him, provided he has the will to confess, even by signs, and has at the same time a true sorrow for sin, he can receive absolution, and his sins will be forgiven. Thus all these parts of the sacrament of penance may be supplied in some way or other, if in certain circumstances any of them is wanting.

But with regard to sorrow for sin the matter is quite different. It is so absolutely necessary, that without it not a single sin will be forgiven. If one who has committed a mortal sin is so simple as to believe that it is enough for him to declare his sins in confession, even if he has never heard anything of sorrow for sin, and knows not how to excite it, his ignorance, although he cannot help it, does not excuse him; he is in the state of sin, and he remains in it. There is another who would willingly make an act of sorrow, but he cannot, on account of weakness and inability; his illness does not excuse him, and if he dies without that sorrow, although he may have received a thousand absolutions, he will be lost forever, and there is no help for him. If I have done my best to repent of my sins, and am of the opinion that I am really sorry for them (although, when a person does his best, the grace of true repentance will never be wanting to him), but if in reality I have not a true sorrow, my opinion will not save me; my sins will not be forgiven. If my confessor tries to encourage me by assuring me that I have a proper sorrow, and says that he will take my sins on himself if my sorrow is not a true one, the assurances of my confessor, even if he were the Pope himself, are of no use to me; I am still in the state of sin. Thus there is neither inexperience, nor ignorance, nor weakness, nor illness, nor indulgence, nor jubilee, nor priestly absolution, nor anything in the world that can dispense me from having true sorrow for my sins, or replace it, if it is wanting. If I have offended God by mortal sin, and die without truly repenting of it, whether wilfully, or through inculpable ignorance, or through some cause that I could not prevent, I am lost forever, not, indeed, on account of not having true sorrow for my sin, but on account of the sin I have committed

But nothing
can replace
true sorrow,
if it is
wanting.

and have not annulled by true repentance (unless I make an act of perfect charity, for, as theologians teach, that includes a perfect sorrow for sin, and therefore is able to justify the sinner even outside the sacrament of penance). In the same way, a child who dies without being baptized before it comes to the use of reason cannot go to heaven, even if an attempt was made to administer baptism, but the person, without any fault of his, used white wine instead of water; that is a mistake that neither the child nor the person who wished to baptize it could help; and yet, as the necessary baptism is wanting, the child cannot have any share in the happiness of heaven.

Hence it is of the utmost importance. Shown by examples.

A certain cardinal was lying on his death-bed, and the Pope sent word to him that he would come and give him his apostolic benediction and a plenary indulgence in his last moments. "I am very grateful to your Holiness," answered the dying man, "for such an unmerited favor; but, alas, how much more pleasing and profitable it would be for me if you could also assure me that I have a true sorrow for my sins!" Truly, that was a sensible wish! If one could have given that sorrow to that unfortunate man who appeared after death to one of his former friends, he would have been able to give a better account of himself. His friend asked him how his soul fared in eternity. "Woe to me," was his answer, "I am in hell!" "But how can that be," asked the other, terror-stricken; "you made a good confession before you died?" "Yes," was the answer, "that is true; I declared all my sins in confession." "And the priest gave you absolution?" "Yes, that is also true." "And you received holy Communion and extreme unction afterwards?" "Yes." "And then there were people there to pray with you continually, and to commend your soul into the hands of God on its departure out of this life?" "Yes." "And up to the very last moment almost you kissed the crucifix with the greatest devotion?" "Yes, all that was done." "And how, then, does it happen that you are in hell?" "Alas," cried out the unhappy soul, "the most necessary thing of all was wanting to me. I had not true sorrow for my sins, and without that all else that was done for me was of no avail; I am lost forever on account of the mortal sins I committed."

And should be made the object of our greatest

From this, my dear brethren, we can conclude that our greatest care and diligence, when going to confession, should be devoted to exciting in ourselves a true sorrow and repentance for sin, even when we have nothing but venial sins and daily shortcomings

to accuse ourselves of. If we have not a mortal sin on our conscience, it would be better for us to go to holy Communion without confession, than to confess without true sorrow. For, as I have often said already, I am never bound to confess venial sins; but if, nevertheless, I wish to confess them (and it is a good and useful thing to do) and have nothing else but venial sins, then I must necessarily make an act of true sorrow for all, or for one at least, otherwise I profane the holy sacrament, and the absolution I receive is invalid, on account of the want of one of the necessary parts of the sacrament. Hence it may be that of two persons who go to confession one may come out justified, although his conscience was burdened with a hundred mortal sins, because he has prepared properly for confession and has had a true sorrow for his sins, while the other, who was before pious and just, and had only venial sins to confess, comes out in the state of mortal sin, because he was wanting in true contrition; that is to say, if he is wanting in it through his own fault; for it is another thing if he believes in good faith that he has the necessary dispositions for the sacrament. Therefore I repeat the advice I have often given before, namely, that they who go frequently to confession and have nothing to accuse themselves of but venial sins and daily faults would do well to confess in general terms some sin of their past lives, for which they can easily make an act of contrition, so as not to expose the sacrament to the danger of being invalidly received.

But alas, that true sorrow and repentance for sin, which is most of all required in order to obtain forgiveness of sin, is also unfortunately that in which most penitents are wanting! Is not that the case, my dear brethren? How many are there not who imagine that, when they have examined their consciences accurately and declared all their sins in confession, they have done quite enough? They have not the least doubt that their confessions are good; but they hardly think of having the proper sorrow for sin, their only anxiety being not to leave out anything in confession. Again, you will find hundreds who are anxious and troubled after confession; and why? Ah, they think, have I left out anything? I wish I could be certain that I have told all my sins. But amongst the hundreds you will hardly find one who will be scrupulous as to whether he has had the proper sorrow for sin. It is a good thing to be careful in the examen of conscience, and one is bound to be so according to one's circumstances; it is also good and necessary to declare all one's grievous

care before
confession.

But it is
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sins, and not to conceal any of them wilfully; but that is not enough; the principal requisite for a good confession is to have true contrition for sin, and if this is wanting, the confession is worthless. There are others, again, who, when they have finished with the examen of conscience, and their turn has not yet come to enter the confessional, spend the time while they are waiting in saying the rosary, or in reading their prayer-books; these prayers are excellent in their way, but it is not the proper time for them when one should be trying to excite himself to sorrow for his sins.

Nay, many show by the way they live that they do not believe in the necessity of sorrow for sin in confession.

I will say nothing of those Christians whose mode of life sufficiently declares that they do not believe in the necessity of sorrow for sin, and who think that all they have to do is to tell their sins to the priest in order to be forgiven. For when they are assailed by temptation, and the opportunity is offered them, they fall into sin head foremost, without scruple or fear, and then say to others, or at least think to themselves, after all, what harm is there in what I have done? I can tell it in confession, and it will be all right. Yes, I readily believe that, if confession alone were required, one who has little fear of God might be more daring in offending Him; but confession is not enough; you must also detest your sins more than all other imaginable evils. Do you believe that? If you do, is it not a foolish thing for you to think or say, I will satisfy my passion now; I will say or do this sinful thing, and then I can confess it afterwards? That is just as senseless as if I were to say, there are many clever doctors in this town who can heal all kinds of wounds; I will therefore throw myself down from the top of a high wall, and break my limbs to pieces; I shall be sorry for having done so afterwards, but I can go to one of those doctors and he will cure me. The fact is, you do not believe in the necessity of true contrition for your sins, which you commit so freely; or else you do not understand what is meant by this contrition, so that, if you always confess in that way, you will never have a true sorrow and repentance. For my part, my dear brethren, out of a hundred bad confessions, I believe that ninety-nine are bad through want of true sorrow; for he who really repents of his sins will surely not be wanting in the other parts of the sacrament of penance. And this is almost the only thing that makes the duty of a confessor troublesome and difficult, namely, his anxiety that his penitent should show signs of adequate sorrow for his sins. If he can be, humanly speaking, certain

of this, he is not afraid of having to deal with any number of mortal sins, because his penitent has already the disposition that is most necessary in order to receive the sacrament worthily. But, some will think, if true sorrow is then so necessary, in what does it consist, so that we may be more careful regarding it in future? This question I shall briefly answer in the

Second Part.

To repent of a thing, and to be sorry for it, may be two quite different things. We are sorry when anything disagreeable happens to us, although we may not be to blame for it and could not have prevented it; for instance, through a decree of divine Providence, a mother loses by death her only beloved son. She cannot help the loss; she would willingly have kept her child alive if it were possible; it is the will and the decree of God, for her own and her child's greater good, that he should die; and yet she is sorry and feels such grief that her eyes are filled with tears, her heart with sighs, her mouth with complaints. A merchant has a large sum of money stolen from him by night, although he is very careful in looking after it; the loss cannot be attributed to any fault of his; yet he feels it very sorely, and is so sorry for it that he is almost driven to the verge of desperation. In both these cases there is sorrow, but in neither, repentance, because neither of these persons has done anything to repent of. On the other hand, if the mother, in a fit of passion, beats her child so severely, to make it stop crying, that it loses its breath and dies; or if the merchant does not go to the trouble of locking up his store at night, although he is well aware that there is danger of some one stealing his money, then, indeed, the mother and the merchant can have both sorrow and repentance. The one is sorry for the death of her child, the other, for the loss he has suffered, and both repent of their guilt; the mother repents of having beaten her child so severely, and the merchant repents of his carelessness in looking after his money; for both could have avoided, if they had wished, the misfortune that befell them. Ah, they say then, would that I had not done so! Would that I had not beaten my child so severely! Would that I had locked up my money more securely! I repent sincerely of what I have done!

To repent of a thing and to be sorry for it are different things.

What I have now said of natural sorrow and repentance is to be understood, due proportion being observed, of supernatural sorrow and repentance also. "Contrition," says the Council of

Supernatural sorrow for sin

does not
consist in
words or
tears.

Trent, "is the sorrow of the mind which detests its sins and aspires to a better life."¹ Mark the words, "sorrow of the mind," or of the soul. Hence true contrition does not consist in the words that are spoken by the mouth, or read out of a prayer-book, no matter how earnest and expressive they are; nor does it consist in sighs or tears, nor in the sadness that is experienced in the sensitive part of the soul. These outward manifestations of grief are good and praiseworthy; they are sometimes the effect of a supernatural sorrow; but real contrition does not consist in them, nor are they always infallible signs of it; otherwise the wicked king Antiochus, the traitor Judas, and others like them, would have had true sorrow for their sins, for they wept on account of them; nor would the penitent David have had true sorrow when he said, "I have sinned against the Lord,"² in which passage we do not read of his having shed tears, and yet he was immediately assured, in the name of God, by the Prophet Nathan, that his sins were forgiven. Besides, if true contrition consisted in tears, women would have a great advantage over men, for they are of a more tender nature, and can be easily moved to tears, or, as people say, they can laugh and cry as they please. But it is not likely that the almighty God, who created both sexes for the same end, that is, for eternal happiness, has given to women an easier means of repentance, so that they can excite themselves to sorrow with less difficulty than men. That, I say, is not likely. Hence it may sometimes happen that a woman goes to confession weeping and moaning bitterly, while a man goes in as dry as a stick, without giving any outward signs of sorrow, yet the woman does not repent of her sins, while the man's repentance is true and sincere. Therefore those people act very wrongly who, in order, as they think, to awaken sorrow for their sins, make sensible efforts to force out tears and sighs to the great detriment of their health; and if they succeed in doing so, they imagine they have true contrition. But they are greatly mistaken. Others think they have not true sorrow because they do not feel a palpitation of the heart, or some other sign of bodily excitement, or because they do not experience such a bitter sensible sorrow as they would feel at the death of their parents, children, or friends, since it is certain that the sorrow for sin must be greater than any sorrow caused by all the imaginable evils in the world. Ah, they think, that death, or

¹ *Contritio est dolor animi, peccata sua detestantis, et ad vitam mellorem aspirantis.*

² *Peccavi Domino.—II. Kings xii. 13.*

temporal misfortune, or trial causes me such grief that I cannot restrain my tears, while I am not able to shed one for having offended God by mortal sin; it can hardly be that I have a true sorrow for my sins.

What nonsense! Sorrow for sin is not a natural and sensible affection of the sensitive part of our nature, but a supernatural, spiritual affection of the reasoning soul, and it consists partly in a movement of sorrow in the understanding, and partly in an earnest retractation and condemnation in the will, just as we have seen already in the case of the mother who caused her child's death; the natural sorrow and repentance she experienced enabled her understanding to see that she had done wrong, and this knowledge induced her will to condemn her harsh treatment of the child, and to wish sincerely that she had not been guilty of it. So it is also with the soul of the penitent who has contrition for his sins. In the first place, when his conscience represents his sins to his memory, and he, enlightened by faith, has thought of what a great, almighty, all-seeing God, worthy of all love, he has despised, and of what a loving Father and sovereign Benefactor he has offended; of how he has inflicted eternal death on his own precious soul for the sake of some miserable, momentary pleasure, and sacrificed heaven and everything that is good, and exposed himself to the danger of being buried in hell forever, then his understanding is enabled to see, to his secret confusion, that he has indeed acted wrongly and foolishly. Am I not, he thinks to himself, foolish, presumptuous, ungrateful, and wicked, to have committed sin? This knowledge and sorrow on the part of the understanding are followed by a resolution and repentance on the part of the will, by which he hates, condemns, and, as it were, retracts the evil he knows he has done, and wishes heartily he had never done it. Ah, he says to himself in all sincerity, would that I had never done it! If it were to be done again, I would rather die a thousand times than be guilty of it! Now, if this sorrow of his arises from the fact that he is grieved at having offended and insulted God, whom he now loves above all things on account of His infinite perfections, then it is a perfect contrition, and can blot out sin even outside the sacrament of penance. But if it is caused by his grief at having offended God, who has been so good to him, or who can shut heaven against him, or condemn him to hell, then it is an imperfect contrition, which is sufficient to obtain forgiveness of sin in the sacrament of penance. You see now that all this is not necessarily an af-

It is a spiritual act of the understanding and the will.

fection of the senses or of the body, but that it resides in the mind and in the soul. No words are required for it, and the forms of acts of contrition that are found in prayer-books are placed there merely to help the understanding to see that it has done evil, and to impel the will to hate and detest the sin it has consented to. Nor does this contrition require a long time; if it is sincerely entertained in the heart even for a moment, that is long enough for it to obtain the forgiveness of sin.

And must
be sincerely
made.

I say that it must be sincerely entertained, so that, in virtue of my knowledge and detestation of sin, I am seriously resolved, if for instance I should fall into extreme poverty unless I commit a sin of injustice, rather to accept poverty than commit the sin; or, if I had to spend my life in the greatest suffering unless I consent to an impure desire, or speak unchastely, or otherwise indulge my passions, I am firmly resolved rather to choose the suffering than to consent to sin; and so also for all other sins. It is not, indeed, necessary for true contrition, nor is it always advisable, to imagine one's self in such circumstances; yet my sorrow for sin must be so sincere that I am disposed, if such circumstances arise, to prefer any evil rather than offend God by mortal sin.

Many have
not that
sincere sor-
row.

Christians, have we always that earnest resolve when we are exciting ourselves to sorrow for sin before confession? Have you got it, who recite a whole catalogue of mortal sins in confession, and then repeat by heart the formula, "I am sorry for all these sins, because I have thereby offended God," while you hardly bestow a thought on the meaning of those words? The same I say to you who come to confession with a great number of mortal sins, and never show any signs of amendment from one confession to another. And to you also, who continue in the proximate occasion of sin, in impure intimacy, in hatred and enmity, in drunkenness, in the filthy habit of cursing and swearing, in following the unlawful customs of the world, and in the possession of ill-gotten goods. Are you all firmly resolved to detest your sins above every other evil? Do you seriously wish you had never committed them? But how is that possible? Your sorrow is only a lip-sorrow; it does not touch the heart, and therefore it is only an apparent, invalid, and sacrilegious sorrow, which adds to your sins instead of taking them away. I repeat what I have said already, out of a hundred bad confessions, ninety-nine, generally speaking, are invalid through a defect of true sorrow.

Almighty and most merciful God, do Thou with Thy penetrating voice suggest the conclusion to the hearts of all sinners, "Be converted to me with all your heart."¹ All that I require in order to forgive your sins is that you repent of and detest even for a moment your wickedness against Me; but that repentance must be sincere and earnest. If your hearts are so hard that they cannot be moved, come to Me, sigh and call out to Me for the grace of true repentance, and I will soften your hearts, so that you will find it easy to be sorry for your sins: "If he cry to Me, I will hear him, because I am compassionate;"² so have I said to all men long since. Do you then cry out to Me, and I will hear you, for I am merciful and do not desire the death of the sinner. And when you have finished your prayer, represent to yourselves by a lively faith Him whom you have offended, and how unjustly and ungratefully you have treated Him, what a great good you have lost by sin, what a terrible eternal evil you have thereby involved yourselves in. With the help of divine grace this consideration will move your soul heartily to detest sin, and it will compel Me to show you My mercy, and to receive you again into My friendship. Christians, follow the inspirations of the good God who is speaking to you! Amen.

We must pray fervently for the grace of true contrition.

TWENTY-SECOND SERMON.

ON THE PROPERTIES OF TRUE SORROW FOR SIN.

Subject.

1. True sorrow for sin must be extended to all the mortal sins that one has committed, without a single exception. 2. It must spring from a supernatural motive. Many faults are committed against both these properties of true sorrow.—*Preached on the fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Nemo potest duobus dominis servire.—Matt. vi. 24.

"No man can serve two masters."

Introduction.

There are many so-called penitent Christians in the world nowadays who try to prove that they can do what Our Lord says

¹ Convertimini ad me in toto corde vestro.—Joel. ii. 12.

² Si clamaverit ad me, exaudiam eum, quia misericors sum.—Exod. xxii. 27.

cannot be done. They wish to serve the world and God at the same time; they wish to serve God, and also their rebellious flesh; they wish to give themselves partly to God, and partly to the devil. And this is principally the case with them when they are preparing for confession; for there are some sins they wish to banish out of their hearts, and others they remain attached to; or else, if they repent of all their sins, it is not from a supernatural motive. But they are attempting an impossibility; "No man can serve two masters." Last Sunday, my dear brethren, I showed the necessity of true contrition for him who has sinned grievously and wishes to go to confession, and that necessity is so absolute that under no circumstances can sins be forgiven without it. I have also explained in what this contrition consists, namely, in a penitent act of the understanding, by which I acknowledge that I have done evil, and in a penitent act of the will, by which I detest sin and sincerely wish I had never committed it. The further properties of contrition I shall now explain, against those who wish to serve two masters, and I say,

Plan of Discourse.

True sorrow for sin must be extended to all the mortal sins that one has committed, without a single exception; that I shall explain in the first part. It must spring from God, that is, from a supernatural motive, as we shall see in the second part. Many faults are committed against both these properties of true contrition.

To avoid them in future, and to serve Thee with all our hearts, we humbly beg Thy help and grace, O God of goodness, through the intercession of Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

He who falls to repent of one mortal sin that he has committed, does not repent of any.

He who wishes to be a true Catholic must believe all that the Catholic Church teaches. If he doubts of the truth of a single article of her teaching he is already a heretic and an apostate, if he obstinately perseveres in his doubt; nay, by the very fact of his doubting one article of faith, he refuses to believe in any. How is that? Because the motive that should impel him to believe in the one article holds good for all the others. For the same God, for instance, who has revealed that there are three divine Persons in one nature has also revealed that Jesus Christ is really present in the Blessed Sacrament, living God and Man, body and soul; and the word of God is as infallible in the latter article as it is in the former. Now, if I refuse to believe Him in one point, then I consider Him as guilty of deceit, and there-

fore I cannot believe anything He says. The same may be said of one who repents of his sins. If his sorrow does not extend to all the mortal sins he has committed, if there is but one of them that he does not detest with all his heart, then he is not a true penitent. Nay, he is not sorry for any of his sins, because the motive which should excite him to sorrow is opposed to one sin as well as to many. If I detest a mortal sin because it closes heaven against me and exposes me to the eternal flames of hell, provided my repentance is sincere, I must also detest every mortal sin, because they all entail the loss of heaven and the pains of hell. If I detest a mortal sin because I have thereby offended God, who is so good to me, I have the same reason for detesting all mortal sins. If I detest a mortal sin because I thereby have troubled Jesus Christ, my Saviour, who has loved me so much that He suffered death for me, I have the same cause to detest all mortal sins. If I detest a mortal sin because I have thereby despised God, who is worthy of all honor and love, the same motive should impel me to hate all sin, or else my repentance is not sincere.

Even if I had some particular reason for detesting one certain mortal sin, on account of some special deformity which is not found in the other sins I have committed, and if, therefore, my sorrow does not extend to those latter, nevertheless God requires of me, if I wish to regain His grace and friendship and to receive the sacrament of penance validly, that I should hate and repent of all the mortal sins I have committed, and that, too, with my whole heart. For according to the present arrangements of divine Providence one mortal sin cannot be remitted without the others, and none without true sorrow; all must be forgiven together, or else none at all. God will not make friendship with the sinner until the latter has subscribed to all the required conditions; all that He hates must be given up and destroyed. "Be converted and do penance for all your iniquities," He says to sinners by His Prophet Ezechiel, for all without exception, "and iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, by which you have transgressed,"¹ all without exception; for, if you allow a single one of them to remain on your conscience, you will assuredly die the death of the sinner.

One mortal sin is not forgiven without the others.

¹ Convertimini. et agite pœnitentiam ab omnibus iniquitatibus vestris; et non erit vobis in ruinam iniquitas. Proflcite a vobis omnes prœvaricationes vestras, in quibus prœvaricati estis. — Ezech. xviii. 50, 31.

Therefore my repentance is not good, unless I am sorry for all my sins.

And what good would it do me to shed bitter tears for a hundred grievous sins, if my heart and will still remained attached to but a single one? All my tears and repentance would be utterly useless. For if every mortal sin can be compared to a thunder-cloud, according to the words of the Prophet Isaias, "I have blotted out thy iniquities as a cloud, and thy sins as a mist,"¹ what better am I for having gone through a hundred storms without injury, if in one of them a thunder-bolt strikes me to the ground? If every sin is a strong cord, as the penitent David says, "The cords of the wicked have encompassed me,"² does it help me to my freedom to have burst a hundred cords, if I am still bound fast with one in the cruel slavery of the devil? If every mortal sin is a heavy burden, according to the bitter complaint of the same David, "My iniquities are gone over my head; and as a heavy burden are become heavy upon me,"³ what lighter will I be for having thrown a hundred of them off my conscience, if there still remains a heavy mill-stone whose weight is enough to drag me down into the abyss of hell? If every mortal sin brings eternal death, "The soul that sinneth, the same shall die,"⁴ is my life any safer because I am pierced through the heart with one instead of a hundred bullets, or with one instead of a hundred swords? In a word, what good is it to repent of a hundred sins, if I am to be damned on account of one? Hell is full of unfortunate sinners who are lost through a single bad habit, a single vice to which they were addicted during their lives. How, then, can I expect to obtain pardon, if I repent of one sin and not of all, since God will not forgive one without the other? Therefore true sorrow must be extended to all mortal sins that one has committed: "Do penance for all your iniquities."

Many penitents act wrongly in this respect, as Saul did with the Amalekites.

O contrition of many Christians who go to confession, of what kind art thou, I ask again? Art thou always able to loosen every chain, to destroy everything that is hateful to the offended Majesty of God? Does it not sometimes happen that one or another sin is kept in the heart, made the object of a special attachment, and is neither detested nor renounced? Ah, I fear there are many sins that remain still unrepented of! They are the Amalekites rejected by God, who still live in our

¹ Delevi ut nubem iniquitates tuas, et quasi nebulam peccata tua.—Isa. xlv. 22.

² Funes peccatorum circumplexi sunt me.—Ps. cxviii. 61.

³ Iniquitates meæ supergressæ sunt caput meum, et sicut onus grave gravatæ sunt super me.—Ibid. xxxvii. 5.

⁴ Anima quæ peccaverit, ipsa morietur.—Ezech. xviii. 20.

midst, and whom the Lord has commanded us, as he formerly did king Saul, to destroy, and to immolate as a sacrifice to His avenging justice. God commanded the Prophet Samuel to say to Saul, "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 Saul obeyed, but not fully, as God had commanded him; he cut and burnt, and hacked and slew; but whom and what? "All the common people," says the Holy Scripture, "he slew with the edge of the sword. And Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the flocks of sheep and of the herds, and the garments and the rams, and all that was beautiful, and would not destroy them."² He kept for himself what was of any use to him, "but everything that was vile and good for nothing, that they destroyed."³ And therefore he received from Samuel the sad news that God had deposed him from his throne, and rejected him, because he did not destroy everything according to the command of the Lord. "For as much, therefore, as thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, the Lord hath also rejected thee from being king."⁴

There we have a striking picture of the conduct of many Christians when they are preparing for confession. As we have seen already, God has commanded them by the Prophet Ezechiel to put off all sin: "Cast away from you all your transgressions, by which you have transgressed, and make to yourselves a new heart and a new spirit."⁵ If you wish to do penance, you must slay with the sword all the sins you have committed, that is, you must destroy them by true contrition. But how do they act? Many of them are obedient to the divine command, but after the fashion of Saul; they act towards their vices as he did towards the Amalekites: "All the common people he slew with the edge of the sword." They repent of and detest the sins that do not excite strong desires in them, from which they hope for no special profit or pleasure, and which they have not much difficulty in avoiding; these they sacrifice to the divine justice.

For they repent of some sins, but not of habitual ones.

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

² Omne autem vulgus interfecit in ore gladii. Et pepercit Saul et populus Agag, et optimis gregibus ovium et armentorum, et vestibus et arietibus, et universis quae pulchra erant, nec voluerunt disperdere ea.—Ibid. 8, 9.

³ Quidquid vero vile fuit et reprobum, hoc demoliti sunt.—Ibid. 9.

⁴ Pro eo ergo, quod abiecasti sermonem Domini, abiecit te Dominus, ne sis rex.—Ibid. 23.

⁵ Projicite a vobis omnes praevaricationes vestras, in quibus praevaricati estis, et facite vobis cor novum et spiritum novum.—Ezech. xviii. 31.

For instance, one has omitted, through culpable neglect, to hear Mass on a Sunday or holy-day; another, in a fit of anger, has cursed from his heart his parents, his wife, or his children, and he was afterwards frightened at what he said; another has eaten meat on a fast day, or has taken a false oath, or has done something to injure one who was formerly his friend, and so on. These are, so to speak, the common herd of sins, from which no particular profit or pleasure is to be expected; these must be declared in confession, and be heartily repented of: "All the common people he slew with the edge of the sword;" but what becomes of the king? what of the more important and attractive transgressions? "Saul spared Agag . . . and all that was beautiful." That is what they do. Whatever is pleasing to the senses, and has captivated their hearts for a long time, is spared. That unlawful, scandalous intercourse with that person, which there is no intention of abandoning; the proximate occasion of sin, which one does not wish to leave; the inveterate habit of sensual indulgence; that long-standing hatred and enmity; those ill-gotten possessions, that have been kept so long without any restitution being made; the habit of drunkenness and intemperance, which is the occasion of many sins; those scandalous abuses, which are such an occasion of sin to others, etc., these are the king Agag whose life is saved; these are kept uninjured in the heart, in the inclination, and in the desires; these sins are not repented of, because there is no serious intention of avoiding them.

Because they fear the difficulty of amending them.

Hear, O sinner, if you wish to be truly converted to God and to receive pardon of your sins; you must, as soon as ever you can, restore your ill-gotten goods to their lawful owner. Alas! you say, I am sorry for my sins; is not that enough, without giving back those things? It is too difficult for me to do it now; some other time, when I am richer. You see how it is? The king's life must be spared. If you wish to do penance, you must forgive your enemy from your heart, and, if necessary, beg his pardon, and be fully reconciled to him. What? Be reconciled to that man? Never; the thing is impossible; he has insulted me too grossly, and I cannot bear the sight of him; I forgive him in my heart, but I cannot help rejoicing if some misfortune happens to him. There is another king whose life has to be spared. If you wish to do penance and to be readmitted to the friendship of God, you must leave the proximate occasion of sin, and give up your bad habits, live more soberly,

avoid cursing and swearing, dissensions and scandal-giving, and whatever is an occasion of sin to you must be got rid of at once. That improper intimacy has to be broken off, and the proximate occasion of sin to be shunned; you must nevermore enter that house, or go into that company; if the person with whom you have hitherto been in the habit of sinning is dearer to you than the apple of your eye, or more useful to you than your hand or foot, yet you must give up that person once for all, according to the command of Our Lord, "If thy eye scandalize thee pluck it out and cast it from thee; it is better for thee, having one eye, to enter into life, than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire."¹ Have you thought of this seriously? Do you repent of and detest with your whole heart your attachment to these evil habits, occasions, and company, and hate it above every imaginable evil? Do you really prefer to die rather than go back to your evil ways? Alas, cries out your conscience, how can I abandon this or that habit? What will people say? How can I leave that person, break off that intimacy, or go away before the time I engaged for has expired? I dare not do it. The only pleasure or comfort I have is in the society of that person; how can I venture now to cause him or her such trouble? It is impossible; I cannot do it; God will not look at it as a grievous sin on my part. A fine repentance that! The king's life must again be spared.

In that way we do penance in appearance, but not in reality; and we are worse when we come out of the confessional, than when we went in. For repentance does not in that case extend to every mortal sin, and therefore you who act thus are in a miserable and damnable state; not one of your sins is forgiven; the Lord God has rejected you. It is true, He has promised you His grace and friendship, and is ready to give them to you at any moment; but on condition that you repent of all your sins without exception. Hear what He says by the Prophet Ezechiel: "But if the wicked do penance for all his sins, which he hath committed, and keep all My commandments . . . living he shall live, and shall not die; I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done."² "Pour out thy heart like water before the face of the Lord,"³ says the Prophet Jeremias. And why

He who wishes to be truly converted must repent of all his sins.

¹ Si oculus tuus scandalizat te, erue eum, et projice abs te; bonum tibi est cum uno oculo in vitam intrare, quam duos oculos habentem mitti in gehennam ignis.—Matt. xviii. 9.

² Si autem impius egerit poenitentiam ab omnibus peccatis suis, quæ operatus est et custodierit omnia præcepta mea . . . vita vivet, et non morietur; omnium iniquitatum ejus, quas operatus est, non recordabor.—Ezech. xviii. 21, 22.

³ Effunde sicut aquam cor tuum ante conspectum Domini.—Lament. ii. 19.

not like oil or balsam? No; for oil or balsam cannot be poured out of a glass so that none of it remains sticking to the sides of the vessel, while water, on the contrary, may be poured out at once almost to the last drop. Sinner, when you go to confession, "Pour out thy heart like water before the face of the Lord," so that not one of your sins remains unrepented of. Therefore contrition must be extended to every mortal sin. But it must also proceed from a supernatural motive, as we shall see in the

Second Part.

Many examples of penitents in Holy Scripture whose repentance was worth nothing.

By the motive I mean that which impels us to sorrow and repentance; and it must be supernatural; that is to say, that which moves me to be sorry for my sins must come from faith. A few examples will serve to make this clear. We find in the Holy Scriptures instances of sinners who were addicted to almost the same vices, and were guilty of almost the same sins, and, apparently at least, did penance in the same way; who would not say that they all received pardon and grace from the God of infinite justice and mercy? Yet such is not the case. King Pharaoh sinned by rebelling against the divine command, and he repented of his disobedience, not once, but several times; for he sent for Moses and Aaron and said to them with a sorrowful heart: "I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you;"¹ I have done evil in not allowing your people to go out of my country, as the Lord commanded them. I have sinned; "But now forgive me my sin this time also;" I will not be guilty of it again; "and pray to the Lord your God, that He take away from me this death;"² go at once and offer sacrifice to the Lord. King Saul, as we have seen already, sinned by disobedience to the command of God, and he, too, repented. "I have sinned," he said to Samuel, "because I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord. . . But now bear, I beseech thee, my sin, and return with me, that I may adore the Lord."³ King Antiochus sinned by pride, but he repented of his sin and wept bitter tears on account of it. "And by this means," says the Holy Scripture, "being brought from his great pride, he began to come to the knowledge of himself;"⁴ and he acknowledged

¹ Peccavi in Dominum Deum vestrum, et in vos —Exod. x. 16.

² Sed nunc dimitte peccatum mihi etiam hac vice, et rogate Dominum Deum vestrum, ut auferat a me mortem istam.—Ibid. 17.

³ Peccavi quia prævaricatus sum sermonem Domini. Sed nunc porta, quæso, peccatum meum, et revertere mecum, ut adorem Dominum.—I. Kings xv. 24, 25.

⁴ Hinc igitur cepit ex gravi superbia deductus ad agnitionem sui ventre.—II. Machab. ix. 11.

openly before his whole court what he had done, in order to atone for the scandal he had given by his pride. "It is just to be subject to God, and that a mortal man should not equal himself to God."¹ Judas sinned when he betrayed his Master for money, but he repented. "I have sinned," he said to the high-priests, "in betraying innocent blood;"² and in order to prove the sincerity of his repentance, he brought back the thirty pieces of silver and threw them down in the temple.³ But what good did their repentance do those people? None at all; in spite of it, they were lost forever.

On the other hand, King David sinned, and that, too, in consequence of the greater lights he enjoyed, more grievously than those others, when he committed the crimes of adultery and murder. "I have sinned against the Lord,"⁴ said he to the Prophet Nathan; that was all the proof he then gave of his repentance, and yet the Prophet said to him at once: "The Lord also hath taken away thy sin; thou shalt not die."⁵ The notorious sinner Magdalene loved Our Lord with all her heart, and cast herself down at His feet; whereupon she had the happiness of hearing from His own divine lips the words, "Many sins are forgiven her."⁶ Peter denied his Master most shamefully three times; but he began to weep immediately after, and not another word was said of his sin. The thief on the cross, who probably had not done a good act during his whole life, only said to Christ the words, "Lord remember me when Thou shalt come into Thy kingdom,"⁷ and at once the eternal kingdom was promised him; "Amen, I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with Me in paradise."⁸

While others, whose repentance was apparently the same, were forgiven.

How is it, my dear brethren, that there is such a difference between the effects of a repentance that seems in every case the same? Has God, perhaps, more respect for one than for another? But that cannot be, for otherwise the Apostle would not have spoken the truth when he wrote to the Ephesians, "The Lord of you is in heaven, and there is no respect of persons with Him."⁹ It makes no difference to Him who does penance; if

Because the former had not supernatural sorrow.

¹ *Justum est subditum esse Deo, et mortalem non paria Deo sentire.*—II. Machab. ix. 12.

² *Peccavi, tradens sanguinem justum.*—Matt. xxvii. 4.

³ *Poenitentia ductus retulit triginta argenteos.*—Ibid. 3.

⁴ *Peccavi Domino.*—II. Kings xii. 13.

⁵ *Dominus quoque transtulit peccatum tuum; non morieris.*—Ibid.

⁶ *Remittuntur ei peccata multa.*—Luke vii. 47.

⁷ *Domine, memento mei, cum veneris in regnum tuum.*—Ibid. xxiii. 42.

⁸ *Amen, dico tibi, hodie mecum eris in paradiso.*—Ibid. 43.

⁹ *Vester Dominus est in caelis, et personarum acceptio non est apud eum.*—Ephes. vi. 9.

the poor beggar is really sorrow for his sins, there is pardon and grace for him, as well as for the penitent king or prince. What, then, is the reason of the difference? In the eyes of men, says St. Augustine, there was no difference between the repentance of the former and that of the latter; but the divine Judge, who sees the secrets of the heart, did not look at the matter as we do. For in the case of the former it was some mere natural motive that moved them to sorrow; the sighs were pressed from their hearts, and the apparently penitent tears from their eyes, not by the thought that they had offended the great God, but by a desire of their own temporal advantage, or by the fear of some temporal calamity. Pharaoh was afraid that still greater plagues would fall upon him, as Moses had threatened in the name of God; and therefore he repented of his disobedience. Saul was anxious to retain the crown, and when Samuel told him that he would lose it for his sin, he repented at once. Antiochus was afraid of death, and hoped to be freed from the intolerable stench of his illness, for he was being eaten alive by worms; and therefore he wept and acknowledged God as his supreme Lord. Judas could not bear the tortures of a bad conscience, which brought him, not to a true supernatural contrition, but to the extremity of despair. Therefore none of those sinners found grace and mercy from God.

The same defect is found in many who repent because their sins cause them temporal loss or shame.

O Christians, what sort of confessions do you make? Of what kind is your sorrow for sin? I have sinned; I repent of my sins, and am sorry for them, etc. That is what they all say; and many of them are indeed sorry that they have sinned, and would wish never to have committed a sin; but what is the motive of their sorrow? What makes them shed tears of repentance? Is it because they have offended the almighty God, who is infinitely good and worthy of all love? Ah, I am afraid that is what most of them think the least of! Some temporal object, or natural fear and anxiety, or misfortune, or the dread of disgrace before the world; such are the motives that induce them to detest what they have done against the law of God. For instance, a person comes to confession (I know of no such person, my dear brethren, I am speaking only of what may occur), who has been guilty of the sin of impurity, and is so full of sighs and tears that one might imagine that it was a penitent Magdalene who was there; but in the sight of God, who cannot be deceived, those sighs and tears are of no value. Why? Why does he not notice such vehement sorrow? Because that

person's tears and grief arise from the dread of shame and disgrace before the world; that is the only motive from which they spring. A servant comes to confession to accuse himself with many tears of a theft he has committed. Alas, he says, I have sinned! And why is he so afflicted? Is it because he has offended the good God? Not at all. He has been caught in the act by his master, turned out of the house, and has consequently lost his good name, so that he cannot find another place; that is what fills his eyes with tears. Another accuses himself of gluttony and drunkenness, of quarrelling and contention, of cursing and swearing and gambling; and he is sorry for those sins; but why? Because he has lost the inestimable treasures of divine grace? Not by any means. By drinking and gambling he has reduced himself and his children to poverty; he has spent his week's wages; or he has lost a law-suit that he had unjustly commenced; there you have the only motive of his sorrow. All these people may have committed other sins as well; they may have grievously injured their neighbor's good name, or committed some other sin against charity; they may have sought to be revenged on their enemies, have indulged in immodest conversation, have taken deliberate pleasure in impure thoughts, have given scandal to others by word or deed, etc.; but when they come to speak of those sins, there is an end of their tears and sighs, because they have suffered no temporal loss by them, and are not put to shame before the world; and yet the great God is offended by the latter sins as well as by the former. That is an evident proof that their sorrow and repentance come only from some natural motive and are worth nothing as far as the forgiveness of sin is concerned.

Another person comes and accuses himself of continual im-
patience, saying that he has often murmured against God, and
given way to despair, and wished death to himself and to his
family. If he is asked why, there is no end to his tears and
lamentations. Oh, what a heavy cross I have to bear! I cannot
stand it any longer! I must put an end to myself! And then
he begins to relate the whole history of his misfortunes, until
the confessor, with great difficulty, succeeds in quieting him
down somewhat. Now, of what use are those sighs and tears to
repentance? Not the least. For it is not the offence offered to
God, but their own misery and trials that they deplore; their
sorrow is not supernatural, and, in fact, such people are the
least capable of being moved to true contrition for their sins,

Others be-
wall their
trials and
crosses.

because their hearts are fully occupied with their natural grief, and their minds are too disturbed to admit of good thoughts. A woman has been for a long time in the habit of cursing her husband and her children; she has caused her parents great sorrow, and has treated them very harshly, and she confesses those sins constantly, without any serious effort to amend them. At last her husband, or her father, or her child dies; and then her heart is softened; then she runs to confession, bathed in tears. Unhappy wretch that I am, she exclaims, what have I done? How cruelly I have acted towards my dear husband or child, to my father, who was always so good to me, to my mother, who took such care of me! I am so sorry for it now! Would that I never had been guilty of such harshness towards them! But why do you make such a lamentation about it now? When your husband, or parents, or child were alive, did not your conduct provoke the wrath of God just as much as it does now? But you were not sorry for cursing and swearing at them then; you shed not a single tear of repentance; and even now you continue the same harsh treatment towards your other children, who are still alive; you still trouble your mother by your disobedience. Thus it is evidently a mere natural feeling of compassion for your deceased relatives that causes your sorrow, and not the fact of your having offended God. But what is the good of such a repentance as that? The tears you shed are like the sap that drops from a tree, when a branch is cut off it in spring-time, and which simply wets the outer bark, without contributing anything to the fruitfulness of the tree.

How
Nathan
moved
David to
supernatur-
al sorrow.

Your motive for repenting of and detesting your sins must be far different, if you wish to regain the grace and friendship of God in the sacrament of penance. Represent to yourself by faith what a great, mighty, powerful, omnipresent, good, merciful, and just God you have despised by your sins; the immense loss you have caused your soul to suffer; the punishment, the eternal flames of hell, that you have merited in the next life, and then you will have reason enough to deplore your sins with true interior sorrow. When you are going to confession, let faith speak to your heart in silent meditation, as the Prophet Nathan spoke to king David, when the latter was still in the state of sin and had forgotten God, in order to move him to repentance. Mark the tone in which the Prophet addresses him: "Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel; I anointed thee king

over Israel;"¹ (pay attention, David, for it is the Lord who is speaking to you!) think of what you were a few years ago; you were a poor little boy, running about barefooted, the least amongst your brethren, who had nothing to hope for but what you could earn by the sweat of your brow; a poor shepherd boy, ill clad, you were glad when you had bread enough to eat. And I have given strength to your arms, that you might slay the fierce lion; I enabled you to overthrow the mighty giant, and to put his army to flight; and finally, out of sheer mercy and goodwill to you, I have raised you to the throne; "I anointed thee king over Israel." Is not that so? Yes, David was obliged to confess, it is quite true. "I delivered thee from the hand of Saul."² Do you remember how you fared at the court of that king? How he often tried in his madness to pierce you with his spear, and how he pursued you everywhere with his army, seeking to kill you? Who helped you in those difficulties? Who protected you and saved you from the hands of your enemy? It was I, as you know very well. "And I gave thee thy master's house."³ The splendid palace in which you now live, the gardens that surround it, the treasures which you possess in such abundance, whom did all those things belong to a few years ago? To Saul, your master.

And I have taken them from him, in order to bestow them on you, who never expected to be raised to such dignity and wealth. Is not that the case? "Why, therefore, hast thou despised the word of the Lord, to do evil in My sight? Thou hast killed Urias the Hethite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife."⁴ Have I deserved that from you? When I placed the crown on your head, was that the time for you to trample My commandments under foot? When I raised you from out of obscurity, was it right of you to make Me your foot-stool? Ungrateful mortal, how have you dared to treat Me thus? But cease, O Lord, I pray Thee; Thy servant is at hand to secure pardon for the poor king, who is ready to die of shame and sorrow! "I have sinned against the Lord,"⁵ said David, and his deep contrition prevented him from saying any more.

Sinner, when you are preparing for confession, you should imagine that God is speaking to you in the same manner; that

So, also,
must the
sinner pre-

¹ Hæc dicit Dominus Deus Israel: Ego unxi te in regem super Israel.—II. Kings xii. 7.

² Ego erui te de manu Saul.—Ibid. ³ Et dedi tibi domum domini tui.—Ibid. 8.

⁴ Quare ergo contempsisti verbum Domini, ut faceres malum in conspectu meo? Uriam Hethæum percussisti gladio, et uxorem illius accepisti in uxorem tibi.—Ibid. 9.

⁵ Peccavi Domino.—Ibid. 13.

pare him-
self for re-
pentance.

He says to you, I have created you; a few years ago you were nothing; I could have left you in the abyss of your nothingness; I have chosen you in preference to countless others, whom I might have created, and have drawn you forth from that abyss, and made you to My image and likeness; your soul and body, your understanding, memory, health, skill, good name, and temporal support, all that you have and are, are benefits that you have received from Me; and I have given them to you without any merits on your part. The sun and moon, the stars in the heavens, the air, water, fire, the earth, and all that it produces, I have created for your service, comfort, support, and enjoyment. Is not that the case? I have redeemed you from eternal death. When David sinned, I had not yet become man, nor died on the cross, nor given Myself as the food of men's souls in the Blessed Sacrament; but since then I have come down from My throne of glory in heaven, taken on Myself the semblance of a poor servant, lived a life of toilsome poverty, and shed even the last drop of My blood, and all that for your sake, in order to save you from hell. In preference to many thousand others, I have called you to the true faith, given you My Flesh and Blood as the food of your soul, and preserved you from many dangers of soul and body. Often, when you had sinned mortally, I could have hurled you into hell, where many are burning now who have committed less sin than you; and while you were actually in the state of sin, I have had the greatest patience with you, although I could have inflicted eternal punishment on you at any moment. Look where you will, and everything you see, everything you have or know, or can do, is it not all from My goodness that you have it? Can you deny that? "Why, therefore, hast thou despised the word of the Lord, to do evil in My sight?" If I had injured instead of benefiting you, could you have treated Me worse? And yet, in any case, I should be your supreme, almighty God, deserving of all your love, reverence, and obedience. See how ungrateful you have been to your sovereign Benefactor!

Conclusion
and repent-
ance for
past sin.

Ab, Christian soul, is it possible that those thoughts do not cause your heart to melt with sorrow and contrition? Say therefore, with the penitent David, "I have sinned against the Lord," ungrateful wretch that I am; I have offended Him, who has never done me the least injury! Shameless mortal that I am, I have rejected Him, who has done me good every moment of my life. How rashly I have acted in sacrificing His grace and

friendship for some miserable thing, some wretched gain, some vain honor, or brutish pleasure, and in bartering the joys of heaven for the eternal flames of hell! Foolish mortal that I am! Even if I did not suffer such a loss, I have been guilty of despising and insulting the great God to His very face! Presumptuous wretch that I am, what have I done? What could I have been thinking of, when I dared to act thus towards my God? Alas, I have sinned against the Lord: I acknowledge it now with shame; I have sinned often and grievously, O Lord, in Thy sight; and now all I can think and say is, I am sorry for it! Would that I had never offended Thee! Pardon me this once, O God of mercy, and I will never offend Thee again. Such is the way, my dear brethren, in which you must prepare yourselves to have a supernatural sorrow. Do Thou, O God of goodness, move my heart and the hearts of us all to this sorrow for our sins, by Thy powerful grace! And then let us all experience the realization of that assurance that Thy Prophet gave Thy penitent servant David: "The Lord also hath taken away thy sin; thou shalt not die."¹ Such will be the case with you, O sinners, if you repent sincerely of your sins, in the way I have now explained to you! May God grant it! Amen.

¹ Dominus quoque transtulit peccatum tuum; non morieris.—II. Kings xii. 13.

MOTIVES OF TRUE REPENTANCE

TWENTY-THIRD SERMON.

ON REPENTANCE FOR SIN ON ACCOUNT OF THE STRICT JUSTICE OF GOD.

Subject.

The strict justice of God in punishing sinners is especially evident in the punishment of the angels; and therefore we should be truly sorry for our sins and dread offending a God who chastises so severely.—*Preached on the feast of St. Michael the Archangel.*

Text.

Michael et angeli ejus præliabantur cum dracone.—Apoc. xii. 7.
“Michael and his angels fought with the dragon.”

Introduction.

Who could ever have imagined, unless the infallible Spirit of God Himself had revealed it, that there was war in heaven, tumult among the stars, rebellion amongst the angels? Yet such was the case. “There was a great battle in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon, and the dragon fought and his angels.”¹ But the strife did not last long; Michael and his followers soon gained the victory: “And that great dragon was cast out, that old serpent who is called the devil. . . and he was cast down unto the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.”² This is a wonderful occurrence, my dear brethren, and it gives rise to many serious considerations. Is it, then, possible for the heavenly spirits to sin, and that in heaven, too; to fall and to be cast into hell? Alas, who then can be

¹ Et factum est proelium magnum in caelo: Michael et angeli ejus proeliabantur cum dracone, et draco pugnabat, et angeli ejus.—Apoc. xii. 7.

² Et projectus est draco ille magnus, serpens antiquus, qui vocatur diabolus. . . et projectus est in terram, et angeli ejus cum illo missi sunt.—Ibid. 9.

free from sin on earth? "Michael and his angels fought with the dragon;" in order to avenge the injured honor of God, they boldly took up arms, and cast the rebels out of heaven. Therefore, in all temptations and dangers that threaten our souls, we should call upon St. Michael and our holy guardian angels with child-like confidence for help, that they may continue, as they have hitherto done, to drive away from us the demons who assail us. "And that great serpent was cast out, and his angels were thrown down with him." I shudder when I think of that! The angels were thrown down from heaven into the abyss of hell! Oh, what a just God we have, and how severe He is in His punishments! Who should not dread offending Him in the least? Who should not tremble at the thought of having ever offended Him by mortal sin! This is the thought that I shall develop to-day, by way of salutary warning.

Plan of Discourse.

The strict justice of God in punishing sinners is especially evident in the reprobation of the angels. Such is the whole subject of this meditation. To know the wickedness of sin, to repent of the sins we have committed, to be careful in avoiding sin in future, and to love and fear God always, such shall be the conclusion.

To which mayest Thou, O Almighty God, help us by Thy powerful grace, through the meditation of Thy strict justice. This we ask of Thee through the intercession of Mary, Thy Mother, St. Michael, the Archangel, and our holy guardian angels.

In order to realize the strict justice with which the Lord Our God acted towards the rebel angels, imagine, my dear brethren, that you see a criminal being dragged out of his prison, placed on a hurdle, and brought through the public streets to the place of execution, where he is first to be broken on the wheel and then burnt to ashes. All are stricken with astonishment at hearing of such an extraordinary and unusually severe punishment. Who is the poor man? they ask; where does he come from? what has he done? And they are told that he is one of the highest of the nobility, a minister and courtier, who, on account of his knowledge, prudence, and skill, was hitherto held in the greatest esteem by his sovereign; who had the arrangement of nearly everything in the whole kingdom, and who would still do much for the welfare of his country and the honor of his

The strict justice of God in the reprobation of the angels shown by a simile.

sovereign, if his life were spared. Oh! each one would cry out, horror stricken at this answer, I thought he must have been one of the vilest of the common people, a notorious robber or murderer. But no, is the reply; he is, as I have said, one of the noblest in the land. And who has passed such a severe sentence on him? Our sovereign himself. What? Our sovereign? He who is known everywhere to be a most gentle, mild, good and merciful ruler, who can hardly bear to inflict a trifling fine on a lowly peasant, so filled is he with pity and compassion? Is it he who has condemned to the wheel and the stake one whom he formerly held in such high esteem? Yes, it is he. But it is impossible that such a sentence could be really carried into execution; it is published, doubtless, in order to strike terror into other malefactors; but when he arrives at the place of execution his life will certainly be spared? Not the least chance of it; if you go there yourself, you will see what will be done to him, and how his clothes will be pulled off, his limbs broken to pieces one after another on the wheel, and how he will then be thrown, still living, into the flames, where he will be burnt to ashes. What do you think of it now? Well, if that is the case, he must have committed some enormous crime, or he would not have provoked such a mild and merciful sovereign to inflict such a dreadful punishment on him. Such is the conclusion that every thinking man must come to, under the circumstances.

The angels
were mighty
princes
of heaven.

Now, my dear brethren, to drop metaphors, and speak of the matter as it really is, ascend with me in thought into the courts of heaven; imagine that you see there countless numbers of angels, who have still to merit their eternal happiness. The very name of angel suggests a nature that is noblest, mightiest, and most beautiful amongst all mere creatures, the most excellent master-pieces of the Almighty's power; full of knowledge and wisdom, as far as the understanding is concerned; endowed with the most complete freedom of the will; adorned with all kinds of natural and supernatural gifts, and created to the end that they might be courtiers and princes of heaven in the palace of the Most High, whose duty should be to stand round His throne and further His exterior honor and glory forever; and, besides, they were chosen by God as His ministers to carry out His commands on earth. Amongst these princes of heaven one of the noblest, if not the noblest, was Lucifer. "Thou wast the seal of resemblance," such are the terms in which God addresses him by the Prophet Ezechiel, "full of wisdom and

perfect in beauty," on account of the likeness his nature had to the divine nature. "Thou wast in the pleasures of the paradise of God," showing the happiness of the state of grace in which he was created, and the great favor he enjoyed with God. "Every precious stone was thy covering;" because he had a superabundance of the most perfect qualities, by which he surpassed his companions. "Thou wast a cherub stretching out thy wings, and covering, and I set thee in the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked in the midst of the stones of fire." Oh, certainly happy was the state of that great spirit in the courts of the Lord!

But, my dear brethren, this very Lucifer, with the third part of the host of heaven, is doomed to execution; and sentence is already passed on him, according to the same Prophet: "Thy inner parts were filled with iniquity, and thou hast sinned; and I cast thee out from the mountain of God, and destroyed thee, O covering cherub, out of the midst of the stones of fire. . . . I have cast thee to the ground. . . . Therefore I will bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, to devour thee, and I will make thee as ashes upon the earth in the sight of all that see thee; . . . thou art brought to nothing, and thou shalt never be any more." I will take away all beauty and glory from you, and from beautiful spirits you and all your companions shall be changed into hideous monsters, dragons, and demons. In a word, Lucifer and the third part of the angels were hurled down from heaven and condemned to the everlasting flames of hell.

Yet they were condemned to hell.

What a fearful sentence that is! And what judge pronounced it? God. What? That God, whose very nature is goodness itself, of whom the Holy Ghost says that He hates nothing of all that He has made, and that He does not take pleasure in the destruction of His creatures; whose justice cannot allow any one to be punished more than he deserves; whose endless mercy makes Him bear for long years with even the most wicked sinners, and behave towards them with the greatest mildness and patience, so that, when He is at last compelled to punish them, the chastisement He inflicts on them is far less than they deserve? Could so merciful a God, I ask, pronounce such a

By the infinitely merciful God.

¹ Tu signaculum similitudinis, plenus sapientia, et perfectus decore, in deliciis paradisi Dei fuisi; omnis lapis pretiosus operimentum tuum. Tu cherub extensus et protegens, et posui te in monte sancto Dei, in medio lapidum ignitorum ambulasti.—Ezech. xxviii. 12-14.

² Repleta sunt interiora tua iniquitate, et peccasti; et eeci te de monte Dei, et perdidisti te, O Cherub protegens, de medio lapidum ignitorum; in terram projecti te: producam ergo ignem de medio tui, qui comedat te, et dabo te in cinerem super terram in conspectu omnium videntium te; nihil factus es, et non eris in perpetuum.—Ibid. 16-19.

severe sentence on those who were formerly His most beloved ministers and courtiers? Yes; and the sentence must be carried out on them; for they have deserved it. But, God of goodness, if they have sinned only once, must their sin be punished so quickly with the fire of hell? Remember that Thou art mildness and mercy itself, and if Thou wilt, Thou canst use more lenient measures towards them! Consider the high position they have occupied in Thy kingdom. One prince or king is deserving of more consideration than a thousand of the common people; and how much more an angel? Certainly, a difference should be made between the punishment inflicted on a noble prince, and that inflicted on a lowly slave or servant. Even according to our human laws, and the usual custom of the world, "one who excels in his art should not be condemned to death."¹ No matter; in spite of their greatness and excellence, they have to suffer the eternal punishment of hell.

And in
great num-
bers, not
one of them
being
spared.

Is there no chance for them, then, O Lord, and must their crime meet with such severe chastisement? Would it not suffice if the ring-leaders of them were punished as a warning to the others; or that every tenth one of them had to pay the penalty? Wilt Thou destroy such a vast number of heavenly spirits for one sin, and condemn to eternal death those beautiful master-pieces of Thy hands? Remember, my dear brethren, that, according to the testimony of Denis the Areopagite, a pupil of St. Paul, who was wrapt in spirit to the third heaven and saw what was going on there, and also according to the opinion of St. Thomas of Aquin, God has created the angels in such numbers that they outnumber all other creatures in the whole world, so that there are more angels than grains of sand on the sea-shore, stars in the firmament, leaves on the trees, and drops of water in the ocean. Such are the words of St. Denis.² Consider the length of time it would take to count the leaves on even one tree, and you may have some idea of the vast number of leaves on the trees in all the gardens and forests in the world. But the number of angels is much greater. Imagine, for you cannot see them on account of their great number, how many grains of sand there are in one little brook, and then think of the number there are in the Moselle, the Rhine, the Danube, in all the rivers of the earth and on the boundless sea-shore. Could any one count them all? But the number of angels is greater.

¹ Excellens in arte non debet mori.

² Angeli plures sunt quam stellæ cœli, quam arenæ maris, quam folia, quam herbes.

Now the third part of them, with their leader, Lucifer, fell into sin; and, indeed, on one occasion St. Antony says that he saw the whole world filled with demons. But in spite of the fact that this severe sentence is passed on countless millions, the infinitely good and merciful God does not alter it; they must all without exception suffer eternal torments.

But, O God, art Thou utterly inexorable? Suffer me to put forward a petition for those unhappy criminals. Do not visit them at once with the rigors of Thy justice. Give them only a moment's respite, that they may consider what they have done, and Thou wilt see how bitterly they will deplore their sin, how humbly they will implore Thy pardon. And if Thou grantest them that grace, oh, how grateful they will be to Thee for all eternity; how they will love, praise, honor, and bless Thee, and spread Thy glory throughout the world. But if Thou refuseth it to them, they will rage against and curse Thee in despairing hatred forever; instead of giving Thee the honor and glory Thou mightest expect from them, they will blaspheme and revile Thee unceasingly; they will declare open war against Thee and Thy creatures, fill the whole world with idolatry and all kinds of vice, and by their temptations and snares drag down innumerable souls to hell with them, after having seduced them from Thy service, so that they will join with them in cursing and blaspheming Thee forever. According to our ideas, my dear brethren, these considerations should have moved the Almighty to have at least given the rebel angels time for repentance; but quite different are the inscrutable decrees of the most just God; in the very moment in which they sinned against their Creator they were all hurled into the abyss of hell, without having a moment of mercy accorded them. "I saw," said Our Lord to His Disciples, "Satan like lightning falling from heaven."¹

Without conceding them a moment for repentance.

And how long, O Lord, will they be tortured in that fire? When they have spent a hundred, a thousand, or a hundred thousand years therein, wilt Thou not then be satisfied, and have mercy on them? No, their punishment is not to be reckoned by years. Suppose, then, that they are to be tortured for as many millions of years as there are stars in the heavens, grains of sand on the sea-shore, and drops of water in the ocean, will not that be enough for one sin, that lasted but a moment, and wilt Thou not then receive them into Thy favor? No; they need never hope for pardon, eternal fire is their lot, and they must burn

They will be tortured forever for a momentary sinful thought.

¹ Videham Satanam sicut fulgur de cœlo cadentem.—Luke x. 18.

therein forever without hope of redemption. And what was, then, their sin, O my God? What did they do to displease Thee? Theirs must have been a terrible and enormous crime? Do you wish to know what it was, my dear brethren? There is no doubt that the sin of the rebel angels was pride, and that they committed it by a single momentary thought. "And thy heart was lifted up with thy beauty," says the Prophet Ezechieh of Lucifer, "thou hast lost thy wisdom in thy beauty."¹ For, according to the general teaching of the fathers and of theologians, God revealed to the angels the future incarnation of His Son, whom they would have to acknowledge as Chief and to adore as their God and King; but Lucifer and his followers, considering the beauty and excellence of their nature, thought it beneath them to adore one of a nature so much inferior to theirs as human nature is; and therefore they came to the resolution of not adoring that Man, nor acknowledging Him as their lawful superior. Such was the crime of those princes of heaven which compelled the good and merciful God to punish them so severely that they were at once cast into hell without a moment's grace being given them.

From this
we can see
the malice
of sin.

And what am I to conclude from all this? O sin, sin, how fearful must be thy malice! What an abomination in the sight of God must not even one wilful sin of thought be! And we make nothing of it! We commit sins of the kind, and laugh and joke and amuse ourselves with them, as if there were nothing in them. They are committed daily by the dozen, the hundred, the thousand, by us mortals, and that for something so worthless that we have reason to be ashamed of it. Besides that, we seek for the occasion of committing them, and when we have found it, we rejoice; nay, we boast of our sins sometimes, as if we had performed some heroic deed. What great harm is there, many a one thinks, to look at a person of the opposite sex with wilful desire, or to indulge with deliberate pleasure in a passing impure thought? What great harm is there in being proud and vain in dress, in order to please others, although occasion may thus be given to impure desires here and there? Ah! ask Lucifer, ask all the evil spirits in hell, and they will tell you what a great evil it is thus to offend God even for a moment. Therefore, either God must have punished far too severely that one proud thought in so many millions of angels, and be still more unjust

¹ Elevatum est cor tuum in decore tuo; perdidisti sapientiam tuam in decore tuo.—Ezech. xxviii. 17.

in making their punishment last forever; or else every mortal sin, even of thought or desire, must contain in itself a fearful amount of malice. Now the first statement cannot be true, for it is opposed to the infinite goodness and mercy of God, so that the latter must be true, namely, that the malice of mortal sin is incomprehensible, even when it is committed only in thought. Ah, Christians, if we had thought of that before, and taken it deeply to heart, is it likely, nay possible, that we should have committed so many mortal sins, so easily and for such worthless things, in thought, word, and deed? If we always thought of it with a lively faith, would it be possible for us ever again to dare to consent to sin in any circumstances? No; it would not be possible.

For, on further consideration, if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but at once cast them off forever out of His sight, have I not much more reason to fear if I should be guilty of the presumption of saying, thinking, or doing anything that he has forbidden under pain of mortal sin? If He has broken the precious golden vessels so quickly and cast them into the fire, what will He not do to the vile earthen ones? Every law makes a difference between the punishment to be inflicted on a noble and that which should be inflicted on one of the common people, although both are guilty of the same offence. Now, if the just God has acted with such severity towards those who were formerly His most noble and beloved courtiers, how can I, a poor, miserable mortal, who am nothing but dust and ashes, presume to hope that the same God will be more gracious to me, if I should offend Him grievously? If God was not in need of His angels, from whom He might have received such praise, honor, and service for all eternity, can I expect Him to have more consideration for me, a miserable worm of the earth, who, if I do my very best, can offer Him but a worthless service? In a word, if, as St. Bernard says, "God did not spare the proud angels, but cast them at once into hell, how much less will He spare you, who are but rottenness and worms?"¹ And yet, I dare to offend this most just God by mortal sin! O gracious Lord, protect me, save me from such presumption! And yet, how often have I not been guilty of it?

Alas, what am I to do? The angels in heaven have sinned against their God merely in thought, and they are condemned

How we should fear offending God.

What punishment has man to

¹ Si superbientibus angelis Deus non pepercit, quanto magis tibi, putredo et vermis?—S. Bern., Sermon. 1, de advent.

expect,
whose sins
are so manifold.

to hell forever; what sort of a hell have I, wretched sinner that I am, to expect, who have so grievously offended the same God in thought, word, and deed? The angels sinned by a thought which they could not carry into effect; but I have completed by shameless deeds my unchaste, brutish, revengeful, proud, avaricious, unjust, and envious thoughts and desires. The angels sinned only once, and that for the first time; and the Almighty in His anger did not give them a moment to repent; I have committed the same grievous transgressions twice, ten times, a hundred times, and have added sin to sin. I must acknowledge that I am one of those wicked ones of whom David says, "God is not before his eyes; his ways are filthy at all times."¹ Yes, my ways have indeed been filthy from the moment when I first came to the use of reason! I have defiled myself with sin in the houses in which I have lived, in the schools in which I was taught, in the gardens in which I amused myself, in the rooms I occupied; nay, I have desecrated by my sins the temples and churches consecrated to God in which I appeared, the holy sacraments I received when I was in the state of sin, and even the very confessional in which I could have cleansed myself from sin, when I appeared in it without true sorrow and purpose of amendment, or when I wilfully concealed a mortal sin through shame. My ways are filthy at all times: during the holy season of Advent, during Lent, in Holy Week, at Easter; and at Pentecost, at all times I have sinned. My Lord and my God, if I had been born in this world not to serve Thee and to keep Thy commandments, but to offend and despise Thee, could I have led a worse life? Years of my youth that are past and gone, show me a single day that I have spent without sin! Holy law of God, show me a single commandment that I have not broken! Alas, I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word, and deed! I have sinned with my eyes, my ears, my tongue, my hands, and all my senses. "My iniquities have overtaken me, and I was not able to see. They are multiplied above the hairs of my head."² My poor soul, thou art like Job on the dunghill; "From the sole of the foot, even to the top of the head,"³ thou art covered with a loathsome ulcer! Hear, ye reprobate spirits, and be astonished; I, a miserable mortal, have committed more sin than many thousands of you together; and

¹ Non est Deus in conspectu; ejus iniquitates sunt visæ illius in omni tempore.—Ps. Hebr. x. 5.

² Comprehenderunt me iniquitates meæ, et non potui ut viderem; multiplicatæ sunt super capillos capitis mei.—Ps. xxxix. 13.

³ A planta pedis usque ad verticem.—Job. ii. 7.

if one deliberate, sinful thought was enough to turn so many countless millions of you into demons, what sort of a hideous demon must I then be in the sight of the God whom I have so often offended? If I only committed twenty sins in my life, they would be enough to turn twenty bright angels, if they could be guilty of them, into frightful devils; what a filthy object my soul must then be in the sight of God, since my sins are beyond counting?

Those angels are now in hell, and have been there for many thousand years, for one momentary sin. O my God, where am I? Do I still live? Am I still in Thy presence, before Thy face? Can I still hope for mercy and grace from Thee? Dare I still raise my eyes to heaven, when I think of the terrible but at the same time most just revenge Thou hast taken on Thy angels? They have sinned, it is true; but only once, and before they knew anything about hell being the punishment Thou hast decreed against sin; before they had the least idea of such a thing as an eternal fire, and before any example of a reprobate sinner was given them, by which they might have profited. I (foolish and presumptuous mortal that I am!) have wantonly contemned a hundred times Thy holy law, and have committed sin after sin, although an infallible faith teaches me that the pains of hell are eternal, and reminds me that I must burn in them forever, if I offend God and do not keep His commandments. But I have cared little for the teaching of faith; I have sinned often and grievously, in spite of the example of the angels, in spite of being assured by faith that the same punishment is in store for me. I have sinned, in spite of the many examples of men like myself whom I know to be now in hell on account of their sins, as I read in Thy own written word and in the writings of the Fathers of the Church, and learn from different examples. Thou hast not given the rebel angels the least remission of their only sin, which Thou hast refused to forgive; but Thou hast often pardoned me in the sacrament of penance; and nevertheless I have not feared to relapse into the same grievous sins. Nay, since I knew that Thy goodness and wonderful patience and mildness did not punish me after the first, second, third, twentieth, or fiftieth sin, I have been so ungrateful and presumptuous as to take advantage of Thy patience, and to sin all the more boldly.

And who knows, by faith, of the punishment of the angels.

And finally, O Lord, if I had been present with all my sins on my soul, at the time when Thou wert punishing the rebel

Humble confession

of our malice and acknowledgment of God's mercy.

angels, and had seen millions of them falling like lightning from heaven into the abyss of hell, how would I not have trembled with fear and anguish? Woe to me, I would have thought, if such a severe punishment is inflicted on the princes of heaven, because they have sinned but once in thought, what will become of me, a miserable and vile mortal, after so many horrible crimes? Now faith represents to me the terrors of Thy vengeance on the angels, and says to me, you see what happened to them? Is it possible for me, then, O Lord, not to despair of grace or pardon from Thee? And, indeed, I should despair, if I considered only my own presumption and wickedness, and did not remember that Thy infinite mercy towards us poor mortals is immeasurably greater than our malice. Just reason should I have for despair, if I did not keep before my eyes Thee, my Redeemer, who wast crucified for me, and (what Thou didst not do for the rebel angels) hast offered me the infinite merits of Thy precious Blood to wash out all my sins, if I wish to return to Thee with a contrite heart, and to do sincere penance. Ah yes, that is the only ground of my hope and confidence! Strengthened and comforted by that hope, I prostrate myself at Thy feet, and acknowledge, in the deepest humility and with sorrow of heart, that I have often and grievously offended Thee. I have sinned, O Jesus my Saviour; but that very name of Thine is a source of consolation to me! My sins are without number; but pardon me this once, not because I deserve it, but because Thou art a God of great mercy, who hast suffered death for me on the cross. I freely acknowledge that I have deserved, not one, but a thousand hells. Alas, how many thousands of angels and of men like myself are now burning in hell, although they have not committed the half, or the hundredth part of the sins by which I have offended Thee. O terrible and at the same time most just and righteous judgment of my God! Thou hast decreed to show more to one than to another the mercy and grace Thou owest to none. Thy all-wise Providence has resolved from all eternity to punish with hell one man, as Thou didst the rebel angels, immediately on his committing the first mortal sin; nor is there any injustice done him, for he deserves it; another Thou wilt allow to commit five sins, but no more; another twenty, or a hundred, or a thousand, or many thousand, without condemning him to hell; and Thou hast determined to do so, because Thou art pleased to show to one more than to another the mercy Thou owest to no sinner. For my part, I must ac-

knowledge that I am amongst those who have been most fortunate in this respect. I thank Thee most humbly, O God of mercy, that Thou hast borne with my many and grievous sins, and hast deferred for me the damnation that I have deserved like so many others!

And for that very reason I now more vehemently bewail my malice in offending Thee, my God, who hast been so good to me! It is now time and more than time for me to cease offending Thee, and not merely to avoid ever sinning again, but also to get rid of the weight of my sins, the measure of which may even now be wanting only one to be completely filled; to make a good confession, to renew my contrition every day, to give alms to the needy according to my means, to practise Christian humility and modesty, to fast and otherwise mortify myself voluntarily, to bear patiently the injuries offered me by others, and all the trials and crosses Thou wilt send me, (ah, would that I had done so long since!) and to love Thee constantly above all things. For that Thou hast spared me in spite of my many sins should not encourage me in the presumptuous hope that, if I again dare to sin, Thou wilt be equally merciful to me. Perhaps the next sin (grant, O God, that I may die even in this very moment before committing it!) may be my last, after which Thou hast determined in Thy inscrutable decrees to give me no further time for repentance, and to hurl me into hell with the rebel angels.

O no, my God, with Thy fatherly help I will not sin again! The example of the fallen angels will make me humble and cautious, so that I shall fly all dangerous occasions of sin. For if they were not safe from sin even in heaven, how can I, a weak mortal inclined to evil, hope to escape it in that company and society, amidst those allurements, occasions, and dangers in which sad experience has taught me that I am only too apt to sin? No, O Lord, I will fly even the shadow of sin, and to that end I will keep a guard on my senses, especially on my eyes, ears, and tongue, that I may neither hear, see, nor say anything that might give me occasion to transgress Thy commands. "Pierce Thou my flesh with Thy fear,"¹ is my humble prayer with Thy servant David. Thou hast now filled me with Thy fear in the meditation of the fall of the angels, and that fear has taken possession of my mind; grant that it may also penetrate the very marrow of my bones, so that not a member of my body

Repentance
for past
sins.

Purpose of
amend-
ment.

¹ *Centige timore tuo carnes meas.—Ps. cxviii. 120.*

may ever again place me in danger of offending Thee. I will love Thee, O God of all beauty, who art worthy of all love for Thy own sake alone! And I will fear Thee, too, O God of justice, and by that constant love and fear I hope and trust one day to arrive at the place from which Thou didst expel the angels, that is, heaven, where I shall be able to praise Thy mercy forever. Amen.

TWENTY-FOURTH SERMON.

**ON REPENTANCE FOR SIN BECAUSE IT OFFENDS OUR
HEAVENLY FATHER.**

Subject.

He who commits a grievous sin hates, grieves, and dishonors God, his heavenly Father, an ingratitude and a wickedness that cannot be sufficiently deplored.—*Preached on the feast of SS. Simon and Jude.*

Text.

Qui me odit, et Patrem meum odit.—John xv. 23.
“He that hateth Me, hateth My Father also.”

Introduction.

Christ Our Lord, in order to show His Apostles the extent of the malice with which the envious Jews hated and persecuted Him everywhere, makes use of the words I have quoted: “He that hateth Me, hateth My Father also;” and His meaning is, that there is nothing more terrible than to hate His heavenly Father. Sinner, whoever you are, you are guilty of that malice and presumption whenever you commit a mortal sin; you hate and persecute Christ, your Saviour, like the Jews, the high priests, and the Scribes, inasmuch as you renew the cause of the death of Christ. But, cruel as your wickedness is, it does not finish there; you also hate and grieve His heavenly Father, who has adopted you as His child; and that, as you must acknowledge when you consider the matter reasonably, is something so terrible that it ought to move you to repent of and detest your sins at once. Such is the object of my sermon to-day, by way of meditation for me, and you, and all sinners. Namely,

Plan of Discourse.

He who commits a grievous sin hates, grieves, and dishonors God, his heavenly Father, an ingratitude and a wickedness that cannot be sufficiently deplored. Such is the whole subject of this meditation.

Heavenly Father, illumine the hearts of all here present with the light of the Holy Ghost, that they who have sinned may acknowledge their ingratitude and wickedness, and may do sincere penance; and that all others, knowing the malice of sin, may come to the irrevocable determination of never offending Thee. This we beg of Thee through the intercession of Mary, the Mother of Thy Son, and of our holy guardian angels.

The sweetest and most gracious of all names is that of father, and when uttered by a child, it denotes a special affection, confidence, and reverence, as well as the tenderest love. Amongst all the obligations which can bind us to honor and love another in this world the greatest and most just is that which binds a child to his father, and it is an obligation that can never be sufficiently fulfilled, much less cancelled, even by the greatest services and the most heartfelt gratitude. For, if the son were to show his love for his father to the extent of giving his life for him, in order to save him from death; he would not yet have sufficiently repaid the benefit he owes him from whom he has received his life. For the power and strength by which he is able to save his father's life is a blessing that he owes originally to his father next to God. Hence the philosopher Aristotle says: "we can never make an adequate return to God and to our parents;"¹ and, he continues, this obligation of holding one's father in all possible honor is implanted in every man by nature itself so deeply, that he who denies or refuses to acknowledge it should be brought to a sense of duty, not by argument, as if he were a reasonable man, but by blows, as if he were a fool.

Nature implants in every child a special love and reverence for his father.

From the very beginning of the world, there never was a people, even amongst heathens and idolaters, living in well-ordered community, who did not look on a child who dared to grieve and offend his father as a monster deserving of execration. Already in ancient times legislators had established all kinds of punishment for different crimes; there was one punishment for murder-

He who raised his hand against his father was always held in execration as a monster.

¹ Deo et parentibus nunquam satis rependi potest.

ers, another for robbers, another for adulterers, and so on; but for those who dared to lay violent hands on their father or mother there is no punishment on record. And why? Is not parricide a far more horrible crime than thieving, adultery, or murder? Did they, perhaps, wish to allow such criminals to remain unpunished? No; but they looked on it as impossible that a reasoning being could so far forget himself as to be guilty of such wickedness, and therefore they thought it unnecessary to legislate against a crime of that kind.

And was punished in a special manner, by human law.

But as time rolled on, and people found out that not only was such a crime possible, but that it was actually committed, the ancient Romans made a special law, according to which a parricide was condemned to be tied up in a leathern sack with a live ape, a viper, and a cock, and to be thrown into the sea, as one who was unworthy of looking up to heaven, or of remaining on earth. Mark, my dear brethren, the companions that the wretch was compelled to associate with; an ape, because that animal has the outward semblance of a man, but is in reality an unreasoning brute, so that the parricide might learn that he had only the appearance of man, but was really lower than the brute beast. The viper, the most poisonous of all serpents, is a symbol of the odious vice of ingratitude, for it tears open the body of its own mother at its birth. The cock symbolizes shamelessness and audacity. Thus, according to that law, the wretch had to die with those beasts as his companions, to signify that he was far more ungrateful and shameless than any other monster on earth.

By the divine law.

The almighty God, in order to show His detestation of such wicked children, commanded in the Book of Exodus that he who raised his hand against father or mother should be at once punished with death: "He that striketh his father or mother shall be put to death."¹ Nay, He decreed the same punishment against those who dared even to curse their parents: "He that curseth his father or mother shall die the death."² And death was the least punishment decreed against disobedience to one's parents: "If a man have a stubborn and unruly son, who will not hear the commandments of his father or mother," such are the words of the divine law in the Book of Deuteronomy, "the people of the city shall stone him, and he shall die, that you may take away the evil out of the midst of you, and all Israel hearing

¹ Qui percusserit patrem suum, aut matrem, morte moriatur.—Exod. *xxi.* 15.

² Qui maledixerit patri suo, vel matri, morte moriatur.—*Ibid.* 17.

it may be afraid.”¹ I have spoken of this more at length when explaining the duties of children to their parents. And on what is this grave obligation of the child towards his father founded? On the fact that the child owes his life to the father as far as his mortal body is concerned. And is that all? Yes, there is absolutely no other reason. And for such a small benefit as that must the child remain under such deep obligations to his father during his whole life, and must such severe punishments be decreed against those who offend their parents?

O Christians, think of this. How great must not then be our obligation to love and honor that Father of whom Christ Our Saviour said to His Apostles before His ascension, and in their persons to all of us: “I ascend to My Father and to your Father, to My God and to your God;”² that Father to whom we daily pray, “Our Father who art in heaven.” For the great God is in the proper sense of the word our Father, from whom we receive our whole being, natural as well as supernatural. He is our Father according to nature, for He has created us to His own divine image, and has given us life. “Have we not all one Father,” asks the Prophet Malachias, “hath not one God created us?”³ Does He not feed and preserve us all as His children? He is our Father according to grace, for by Jesus Christ, our elder Brother, He has adopted us by a new birth in baptism as His children, and has made us lawful heirs to His property. Of this adoption St. Paul writes to the Galatians, in order to give them an idea of the great happiness they enjoyed, and of the dignity to which they were raised: “But when the fulness of time was come, God sent His Son made of a woman, made under the law.” To what end? “That we might receive the adoption of sons. And because you are sons, God hath sent the spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying: Abba, Father. And if a son, an heir also through God.”⁴ “O wonderful condescension of the divine goodness,” I must exclaim with St. Gregory, which has raised us poor mortals to such a dignity; “we are not worthy to

God is our
Father.

¹ Si genuerit homo filium contumacem et protervum, qui non audiat patris aut matris imperium. . . lapidibus eum obruet populus civitatis, et morietur, ut auferatis malum de medio vestri, et universus Israel audiens pertimescat.—Deut. xxi. 18, 21.

² Ascendo ad Patrem meum et Patrem vestrum, Deum meum et Deum vestrum.—John xx. 17.

³ Numquid non pater unus omnium nostrum? numquid non Deus unus creavit nos?—Malach. ii. 10.

⁴ Ubi venit plenitudo temporis, misit Deus filium suum factum ex muliere, factum sub lege. . . ut adoptionem filiorum reciperemus; quoniam autem estis filii, misit Deus Spiritum filii sui in corda vestra, clamantem: Abba, Pater. . . Quod si filius, et hæres per Deum—Gal. iv. 4.—7.

be His slaves, and He has made us His friends!"¹ nay, His children. "Behold," says St. John with astonishment in his First Epistle, "what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called and should be the sons of God."² Certainly, there is not one of us mortals who should dare to think that, after having been born a child of wrath and malediction, he would be made a child of God, and would be able to call God his Father; no one, I say, would ever dare to aspire to that dignity, if God Himself had not commanded us to call Him by that sweet name. "Thus, therefore, shall you pray," says Our Lord in the Gospel of St. Matthew, "Our Father who art in heaven."³ And therefore the priest, before saying this prayer in the Holy Mass, makes confession of our unworthiness in the following words: "instructed by Thy saving precepts, and following Thy divine directions, we presume to say: Our Father who art in heaven."⁴ Consequently God is our Father.

And an infinitely better Father, and more deserving of love, than our earthly fathers, as far as creation is concerned.

And what kind of a Father is He? O ye mortal and earthly fathers, no matter how great is your natural love and goodness towards your children, no matter how just your claims to their reverence, obedience, and love, yet, in comparison to our heavenly Father, you must humbly acknowledge that you do not even deserve the name; for your only title to it is the fact that your children owe their mortal bodies to you, which, as St. Thomas says, "are the source of sin, the cause of concupiscence, and the origin of guilt."⁵ And not even that much would they owe to you without the help of God, by whose power all things exist. As far as the nobler part of our nature, the soul, is concerned, in which the life and substance of man principally consist, you have had nothing whatever to do with that; the only Author and Father of the soul is God, our heavenly Father, who created it out of nothing, without the intervention of any creature, and made it to His image and likeness. This beautiful spirit is breathed forth from the mouth of God and is endowed with a wonderful memory, and with understanding and will, so that it moves the body and governs it as its servant. You must say to your children, like the heroic mother of the Machabees, when she was encouraging her seven sons to bear their torments with fortitude.

¹ O mira divinx bonitatis dignatio! servi digni non sumus, et amici vocamur!

² Videte qualem charitatem dedit nobis Pater, ut filii Dei nominemur et stmus.—I. John iii. 1.

³ Sic ergo vos orabitis: Pater noster qui es in cœlis.—Matt. vi. 9.

⁴ Præceptis salutaribus moniti, et divina institutione formati, audemus dicere: Pater noster qui es in cœlis.

⁵ Materiam corporis causam libidinis, originem reatus.

lift up your eyes to heaven, my children, "for I neither gave you breath, nor soul, nor life, neither did I frame the limbs of every one of you; but the Creator of the world, that formed the nativity of man."¹ I am your mother according to the flesh; but the noblest part of you, your immortal soul, is a masterpiece of God, your heavenly Father.

When you, O fathers, have contributed your share to the existence of your children, what do you do to preserve them in life? To answer in a few words, nothing at all. Nor is it in your power to prolong their lives for a single instant; for they must depend altogether on the will of their heavenly Father, who can take their lives away when and how He pleases, and who every moment gives them, as it were, a new life by preserving them. It is true that by your daily care and labor you provide for their temporal wants; but even these, again, are free gifts of their heavenly Father, and if He did not bestow them on you, all your toil and diligence would be fruitless, so that, although you were to work day and night, you and your children would at last die of hunger. Therefore you must cry out daily to your Father in heaven, "Give us this day our daily bread." Besides, it is principally during their childhood and early youth that you have to provide for your children; when they have once grown up, they are no longer in need of you. But God never for a moment lays down His fatherly office; from the first breath your children draw, down to the last moment of their lives, He never ceases bestowing on them the protection and care which are so necessary to them. In all places, and where it is very often impossible for you to look after them; at all times, in the dark night as well as in the clear day, the Eye of His Providence watches over their welfare and safety. If your children had to depend on your care alone, how often might they not have broken their necks by a sudden mishap; how often might they not have been drowned, or stricken by a thunder-bolt, or, when they were actually in the state of sin, dragged off by the demon to hell? It was God, their heavenly Father, who warded off all those dangers from them and from you, when you were not even thinking of them, and who every moment heaped benefits on them. It is God, their heavenly Father, who has given to each and every one of your children the infallible assurance that, if a mother were to forget her son, and not to have pity on him,

As far as preservation is concerned.

¹ Neque enim ego spiritum et animam donavi vobis et vitam, et singulorum membra non ego ipsa compegi; sed enim mundi Creator, qui formavit hominis nativitatem.—II. Machab. vii. 22, 23.

“yet will not I forget thee: behold I have graven thee in my hands. Thy walls are always before my eyes.”¹

And training.

Your greatest care, O fathers, is devoted to the perishable bodies and the temporal welfare of your children; your efforts are directed to giving them a good training according to the ideas of the world; and it often happens that you thus murder their souls most cruelly, inasmuch as you do not keep them from the dangerous occasions of sin, nor punish their faults as you ought, but train them up by word and example to all kinds of vanity and luxury, to lying and deceit, to cursing and swearing, and other abominable vices, so that it would have been far better for them to have been brought up in a wilderness by a brute beast, than by you, and they will one day be compelled to curse you as the cause of their eternal damnation. There are some of you fathers who, besides neglecting the souls of your children, treat them as if they were dogs, and beat them as if they were beasts of burden, punishing them for faults of which you yourselves are guilty. There are some of you fathers who, by constant idleness, unnecessary expense in dress and useless entertainments, gambling and drinking, steal away the bread out of the mouths of your children, and reduce them to poverty, so that, instead of loving and honoring you, as they ought, they will curse and revile you. Thus you destroy, not only the souls of your children, but also their bodies, as far as their temporal prosperity is concerned. Oh, how much better is the Father they have in heaven, who always provides for the welfare of their bodies by giving them the necessaries of life, but especially is concerned for the welfare of their immortal souls! To this end are directed all the arrangements of His all-wise Providence; those good inspirations, which He gives them partly immediately, and partly by means of the holy angels whom He has appointed to be their protectors and guardians in the pilgrimage of this life; those salutary exhortations and warnings which He places on the lips of preachers and confessors, that they may deter them from sin and lead them on the path of virtue to heaven. Such, too, is His intention in visiting them with crosses and trials, for these are all so many proofs of the love of His fatherly heart, and He wishes thereby to humble them, or, if they are in the state of sin, to bring them to a knowledge of themselves, that they may return by a speedy repentance to their Father who is

¹ Ego tamen non obliviscar tui; ecce in manibus meis descripsi te: muri tui coram oculis meis semper.—Isa. xlix. 15, 16.

in heaven or, if they are in the state of grace, to try their patience, and to increase their virtues and merits.

Finally, what sort of an inheritance have your children to expect from you, O fathers, on account of which they should be under such great obligations to you? Does it not often consist of ill-gotten gains, which they must restore, if they do not wish to lose their souls? Does it not often consist of debts, which they will hardly ever be able to pay? Is it not often a law-suit that eats up all their savings? Is it not sometimes mourning and lamentation, and nothing else, that you have to leave them when you die? But even supposing that you leave them spacious lands and vineyards, full granaries and cellars and well-furnished coffers, so that they can lead a comfortable life, what is it worth, after all? It is certainly a gift of God, who has blessed you with temporal prosperity; but what is it, I ask, when compared to the inheritance their heavenly Father has in store for them? Eternal riches and treasures, eternal joys and pleasures, eternal and endless goods are what He will give His chosen children. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him."¹ Therefore, I say again, earthly fathers, that you are not deserving of the name when compared with God, our heavenly Father. And that is the meaning of those words of Our Lord in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "And call none your father upon earth; for one is your Father, who is in heaven,"² as if to say, when you are comparing one man with another, then, indeed, you may say, this man is my father, but when you are making a comparison between God and man, then he whom you call your father is not deserving of the name, because he has contributed but very little to your existence, while God gives you a temporal and eternal, a spiritual and a material, a natural and a supernatural life. Therefore one is our Father, who is in heaven.

As far as their inheritance is concerned.

What conclusion are we to draw from this, my dear brethren? Certainly the following, which no one can reasonably dispute: if a child is bound by a grievous obligation to obey his mortal father humbly in all things, although he receives so little from him, to honor him under all circumstances, and to love him sincerely; if it is a universally received opinion that, no matter

It is a fearful crime, then, to dishonor and offend this heavenly Father.

¹ Genus non vidit, nec auris audivit, nec in cor hominis ascendit, quæ præparavit Deus iis, qui diligunt illum.—I. Cor. ii. 9.

² Patrem nolite vocare vobis super terram; unus est enim Pater vester, qui in cælis est.—Matt. xxiii. 9.

what services he renders his father, he can never discharge fully this obligation; how much more, then, are we not bound, nay, is not our obligation infinitely greater, to show to our heavenly Father the homage of our most punctual obedience, our deepest reverence, and our most tender love? And if the very name of father aggravates the malice of an insult or injury offered to him who bears it by his son or daughter, so much that it is looked on as intolerable; if all human and divine laws are unanimous in condemning as a monster and in sentencing to death by stoning, drowning, or burning him who dares to raise his hand against his father to injure him, not to speak of murdering him; if an undutiful child is cursed by God Himself; where, then, can we find words expressive enough to describe the abominable wickedness of the wretch who ventures to dishonor, grieve, and insult his most kind and loving heavenly Father? "Ah," says St. Augustine, "what a cruel thing it is to offend," to insult and rebel against "such a Father, or to do anything against His will!"¹

That is
done by
every one
who com-
mits sin.

Hear, O sinner; such an undutiful child have you been, when ever you committed a mortal sin. Instead of obeying your heavenly Father with child-like submission you have rebelled against Him, and said by your actions: I will not do as Thou commandest me. In place of the filial reverence you owe Him, you have kicked against Him like a stubborn horse, and have trampled His law and His inspirations under foot, thus showing that you did not care anything for Him, and that His threats and commands were alike disregarded by you. Instead of loving Him, as a child should, you have planted as many daggers in His fatherly heart as you have committed sins; and you have torn to pieces before His very face the beautiful robe that He gave you in baptism, as a sign that He wished to adopt you as His child; and thus you gave Him to understand plainly enough that you did not desire to be His child. Like the prodigal in the Gospel, you have run away from Him into a strange land, and there you have attached yourself to another father, whose child you preferred to be, namely to him of whom Christ says in the Gospel to the Pharisees: "You are of your father the devil."² See what a fine exchange you have made, and whom you have preferred to serve as your father, instead of your loving heavenly Father! In his service you have squandered all your patrimony,

¹ Talem Patrem offendere, contra ejus voluntatem aliquid committere, quam est crudele!

² Vos ex patre diabolo estis.—John viii. 44.

your supernatural gifts and graces, the merits you had gained, and the inheritance that awaited you in heaven. And all that you have done, not like the prodigal, in a foreign country, out of your Father's sight, but before His very face, under His all-seeing eye, which nothing can escape. Ah, how cruel thus to insult such a loving Father! What does your heart say to you, when you think of this? Is it possible that it does not burst with sorrow?

Ah, my Lord and my God, I am that unthankful, undutiful, and heartless son, who have so often and for such a long time treated Thee so cruelly! How great and excessive my presumption! How great and excessive the patience with which Thou hast borne with my wantonness for so many years! If Thou hadst never taken the least care of me, if Thou hadst allowed me to be born among heathens and Turks, even then I should have been bound to serve Thee with all humility and devotion. If Thou hadst made me poor and miserable, blind, crippled, or lame, I should still be obliged to honor Thee as my supreme God and to love Thee with all my heart. But I have treated most shamefully a Father such as Thou art, who hast loved me so tenderly in preference to so many thousands, and given me such extraordinary graces, as if I were the favored Benjamin among Thy children! Oh, what cruelty I have been guilty of! When children act undutifully, people say to them, fie! are you not ashamed of your conduct? You have most loving and respectable parents; your father and mother have spared neither trouble nor expense to procure for you a becoming position in life, and now you act so undutifully towards them! What a shame for you! Ah, my soul, art thou not ashamed? Thou hast a good, kind Father in heaven, who has, so to speak, labored most indefatigably and worn Himself out for thy sake and for thy eternal advantage, and thou hast offended Him most grossly, and insulted and grieved Him. How canst thou dare to address this God as thy Father, and to say to Him, "Our Father who art in heaven?" With what kind of a faith canst thou say, "I believe in God the Father?" Must thou not exclaim with the humble St. Bernard, "how can I, such a wicked son, dare to raise my eyes to such a good Father?"¹

O eyes, where are your tears? For what will you shed them, if not for this? There was once a youth who dared, in a fit of passion (ah, I burn with shame when I think of it!) to spurn his

What ingratitude and wickedness in the sinner.

Who has, therefore, just reason for bewail-

¹ *Quanam fronte attollo oculos ad vultum Patris tam boni, tam malus filius?*

ing his sins.
Shown by a
smile.

mother from him with his foot. When his passion was over he realized what he had done, and, full of shame and repentance, went to St. Antony of Padua, and disclosed to him in confession the sin he had committed. The holy man reprov'd the youth in these few words, which showed, however, the zeal with which he was inflamed: "Ah, my son," said he, "to spurn your own mother with your feet! You could not treat a dog worse! A child to behave thus to the mother that bore him! The foot that committed such a crime deserves to be cut off, so that not the least use can be made of it in future." These few words sank deep into the heart of the young man, and the consideration of his abominable wickedness filled him with such an excess of sorrow that, when he went home, he actually took an axe, and, laying the offending foot on a chair, cut it off, the loss of blood ensuing thereon causing him to faint away and fall to the ground half dead. Antony having been sent for to witness this tragedy, reprov'd the intemperate zeal of the young man, and, taking the foot in his hand, applied it to the limb, to which it immediately became miraculously united. O my heavenly Father, if I had a proper knowledge of the wickedness I am guilty of when I spurn Thee from me so often, what vengeance should I not take on myself? I should tear out the eyes that so often offend Thee by impure looks. I should cut out the tongue that insults Thee by cursing and swearing, by slandering my neighbor and giving him scandal, by unchaste words and songs. I should cut off both hands that offend Thee by thieving and taking improper liberties. I should lop off the feet that bear me into dangerous company, where I so often do what Thou knowest, in despite of Thee. I should burn to ashes my whole body, which has insulted Thee by all kinds of vice. But all this would not be enough to restore Thy honor, which I have lessened by my misconduct. Nor dost Thou require it of me; for Thou art satisfied with a child-like and loving repentance on my part.

And should
beware
them all the
more, be-
cause his
heavenly
Father is
ready to re-
ceive him
with love.

Children who have committed a grievous fault do not dare to present themselves before their father, lest they should be punished; if they hear his voice, they run away and hide, so that he may not see them; during the night they dream of nothing but rods and whips with which their fault is to be punished; and if the least noise is made at the door of their room, they start up in a fright, thinking it is their father, who is coming to give them what they deserve. And Thou, my heavenly Father, how art

Thou disposed towards me, after I have so recklessly and wantonly offended Thee for so many years? Dare I appear in Thy sight? O the unspeakable goodness and love of Thy fatherly heart! Thou awaitest me, ready to receive me when I return to Thee; Thou callest out to me and invitest me to look at Thee with a repentant heart and with child-like love. I see Thee already (as Thou Thyself assurest me in the parable of the prodigal son) running towards me with outstretched arms to embrace me and to press me to Thy fatherly bosom, not otherwise than if I had always been Thy most obedient and loving child. To show in the sight of heaven Thy joy at my return, Thou preparest for me a public and most magnificent banquet, in which Thou givest me, not a fatted calf, but the Flesh and Blood of Thy own Son, our elder Brother, Jesus Christ, as my food and drink, with the assurance that Thou hast forgotten forever all my grievous transgressions against Thee, and that Thou wilt henceforth look on me and love me as Thy dear child. O my heart, how dost thou not break with sorrow at having offended and grieved such a good and loving Father! Eyes, turn yourselves into fountains of tears, that I may truly say, with the penitent David: "My eyes have sent forth springs of water, because they have not kept Thy law."¹ Shameless face of mine, cover thyself with confusion;² life of mine, be wasted away in sorrow, and my remaining years, be ye spent in sighs.³

Do you, my tongue, continue to cry out with that penitent Count of Anjou, "Father, I have sinned."⁴ I have offered Thee many insults! I have raised my wicked hand against Thee! This penitent count was going on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and he took with him, as the companions of his journey, two pious servants of God. Before setting out, he made them promise on oath that they would do all he should command them, a promise which they religiously kept. When they came to the holy sepulchre, he ordered one of them to tie a rope round his neck and to drag him to the sepulchre, while the other had to scourge him until he fell exhausted to the ground. While doing this penance his only cry was: "Father, I have sinned." I have committed a most horrible crime! In this grave lay my Father, whose life I have taken; this grave-stone

Sorrow,
prayer for
pardon, and
purpose of
amend-
ment, after
the exam-
ple of a
true peni-
tent.

¹ *Exitus aquarum deduxerunt oculi mei: quia non custodierunt legem tuam.—Ps. cxviii.* 136.

² *Operuit confusio faciem meam.—Ibid. lxxviii. 8.*

³ *Defecti in dolore vita mea, et anni mei in gemitibus.—Ibid. xxx. 11.*

⁴ *Pater, peccavi.*

reproaches me with the murder of my Father, whom I have slain by my sins ! He then sank to the ground, not on account of the pain caused by the scourging, (for his companions, moved with pity and shedding copious tears, struck him as gently as possible !) but solely at the thought inspired by the words, "Father, I have sinned." Alas, he would say, "I have sinned grievously and murdered Thee ! What have I done ? O heavenly Father, if I dare to call Thee still by that name, for I have been a most undutiful and wicked son, with contrite and sorrowful heart, prostrate before Thee, I cry out to Thee : Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before Thee ; I bewail bitterly, not my own misfortune, great as it is, but the fact that I have repeatedly offended Thee, my most loving Father. I am not worthy to be called Thy son, because I have not the heart of a son. I do not deserve to be looked on by Thee with the eyes of a father ; nevertheless, do not consider my wickedness, but the infinite mercy of Thy fatherly heart. Do not be to me a stern judge, although I deserve that Thou shouldst be so to me, but be a good Father according to Thy mercy. If Thou wilt punish me for my sins, I acknowledge that I have deserved it a thousand times ; and behold, I submit myself completely to Thy fatherly chastisements ; punish me as Thou wilt and as Thou knowest to be for my advantage ; but one thing I beg of Thee : give to me and preserve in me the heart of a true child, so that I may serve Thee in future with all submission, not so much through fear of punishment or hope of reward, as through perfect love for Thee, so that I may always be most obedient to Thy holy will, in all circumstances, for the remainder of my life. Amen."

On the Loss of one's Soul as a Motive for Contrition, see the preceding First Part. On account of Presumption in Despising God, see the Second Part. On account of the Goodness and Mercy of God towards the Sinner, see the Eleventh and Twelfth Sermons in this Part. On account of Offending God, who is present everywhere, see the Fifty-seventh sermon in this Part. On account of Provoking the Anger of the Almighty God of Infinite Goodness, who is worthy of all Love, see the following Fourth Part. On account of Losing Heaven and running the risk of Eternal Torments, see the Fifth Part. On account of again Crucifying our Saviour, see the Sixth Part.

ON THE PURPOSE OF AMENDMENT.

TWENTY-FIFTH SERMON.

ON THE NATURE OF THIS PURPOSE.

Subject.

He who wishes to rise from spiritual death in the sacrament of penance must have: 1. A firm purpose of avoiding all mortal sins; 2. A firm purpose of avoiding all mortal sins completely and for all time.—*Preached on the fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Resedit qui erat mortuus et cepit loqui.—Luke vii. 15.
“He that was dead sat up, and began to speak.”

Introduction.

These were proofs that established beyond a doubt that the young man who was dead was really restored to life: “He that was dead sat up,” and, that no one might think it was a delusion, “he began to speak,” as if to say to the people who were standing round: see, I can move; I can speak to you; I am restored to life. Would to God, my dear brethren, that all who are dead were thus restored to life! I am alluding now to sinners whose souls are dead, and who try to recover sanctifying grace in the sacrament of penance. Would to God, I say, that the amendment of their lives were always there to prove that their resurrection was not a mere delusion! But how many are deluded on this point! How many are there of whom we might say with truth, when they come out of the confessional, what we read in the Gospel of to-day: “Behold, a dead man was carried out”? He went in dead, and he comes out in the same state; his repentance was only an apparent

one. And this occurs either because a grievous and wilful fault has been committed in the examen of conscience, or through want of a true supernatural sorrow for sin, of which we have already treated; or else through want of a firm purpose of amendment, which is the third requisite to a good confession. The nature of this purpose shall form the subject of to-day's instruction, as follows:

Plan of Discourse.

He who wishes to rise from spiritual death in the sacrament of penance must have a firm purpose of avoiding all mortal sins, as we shall see in the first part. He must have a firm purpose of avoiding all mortal sins completely and for all time, as we shall see in the second part.

That all sinners may have this purpose, we beg of Thee, O Lord, whose word can call the dead to life, to grant us all Thy grace through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

Repentance
is of no
avail with-
out a firm
purpose of
avoiding all
mortal sin.

Just as true contrition does not consist in words that are uttered by the mouth, whether by heart or read out of a prayer-book, nor in sighs and tears, but in an act of the will by which, after having acknowledged the malice of my sins, I hate and detest them all from a supernatural motive, and wish from my heart that I had never committed them, so also the purpose of amendment that I make in presence of God and of my confessor does not consist in the words I speak, but in an earnest and present determination of my will, for a supernatural motive, not to commit again a single mortal sin in any way whatever, for the sake of any person, pleasure, or profit, and to use all the necessary efforts to carry out this determination. If this firm purpose is wanting, repentance is of no avail, confession is useless, and the absolution received is invalid, so that the conscience remains burdened with sin as before, according to the present arrangements of divine Providence, because, as the Council of Trent says, true repentance requires not merely a detestation of one's sins, but also a firm purpose of amending one's life. Just as you would have little chance of regaining the favor of a prince whom you have grossly insulted, no matter how sorry you are for having done so, if you give him reason to believe that you are ready to repeat the offence, so, also, you cannot hope to be received into the friendship of the great God whom you have offended, and who considers not outward signs,

But the heart, unless you are seriously determined to avoid all mortal sin. There is no Catholic who doubts this truth, my dear brethren, for even little children learning their catechism know that a firm purpose of amendment is required, along with other things, for the valid reception of the sacrament of penance.

But, alas! if I ever had cause to fear that countless confessions are of no avail for the forgiveness of sins, I certainly have reason for that fear now, on account of the want of this sincere purpose. For, of the numbers who go to confession, how few there are who make an earnest attempt to amend their lives? How many there are who say, I am heartily sorry for my sins; how few who make a firm resolution to avoid sin in future! They all sing to the same tune; I firmly purpose to avoid all sin, and to amend my life, such are the words they utter with their mouths; but what do their hearts say? Ask your own conscience. Do you not often think, when saying those words, I shall never be able to do as I say; I cannot give up this or that? I will amend, says the mouth; but I cannot look favorably on that man whom I have borne hatred to for such a long time, and much less can I say anything good about him. So thinks the heart. I will amend, says the mouth; but when difficulties arise at home I will not abstain from cursing and swearing. So thinks the heart. I will amend, says the mouth; but next Sunday, as usual, I will go to the ale-house, and get drunk. So thinks the heart. I will amend, says the mouth; but if I happen to be in that person's company, which is very likely to be the case, I will not abstain from taking impure liberties. So thinks the heart. What kind of a firm determination of the will is that, when one knows in his conscience that he does not intend keeping his promise of amendment?

Many know in their hearts that they have not a firm purpose.

I firmly purpose to amend my life. There are others who make use of those words before confession; but in the confessional itself they betray themselves and show by their own words that they are not in earnest. They say, for instance: I have a bad habit of cursing my husband, or wife, or children, or servants. Now speak the truth and tell me, is it really your intention to do your best to give up that hellish language, by which you scandalize your children, and teach them to imitate you, although you are bound before God to bring them up to virtue? You say: I have hitherto lived in disunion with my husband, or wife, or neighbor. Are you really determined to

Others say they wish to amend.

future to preserve peace and harmony, and to live in conjugal and neighborly love and friendship, according to the law of Christ, and to bear patiently with the faults of others? You say: I have got drunk so often since my last confession, and when in that state I am quarrelsome, or cruel towards the members of my family, or I am likely to commit sins of impurity. Are you firmly resolved to abstain from drink in future, and to avoid those companions and houses that would be apt to lead you into sin? You say: I have often kept for myself a considerable quantity of material that was given me for a certain work. Are you honestly determined to give up that unjust practice? You accuse yourself of impure looks and desires, of unchaste words and songs, of actions and touches that one may not speak of. Are you firmly resolved never to be guilty of those sins again, nor to allow any one to take improper liberties with you?

But show
that they do
not mean it.

Answer my question, all of you. Have you that firm determination? Ah, yes, they say, sometimes with a deep sigh. And what are you sighing about? Ah, Father, it is so hard to avoid cursing; the children behave in such a way that one cannot avoid it. That is a fine purpose of amendment, indeed! How can you resolve to avoid during the remainder of your life that which you are firmly persuaded you cannot avoid? I must go to the ale-house on Sundays and holy-days; otherwise my comrades will laugh at me, and will have nothing to do with me if I act differently from them in this respect. I cannot live in peace with my husband or wife, or with that man; I was not the cause of the quarrel; it was he who first provoked me. Father, you do not understand how we have to manage in our trade; we must keep something now and then, over and above what is due to us; if not, we are hardly paid enough for our work, and we have wives and families to support. Father, what am I to do? If I give up this intimacy, or refuse to allow that person to commit those sinful actions with me, how am I to live? I cannot help myself; I have no pleasure in such things, but am driven to them by necessity. Fine penitents those are, indeed! And a fine purpose they have to amend their lives, and never to sin again! Of course, that purpose comes from their hearts! But how can that be, when, as you yourselves acknowledge, you are compelled to sin. Away with you! You have not a particle of resolution to avoid sin, and therefore you are not true penitents.

Others have
only ineff-

I purpose to amend my life. That is what others say. But they, too, are wanting in firmness of purpose; their desires to

amend are worthless and inefficacious, such as St. Augustine acknowledges that he himself had, before he became converted in earnest. There is many a one who feels the gnawing worm of conscience; the injustice or impurity in which he has been living for years begins to tire him; he knows that he is in a most dangerous state; the hell that he sees almost open before him fills him with anguish, and he readily acknowledges that he cannot long continue in the way of sin. Ah, he sighs, would that I were freed from this miserable state! Would that I had never seen or known that person! If I only could get rid of this wretched habit! And meanwhile he goes on as usual; he cannot make up his mind to overcome himself, or to use the proper means to amend his life. His purpose consists in mere desires, which are like the weather-cock on the steeple of a church, that turns round in every direction, according to the wind, but is not to be moved from its place, nevertheless. Such a sinner would like to amend, but he does not wish it in reality; he would like to avoid sin, but at the same time to gratify his wicked passions; he would like to love God above all things, with his whole heart, and at the same time to place no restraint on his love for creatures; he would like to enter on the way to heaven, and still to keep on the broad path that leads to hell; in a word, he would like to do penance, and amend his life, but he does not wish it earnestly, for he does not do it.

And what is the use of that? "The sluggard willeth and willeth not,"¹ says the Wise Man. It is not enough to say, I would like to do it; you must say, I will; I am in earnest about it, and I will make use of the proper means. There would be very little use in a merchant sitting down in his shop and saying, I would like to be rich; nor in the soldier saying, I would like to gain the victory; nor in the student saying, I would like to be at the head of the school, and to win the golden book at the end of the year. All this "would like" is not of the least help to them. They must set to work and labor, or fight, or study earnestly, if they wish to succeed. Hell is filled with such fruitless wishes and desires, which, if they were capable of restoring a sinner to the state of grace, would soon convert the abode of death into the mansion of life, and the prison of the damned into a paradise of joys. Sinner, are you in earnest about being converted and doing penance? Then you must say from your heart, with the penitent David; "I said: Now have

oacious de-
sires to
avoid sin.

In reality
they do not
wish to
avoid it.

¹ Vult et non vult piger — Prov. xiii. 4.

I begun;"¹ I am fully determined to avoid all sin, and to amend my life. Now I have begun; the change for the better has already commenced. Ah, you think, if I only could do that! But you can do it. You should rather say, if I only wished to do it. You do not wish to do it, and it is there the fault lies. We read in the Gospel of St. Luke that the guests who were invited to the feast began to make excuse: "And they began all at once to make excuse." The first said, "I have bought a farm, and must needs go out and see it. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to try them;" but the third made it appear an utter impossibility for him to go: "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come."² But St. Matthew, who relates the same parable in a different manner, gives in a few words the true cause of their remaining away, and shows that their excuses were worthless: "They would not come,"³ he says. He thus gives us to understand that the excuses we allege for not amending our lives, and which are founded on our weakness, or evil inclinations, or on temptations, habits, and necessity, are referred by the all-seeing God to the one chief cause, "they would not come;" they do not amend, because they do not wish to amend; they do not abstain from cursing, drunkenness, hatred, injustice, and impurity, because they do not wish to abstain. In a word, the earnest purpose is wanting to them.

They could amend if they really wished. Shown by an example.

And, in God's name, what is there to prevent you from amending, if you wish to do so? Has it become impossible for you to keep the commandments? Ah, what can we not do to secure some temporal gain, because we are in earnest about it! How readily we overcome ourselves, and what difficulties we are ready to face! In former times, when the celebrated town of Ostende was being besieged, there was a soldier who had grown so habituated to cursing and blaspheming that, although he was often warned, he used to say openly that he could not give up the habit. He had consumed all his provisions, and was forced to ask alms from the military chaplain; "yes," said the priest, "I will give you a gold piece, if you follow me for an hour wherever I go, and do not utter a curse during the whole time." The soldier agreed, and the priest went on purpose right through the camp, holding

¹ Dixi: nunc coepi.—Ps. lxxvi. 11.

² Et coeperunt simul omnes excusare: villam emi, et necesse habeo exire et videre illam; iuga boum emi quinque, et eo probare illa; uxorem duxi, et ideo non possum venire.—Luke xiv. 18, 19, 20.

³ Nolebant venire.—Matt. xxiii. 3.

the piece of money in his hand. He visited one tent after another, wherever he found most of the soldiers assembled, and when they saw their comrade following him, they commenced to jeer at him as a fool. The soldier was boiling over with rage, and was frequently on the point of breaking out into some of his favorite curses; but (who would believe it?) he restrained himself perfectly, and not only held his tongue, but kept biting his lips, lest he should forget himself. When the hour was up, and the soldier had stood the laughter of his comrades without breaking his promise, the priest gave him the piece of money, with these few earnest words of warning: "you see now, my good friend, that you might have corrected your bad habit, if you wished; and what you have done for the sake of a piece of money, in spite of the great provocation you were exposed to, can you not do it for the sake of God and heaven, since, generally speaking, there is nothing to provoke you to curse or blaspheme?" O my dear brethren, how many sinners there are who think and say, I cannot amend; I cannot avoid this and that! I wish I could make use of a similar means to show them that they can amend. If they would only, for instance, give a penny to some poor person whenever they curse or swear, or send some money to a charitable institution when they fall into their accustomed sins, I am sure that in a short time they would find a great change for the better; and they would have to acknowledge that they were unable to amend hitherto because they had no wish to amend, and that, as they were wanting in this firm purpose, their confessions were invalid.

Finally, there are others who say before confession, I am firmly resolved to amend my life; and they flatter themselves that they have a firm purpose, while they show in reality that there is nothing farther from their minds. For, if I ask one of those penitents, why have you been always running from one confessor to another? Why have you been always looking out for a priest who never gives you a word of advice; who knows not the state of your conscience; who is ignorant of the length of time you have been subject to this bad habit, and who, not being aware that you are in the proximate occasion of sin, cannot remind you of your duty in that respect? What is the meaning of that, unless that you have not a firm purpose of amendment, and that you are not prepared to do all that God requires of you? Again; the same grievous sins of which you now accuse yourself, you have often confessed before; and you have been confess-

Others show by their acts that they have not a firm purpose.

ing them for the last six, seven, or eight months, or even for the last two or three years, or longer; and after all that time you are just as much addicted to vice as before: how is it possible, how can any sensible man imagine that you ever had a sincere purpose of amendment, since there was not the least sign of any improvement in you? If a man is really resolved to avoid a certain thing, he can easily find means to carry out his intention. If you are determined not to fall into the mud, you know how to avoid the stone over which you stumbled before; for, as the proverb says, even the stupid ass does not stumble twice over the same stone. If you pour some boiling water once or twice over a dog that you wish to drive out of your kitchen, you will find that he will not come back again. But you return for the third, sixth, or twentieth time, with the same sins on your conscience, after having fallen over the same stone, or being scalded with the same water. Who can believe that you were in earnest about amending your life? Your purpose was evidently nothing more than empty words, to which you did not attach the least meaning. You have kept on saying, to-morrow, to-morrow; and thus you have put off the almighty God from one day to another, making, as it were, a fool of Him: "he is a scoffer," says St. Augustine, "and not a penitent, who still does what he repents of."¹

All these
are only
sham peni-
tents.
Shown by a
simile.

St. John Chrysostom calls a confession of that kind a theatrical penance, *pœnitentia theatralis*, such as would be represented on the stage, in a comedy. This is a simile, my dear brethren, which will serve admirably to explain the matter. Sometimes a fight is represented on the stage, in which the combatants rush at each other with drawn swords and with every appearance of rage and fury; at last one of them falls to the ground, stretches out his hands, and seems quite lifeless. A child, who does not understand what is going on, might begin to cry at seeing the man fall dead; but his father, who is sitting beside him, could easily reassure him, and explain to him that it was only a sham fight, and that the man would soon come to life again. Later on, the same man who pretended to be dead comes on the stage again in a different character; see, the father says to his child, there is the man; do you not recognize him? When it is all over, the pretended dead man goes home and eats, and drinks, and amuses himself with his family just as before. It is nearly the same with the apparent repentance of

¹ Irrisor est, non pœnitens, qui adhuc agit quod pœnitet.

many who go to confession; they throw themselves down on their knees, praying, sighing, and striking their breasts, and saying to themselves, I am heartily sorry for having offended God, and I will never sin again; so much they say with their lips, and then they go to the priest and receive absolution. Those who cannot see the heart would say in such circumstances that, surely, now there is an end of sin; those people have given every sign of true sorrow; but the angels would think differently and would see that the consciences of those people are still burdened with sin as before. How are you to know that? Have a little patience, and in a short time you will see the apparent penitent returning to his former evil ways; a sure sign that he has not had an earnest purpose of amendment; for, as Tertullian says, "where there is no amendment, there has been only a useless repentance."¹

I do not mean to say, my dear brethren, that it is always an infallible sign of an inefficacious purpose for one to relapse into the same sins, especially when they are venial sins (for this sermon is not directed against them, and when they are declared in confession it is enough if one intends at least to lessen their number), nor even when they are mortal sins; that is to say, if the former sins are committed again, after some time or under the pressure of a great temptation or occasion. For our wills are, alas, inconstant and changeable, so that to-day we may be honestly determined to do the will of God, and to-morrow quite differently disposed. What I say holds good chiefly of those who spend months and years in the same vices, from one confession to another, without showing any sign of amendment, and without using the proper means to correct their bad habits. Of such people I say that they have not a firm purpose of amendment, in spite of their protestations to the contrary in confession, for their actions contradict their words. Hence there must be an earnest determination to avoid all sin. That is the first point. But the purpose must also be directed against all sin whatever, and for all time. This is the second point, and briefly the

Because they do not avoid the sins they have confessed.

Second Part.

The Roman Emperor and other Christian potentates never make a long peace with the Turks, who are sworn enemies of the Christians, but only declare a truce for a time; and when

There must be an earnest purpose to

¹ Ubi emendatio nulla, poenitentia vana.

avoid sin
completely
and forever.

that time is expired they can go to war again, without any breach of faith. Sinners, God does not allow you to act thus with Him; He accepts no armistice for a given time; if you wish to be reconciled to Him, you must declare a perpetual peace with Him, which is to last forever. By virtue of your good resolution, your will must be at the present moment never to commit a single mortal sin, under any circumstances whatever, during your whole life, even if you were to live a hundred years, or could thereby gain all the riches and pleasures of earth, or would be otherwise reduced to the direst poverty, put to shame before the world, make all men your enemies, or have to suffer a disgraceful death. At the present moment, I say; for the purpose, no matter how strong it is, cannot keep you from sinning in the future, or prevent you from committing sin again (very many who have had the firm purpose of never offending God again have nevertheless fallen into grievous sin afterwards); but your will must be so disposed that you are firmly determined as long as your good purpose lasts, so that, while it does last, mortal sin is incompatible with it, and if it lasted for eternity, it would be impossible for you ever to commit a mortal sin. Again, God wishes to make a lasting peace with you; He will not be satisfied with half of your heart. That is, in virtue of this purpose you must be firmly resolved to avoid all the proximate occasions of sin, to overcome all bad desires and inclinations, and to fulfil all the obligations that arise out of sin. If you have not a firm resolution to that effect, your purpose is of no use in obtaining forgiveness of your sins, and your confession is invalid.

They err in
this point
who are not
resolved to
avoid sin in
all circum-
stances.

How shamefully many are wanting in those two requisites to a firm purpose of amendment! Some make up their minds to avoid sin, but not always, nor under all circumstances. I will not curse or swear, they say, provided things go right with me. I will live in Christian peace and harmony with all men, but I will not bear anything from that particular person. I will forgive my enemy from my heart, until I have a good opportunity of revenging myself. I will lead a chaste life, if that person does not provoke me to sin. I will give up all indecent familiarities, as long as that individual keeps out of my way. I will avoid all dissipation during Lent; but when Easter comes I may launch out a little again. I will avoid all company in which I know by experience that my heart or my eyes are sullied; but next Shrove-tide I must except from my resolution,

because I shall be expected to join in the merry-making usual at the season according to the custom of the world. Ah, poor souls! your purposes are worth nothing; you do not make the proper peace with God! What He requires from you is a lasting peace, without condition or exception of time, circumstance, or temptation; a peace you must be firmly resolved to keep, no matter what happens.

There are others who wish to avoid sin, but not completely; and they are, firstly, those who, although they avoid sinful acts, yet retain their evil desires and inclinations. They seem to me to act like a sick man, who abstains from certain articles of food and drink, solely because he is obliged to do so and must follow the doctor's prescription; and meanwhile his desires and his appetite tend towards the forbidden meats; he loves to talk of them, and his teeth water if he sees another enjoying them. Ah, he thinks, I wish I, could eat them, too! So it is, too, with the purpose of amendment that many sinners make. God has forbidden impure pleasures and revenge under pain of eternal damnation, and they know that; they think the fire of hell a severe punishment for such sins; the thought of it frightens them, and they abstain from sinful actions, although the desire to commit them is just as strong as before. They rejoice secretly when they think of the forbidden pleasures they have already enjoyed; they wish they had made more use of the opportunities formerly offered them of indulging their passions; they look on those as happy who still gratify themselves in that way; they wish that it were not forbidden, but lawful, to indulge in such pleasures; and they are so disposed, that, if there were no hell, they would sin without scruple. Thus they have no fear of sin, or of offending God, but solely of the fire of hell; and therefore they abstain under compulsion from that which they would otherwise willingly do. This is a mere slavish fear, which, according to the opinion of theologians, does not exclude fully the will to commit sin, and therefore is not sufficient for the true conversion and repentance of the sinner. Nay, to be thus disposed and to say, for instance, if impurity were not forbidden under pain of hell, I would commit it, is a new mortal sin; because it is a purpose of offending God if there were no hell, as well as a real complacency in and desire for the sinful action. But how injuriously you, who are thus minded, act towards God! You give Him your heart as you would give your money to a cut-throat who threatens your life; here, you say, take all my money, but

Who voluntarily retain their bad desires and inclinations.

spare my life; while you think in your heart that, if he had not a dagger pointed at your throat, you would be very far from parting with your purse so easily. In the same way, I say, you act towards your God. Here, O my God, you say to Him, by your actions at least, here Thou hast my will and the assurance of my obedience; I must obey Thee and abandon sin; but if I had not hell to fear, if I could live forever, then I know what I should do. For shame, I say, to act thus meanly with your God! Away with your purpose; it is of no avail to the forgiveness of sin!

Who do not avoid the proximate occasion, give scandal, retain hatred, and do not make restitution.

Finally, they do not completely abandon sin who do not give up the nearest relations and comrades of sin; I mean, those who retain ill-gotten gains without making restitution to the lawful owner; who continue in improper intimacy and in the proximate occasion of sin, and who do not remove out of the way that which has been a scandal and a frequent cause of sin to themselves and others. There are some men who seem never to be satisfied with the sins they commit themselves in the present life, but leave, so to speak, an inheritance of sin to their descendants. Æneas Sylvius writes of the celebrated hero, John Zisca, that, as he was always accustomed to live and to fight amongst soldiers, he wished to be with them after his death; and to this end he expressed a wish, when he was dying, that his skin should be made into a drum after his death, that, as he could not be there in person to encourage the soldiers, they might have at least as much as possible of him. Such is the way, it seems to me, in which many sinners act. For instance, an unchaste man, who cannot any longer gratify his passions, dies; but he leaves behind him bad books, pictures, and statues enough to corrupt the living. A vindictive man dies; but he leaves behind him a legacy of hatred stamped in the memories of his children, by his oft repeated expressions of rancor against his enemy. An avaricious man dies; but he leaves his heirs a load of unjust and usurious gains that is sufficient to damn them. Oh, my dear brethren, all these people make bad confessions; their sorrow is useless, their purpose vain, the absolution they receive invalid; nor has any one who understands the matter the least doubt of that. The proximate occasion and danger of sin must be removed, and all obligations arising from sin must be fulfilled, or else one cannot say that he has abandoned sin completely. King Jehu, in order to fulfil the divine command, and to destroy utterly the house of Achab, wrote

to the chief men of Samaria, where the seventy sons of Achab were, "if you be mine and will obey me, take the heads of the sons of your master, and come to me to Jezrahel by to-morrow this time,"¹ that I may be sure you have slain them all, as the Lord has commanded me. Oh, how many confessors there are who, if they wished to do their duty properly, would have to make the same request of their penitents; when the latter say to them, I will avoid sin in future; I will keep out of the occasion; I will restore my ill-gotten gains; I will forgive my enemy, etc.! How many there are, I repeat, to whom the confessor should say: see, my child, that I may be certain that your purpose is sincere, as you have so often relapsed into the same sins, bring me the heads of your sins; do away with the dangerous occasion; give back what does not belong to you; be reconciled to him with whom you have been living in enmity; give up those abuses which have been the cause of sin to others; burn those immodest pictures; and when you have done that, "come to me to-morrow," and then I will give you absolution, for I shall then be certain that your purpose is sincere.

And on the other hand, what a blessing it would be, what a consolation for the confessor, what a splendid proof of an earnest purpose of amendment, if the penitent could say with truth, Father, I am seriously resolved to amend, and, in order to prove my sincerity, here are the heads of my sins; I have wronged my neighbor, but I have made complete restitution; or, I have the money here that belongs to him; can you not tell me how to restore it without exposing my good name? I have lived in improper intimacy for so long with a certain person; but that person is now gone away, or, I have left the house in which I used to sin. For some months past I have not spoken a word to one whom I disliked, but we are now reconciled, etc. Oh, I repeat, what a splendid proof of a sincere resolution to amend! But, alas, that proof is not always at hand! What a terrible day it will be when the "Written Book shall be produced;" when that great account-book shall be opened, out of which the thoughts, words, and actions of all men shall be judged. How many confessions and absolutions we shall then find rejected by the Judge, although, in the opinion of men, they were valid! Then we shall see the truth of the words, "Many are called, but few chosen,"² even, perhaps, amongst sinners who belong to

When this is honestly done, it is a sign of a firm purpose.

¹ Si mei estis, et obeditis mihi, tollite capita filiorum domini vestri, et venite ad me hac eadem hora cras in Jezrahel.—IV. Kings x. 1.

² Multi sunt vocati, pauci vero electi.—Matt. xx. 16.

the Catholic Church. But why? They generally go to confession. Few of them die without confessing and receiving the last sacraments. True; but God alone knows what sort of confessions they make. They confess their sins, but, as frequently happens, not properly, and that through want of true sorrow and a sincere purpose of amendment.

Conclusion
of exhorta-
tion to
avoid all
sin.

“ Pour out thy heart like water before the face of the Lord,”¹ is again my conclusion. O sinner, if you wish to be truly converted to God, follow this advice; pour out your heart like water, not like oil, so that no grievous sin may remain in it. And I add, pour out your heart like water, not as one empties a purse of money. And why not? If you let your purse fall, you stoop down to pick it up; but if you pour out water on the ground, it is soaked up, and you cannot put it back, nor, in fact, do you care much about it. In the same way should you make your purpose of amendment; pour all your sins out of your heart like water, that is, without will, desire, or hope to return to them again for all eternity, and with such a firm determination, that you may say, like St. Paul, “ For I am sure that neither death nor life . . . nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus Our Lord: ”² this I am assured of by the grace of God. Amen.

TWENTY-SIXTH SERMON.

ON THE NECESSITY OF REMOVING THE PROXIMATE OCCASION OF SIN.

Subject.

He who does not remove the proximate occasion of sin and avoid it altogether cannot be freed from the state of sin and from eternal ruin.—*Preached on the fourth Sunday after Epiphany.*

Text.

Domine, salva nos; perimus.—Matt. viii. 25.

“ Lord, save us; we perish.”

¹ Effunde sicut aquam cor tuum ante conspectum Domini.—Lament. ii. 19.

² Certus sum enim quia neque mors, neque vita . . . neque creatura alia poterit nos separare a charitate Dei, quae est in Christo Jesu Domino nostro.—Rom. viii. 38, 39.

Introduction.

That was a prayer that the disciples of Christ could offer with the greatest confidence of being heard and saved, although they were in imminent danger: "Lord, save us; we perish." Why? Because they had followed their divine Master into the ship and had Him with them as their Protector. If they had noticed beforehand the stormy state of the sea, and had nevertheless obstinately determined to trust themselves to it, without the protecting presence of the Lord, what would they have had to expect, if not shipwreck? In the same way, my dear brethren, they who, without absolute necessity, venture into all sorts of dangerous occasions and company, desire, hope for, and expect in vain the help of God, and, as I showed in the last sermon, cannot long keep free from mortal sin, on account of their weakness and the want of a special grace of God. Further, if that holds good of those companions who are only a remote occasion of sin, and from whom one often comes away unhurt, and of these we have been speaking hitherto, what are we to think of those companions and people who are a proximate occasion of sin to us? Certainly, they must be at once avoided, and that for all time, or else there is no hope of being saved from mortal sin and from eternal ruin, as I shall prove to-day.

Plan of Discourse.

He who does not avoid those companions who are a proximate occasion of sin to him, and avoid them for all time, cannot be freed from the state of sin and from eternal ruin. Such is the whole subject of to-day's sermon.

"Lord, save us; we perish." Help, O Lord, by Thy powerful grace, all those who are in the proximate occasion, that they may at once avoid it, so as to escape eternal destruction. "Lord, save us; we perish." Help, O Lord, all others, that we may carefully avoid every occasion that seems to be even in a remote degree dangerous, so that such occasions may not be afterwards turned into proximate ones for us. This we ask of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

That we may not be groping in the dark, we must first try to find out what is the proximate occasion of sin. It is nothing else but a danger into which, if one runs, or remains, he, generally speaking, falls into sin, whether in thought or desire, or in words and conversation, or in deeds and actions. Here each

In what the proximate occasion of sin consists.

one must consider his own nature and weakness, his desires and inclinations, and his past experience; for the same circumstance may be the proximate occasion of sin to one, and not to another. For instance, I know by experience that, whenever I go to a certain house, I sin against holy purity; or else that, out of ten times, for example, that I have been there, I have sinned seven or eight times. That house, as long as the same people live in it, is the proximate occasion of sin to me. In the same way, you are in the habit of consenting to an unchaste desire when you look at a certain person of the opposite sex, or at a picture that is not sufficiently decent; a deliberate look at that person or that picture is the proximate occasion and danger of sin for you. Another, when in company with certain friends of his, is wont to indulge in impure discourse and to take a sinful pleasure in it; those companions are for him the proximate occasion of sin. Another is living in a house, or at an inn, where he constantly sees a person for whom he has an impure attachment, so that he, generally speaking, whenever he sees that person, consents to unlawful desires and thoughts, or actually commits some sinful action; to remain in that house is for him the proximate occasion of sin. Another knows from experience that, when he takes too much to drink, although not to perfect ebriety, he is wont to commit sins of impurity, or to be quarrelsome; that drink is to him the proximate occasion of sin. A young person of the opposite sex knows by experience that, if she spends her time in the evenings standing at the door (Oh, would that the wretched practice were done away with, for it can certainly do no good!) she is likely to meet with some companions of the neighborhood, who will lead her into sin; that habit is for her the proximate occasion of sin. And so on for other circumstances.

It is a sin
not to shun
it.

Now, I repeat, he who is not firmly resolved to shun such an occasion once for all, or, if he is actually in it, to give it up completely, cannot be saved from eternal ruin, no matter how often he goes to confession or holy Communion; he is and remains in the state of sin. Why so? Because, even if his going into such an occasion, or his remaining in it, should not be the cause of sin to him now and then, yet it is in itself a sin which God has forbidden under pain of eternal damnation. For He who forbids the end forbids also the means that must of necessity lead to that end; and He who forbids me to commit sin forbids me also to have anything to do with that which, humanly speak-

ing, necessarily brings sin along with it, and that is the case with the proximate occasion.

So we see God has done in all his commandments. In the very beginning He forbade our forefather Adam to eat of the fruit of the tree that was in the middle of paradise: "Of the tree of knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat. For in what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death."¹ Did he, then, forbid the eating alone of the fruit? So it would appear if we consider the words of the commandment; but hear the answer that Eve gave to the serpent afterwards, when he asked her why she did not enjoy such beautiful fruit. "Of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of paradise, God hath commanded us that we should not eat; and that we should not touch it, lest perhaps we die."² Mark those words, we must not even stretch forth our hands to touch the fruit; for its very touch, the sight of its pleasing colors, and its agreeable smell would so entice us, that we could not refrain from eating it; such was Eve's line of argument, and she concluded, therefore God has forbidden us not merely to eat of the fruit, but even to touch it. O Eve, would that thou hadst followed thy own sound judgment, and kept away thy curious eyes and hands from the fruit; for then thou and Adam would not have eaten it, and plunged thyself and thy unhappy descendants into such misery!

It was forbidden by God even in paradise.

In the Old Testament God acted in the same way with the Israelites. He had forbidden them to adore false gods, and in order to remove every dangerous occasion out of their way, He commanded them at the same time to burn all their graven images: "Their graven things thou shalt burn with fire."³ They were not to keep any of these things in their houses, nor even to desire the silver and gold of which they were made: "Thou shalt not covet the silver and gold of which they are made, neither shalt thou take to thee anything thereof, lest thou offend. . . neither shalt thou bring anything of the idol into thy house, lest thou become an anathema, like it."⁴ He had commanded them not to eat leavened bread on Easter, and therefore they were obliged to throw away all such bread out of their houses during those

In the Old and the New Law.

¹ De ligno autem scientiæ boni et mali ne comedas. In quocumque enim die comederis ex eo, morte morieris.—Gen. ii. 17.

² De fructu ligni quod est in medio paradisi, præcepit nobis Deus, ne comederemus, et ne tangeremus illud, ne forte moriamur.—Ibid. iii. 3.

³ Sculptilia eorum igne combures.—Deut. vii. 25.

⁴ Non concupisceas argentum et aurum, de quibus facta sunt, neque assumes ex eis tibi quidquam, ne offendas; nec inferes quidquam ex idolo in domum tuam, ne fias anathema, sicut et illud est.—Ibid. 25, 26.

days. The Nazarenes were not allowed to drink wine and had consequently to abstain from eating fresh or dried grapes, lest the taste of the fruit should entice them to taste the wine also. With still greater care, says St. John Chrysostom, did Our Lord, in the law of grace, endeavor to cut off the occasions that might lead us to transgress His commands. He tells us in the Gospel of St. Matthew that, "Whosoever is angry with his brother, shall be in danger of the judgment. . . and whosoever shall say: Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire."¹ But why so severe, O Lord? That no occasion may be given of doing anything against the principal commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." For if it were lawful to vent one's anger against another, to abuse and vilify him, there would be the greatest danger of coming to blows and even murder in the end. The only confirmation of your speech shall be, yes or no; never shall you swear unless compelled thereto by absolute necessity. Why? That we may have no occasion to violate that other chief commandment, "Thou shalt not bear false witness."

Especially
as regards
impurity.

But with regard to the commandment forbidding adultery and other sins of impurity, to which our miserable nature is so inclined, oh, how careful Christ was! He has closed our eyes, ears, mouths, hearts, and minds against this vice, and forbidden us, under pain of sin, to look at, listen to, speak or think of, voluntarily, anything impure, to look at a person of the opposite sex with desire, or even to mention the vice: "All uncleanness, let it not so much as be named among you,"² as St. Paul says. He has forbidden us, under pain of sin, to hang up anything on the walls of our rooms, or to allow anything to appear in our dress or outward behavior, which might be suggestive of impure ideas. He has commanded us, under pain of sin, to give up the friendship and society of those who are apt to lead us into this vice, no matter how dear they are to us, or how useful or necessary we find them; for such is the meaning of those well-known words in the Gospel: "If thy eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee:"³ that is, if a person who is dear to you as the apple of your eye is the occasion of sin to you, away with him at once. "And if thy hand or thy foot scandalize thee, cut it off and cast it from thee:"⁴ that is, if you gain more by visiting

¹ *Omnis qui irascitur fratri suo, reus erit iudicio; qui autem dixerit fatue, reus erit gehennæ ignis.*—Matt. v. 22.

² *Omnis immunditia nec nominetur in vobis.*—Ephes. v. 3.

³ *Si oculus tuus scandalizat te, erue eum, et projice abs te.*—Matt. xviii. 9.

⁴ *Si autem manus tua, vel pes tuus scandalizat te, abscide eum et projice abs te.*—Ibid. 8.

that house than you could by the work of your hands, and if that house is the occasion of sin to you, you must avoid it altogether. If the society of that person is necessary to your comfort and well-being, so that you could do without it as little as without your foot, but it is an occasion of sin to you, you must leave that person once for all.

Mark, my dear brethren, how exact the command is. Christ does not say, "if thy eye scandalize thee, close it, so as not to see anything with it," but "pluck it out." He does not say, "if thy hand or foot scandalize thee, tie it up," so that it cannot move; but, "cut it off." Hence it is not enough for the fulfilment of this law for one to say, I will go that house, or into that company, or to see that person; but I will guard my heart and my senses so as not to fall into sin. No; that is not the way to pluck out the eye, or to cut off the hand or foot. The occasion has to be completely avoided. Nay, Our Lord is not even satisfied with this; He says, moreover, that we must throw away the eye, hand, or foot, without any desire to take it back again. Why so, dearest Saviour? If I pluck out my eye, can I not keep it by me, since there is no further danger of my seeing anything with it? If I cut off my hand or foot, can I not preserve it in my room, since it will not help me any more to feel or to walk? And therefore I will obey Thy command, and not keep the person who has been the occasion of sin to me in my house, but she can live in the neighborhood; I will break off all intimacy with her, but I will continue to salute her now and then; I will not speak with her alone, but I will write to her occasionally to show that I bear her no hatred. No; even that much is dangerous and would make matters just as bad as before; for it would at least be the occasion of unlawful thoughts and desires. Pluck out the eye, and cast it from thee. You must be as much separated from that person as if you did not know her at all, so that you will have neither the wish nor the power of renewing your intimacy with her. That Christ forbids this under pain of grievous sin is evident from the words that follow: "It is better for thee having one eye to enter into life, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire."¹ Hence he who keeps the eye, hand, or foot, that is, who does not remove the occasion of sin altogether, will be cast into hell, so that it is a grievous sin, deserving of eternal damnation, not to leave the occasion of sin, or to go into it voluntarily.

And the divine command on this point is very strict.

¹ Bonum tibi est cum uno oculo in vitam intrare, quam duos oculos habentem mitti in gehennam ignis.—Matt. xviii. 9.

So that he who does not shun the proximate occasion is not worthy of absolution.

Such is the general teaching of theologians, who are agreed in saying that a man must sacrifice even a great pleasure, or honor, or wealth, rather than enter a house, go into company, or associate with a person who places him in the proximate danger of sin. Nay, there are many who maintain that, if necessary, one should sacrifice in such circumstances all one's wealth, honor, and good name, and even life itself, because we must be always prepared to renounce everything, rather than offend God by grievous sin. There were, indeed, some who taught that one is not bound to shun the proximate occasion of sin if there is a good or reasonable cause for remaining in it; and, again, that it is lawful to seek an occasion of the kind, if one can gain some great advantage by it for himself or for his neighbor; further, that one is not obliged to turn out of his house the person with whom he has been in the habit of sinning, if the absence of that person would cause him too much grief or sickness, and it would be difficult to find any one to replace her. But all these propositions are condemned by the Popes Innocent XI. and Alexander VII. Hence he who remains in the proximate occasion of sin and is not disposed to remove or abandon it at once is not worthy of absolution, no matter what other promises or excuses he makes.

Although he gives other signs of repentance on his death-bed.

One can hardly say of a dying Catholic that he is damned; but one of the surest arguments that lead one to such a conclusion is to see him die without having cut off the occasion of sin. There is a question amongst the learned as to whether King Solomon did penance for his sins and has saved his soul, or not. Many agree with some of the holy Fathers in thinking that he is saved; and they base their opinion on the words he wrote in his old age, "Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity," and on several expressions of a similar nature, which could come only from a contrite heart. Others, on the contrary, maintain that he is damned, and their sole argument for saying so is the fact that he did not destroy the temples that he had built in honor of the idols of his concubines. St. Eucherus agrees with this; "it is evident," he says, "that Solomon did not do penance fully for the crime of idolatry; for if he had brought forth fruit worthy of penance, he certainly would have endeavored above all to destroy the idolatrous temples which he had built:"¹ This conclusion, says a learned author, seems to me irresistible. However, there are some holy Fathers who dispute the argument and

¹ Palam ostenditur quod Solomon de admisse idololatriæ scelere nunquam perfecte penituit; nam si fructus penitentiae dignos faceret, satageret ante omnia, ut idola, quæ ædificaverat, tollerentur.—St. Eucherus in IV. Kings xxiii.

say that Solomon either really destroyed the temples, or that circumstances prevented him from destroying them all before his death. However that be, I will neither condemn nor canonize him; I hope with all my heart that he is saved. But this much I say with that author, if you see a dying man kissing the crucifix, uttering pious words, and leaving something considerable to the poor and sick in his will, you can probably conclude that he has died a happy death; but if, when he could do so, he has not destroyed what he had built up for the devil and the flesh, if you still see in his house or in his room the person whom he kept to gratify his passions, you can with still greater probability conclude that the unfortunate man is damned. For he has not removed the proximate occasion of sin, and therefore he has not, as he could and should have done, freed himself from the state of sin.

From this it follows, in the first place, that he whose occupation or business is a proximate occasion of sin to him, which he, after having used the means suggested to him for that purpose by his confessor, cannot convert into a remote occasion, is bound in conscience without the least delay to leave that occupation or business, even if he should thereby be reduced to poverty. According to this a servant is bound to leave his employment before his time is expired, even at the risk of losing his salary, if he has kept up an impure intimacy in the house, which he cannot otherwise abandon. A maidservant is bound to leave her situation before the expiration of her time of service, and to seek a living elsewhere, if she is solicited to unlawful actions by her master, or his son, or his servant, or by strangers who come to the house, and is in the habit of consenting to their wishes. Even the son or daughter of the family, though reduced to beggary by so doing, is bound to leave the house, if by remaining they are in the proximate occasion of sin, which they cannot avoid; but that is rarely the case, since it is easy for them to avoid sin with the help of their parents.

Secondly, it follows that the excuses that are often alleged are worthless. People say, I cannot yet leave that house, that person, that company; I will go on as usual, but, with the help of God, I will avoid sin. No matter whether you commit sin or not, you are still guilty in the sight of God, inasmuch as He has forbidden, not only the sinful act, but also the occasion of it. And what is the good of saying, I will go into the occasion, but by the help of divine grace will not commit sin any more?

Hence one should prefer poverty or any discomfort, rather than remain in the occasion of sin.

It is a vain excuse to say that one does not intend to sin in the occasion.

You might as well say, I will go out at night and leave my door open, trusting to Providence that no thieves will enter my house; I will put my head into the jaws of a raging lion, trusting that God will prevent him from hurting me; I will not give up drinking, but I hope that God will not allow me to get drunk; I will run into the midst of bullets and swords, but, with the help of God, will not get wounded; I will stand in the middle of a fire, but I hope that God will prevent me from being burnt. What foolish talk that is! How many youths were there who came uninjured out of the furnaces of Babylon? The holy Scripture mentions only three; but now it seems that I must believe that you will be the fourth; for, as St. John Chrysostom says, it is as great a miracle for one not to fall into sin, especially in the matter of impurity, when he goes into the occasion of it, as for the three Hebrew youths to have come out of the fire unharmed. Do you think that God will work a miracle to please you, if you wantonly rush into the danger? I take to witness your own experience. How often have you not made the same promise, and sworn almost in the confessional that you would be careful, with the grace of God, not to fall into sin? And up to the present that promise has remained unfulfilled. For does not your own conscience tell you that, whenever you went to that person, that company, or that house, you came away with another sin on your soul? In vain, therefore, do you renew those promises; you commit a sin by the very presumption of which you are guilty in remaining in, or seeking wilfully, such a danger.

It is vain to rely on the confession one makes and the absolution received.

It follows, thirdly, how little reason one has to depend on one's ordinary confessions and the absolutions he receives, as long as he continues in the occasion of sin. There are many who say, it is true that I commit sin generally when I go to that house, or into that company, or see that person, but I go to confession immediately after, and receive absolution; the priest says nothing to me about the matter, and I must give him credit for knowing his business, etc. So much the worse. A fine confession, that, says St. Ambrose, and a wonderful absolution! Those people are like one who tries to wash himself with an unburnt brick; the more he wets it, and rubs himself with it, the dirtier he becomes.¹ What better are you for going often to confession, if you continue in the proximate occasion of sin? Instead of cleansing your soul, you only add a new burden to it, in the shape of a sacrilegious confession and Communion; for without

¹ Quo magis lavabat, eo magis luto hñiebatur.

an earnest purpose to avoid the occasion of sin you can have neither true sorrow nor resolution of amendment. But, you say, I receive absolution each time. No, I answer, you do not; you hear the words of the form that the priest speaks, but that is all. For you do not act honestly with God and your soul; you run from one confessor to another, who does not know the state of your conscience, or you seek one who will not question you much, and to him you tell the sins you have committed since your last confession, but nothing more; you say nothing of the fact that you are in the habit of committing those sins for a long time because you are in the proximate occasion of them, and that you are bound to tell. Thus, in an underhand manner, you steal an absolution from a confessor who has no suspicion of how matters really stand with you; but it is an absolution that will do you no good, for it will be written down against you in the great account-book, and will only increase your torments in hell; and one day you will find out that your conversion was only a sham and came from a heart that was filled with falsehood. Such is the complaint that God makes of the daughter of Juda by the Prophet Jeremias: "And after all this her treacherous sister Juda hath not returned to me with her whole heart, but with falsehood, saith the Lord."¹

Otherwise, according to the teaching of theologians, if the confessor knows that you are in the proximate occasion of sin, he cannot give you absolution, unless you are firmly resolved to avoid that occasion forever. Nay, if you have often promised him to avoid it, and have not fulfilled your promise, he dare not in the end absolve you from your sins, unless you have really left the house or the person who is the cause of sin to you; nor must he trust any farther to your mere promise, even if you confirm it with an oath. If, in spite of that, he gives you absolution, then either he does not know his duty, or else he commits a sin with you, by trying, as St. Cyprian says, to make a peace between you and God, "which is a vain and false peace, injurious to him who gives it, and in no way profitable to him who receives it."² It is a favor which condemns the judge, and does not acquit the accused. You must know that, although you may have received absolution a hundred times in that way, if you wish afterwards to do sincere penance and be really con-

For such an
absolution
is invalid.

¹ In omnibus his non est reversa ad me prevaricatrix soror ejus Juda in toto corde suo: sed in mendacio, ait Dominus.—Jerem. iii. 10.

² Irrita et falsa pax, periculosa dantibus, nihil accipientibus profutura.—St. Cyprian, tract. de lapsis.

verted to God, you must tell in confession all the mortal sins you committed during the whole time you were in the occasion of sin; as well as the number of times you made sacrilegious confessions and Communions, and all those confessions you must repeat with true sorrow, because the absolutions you received were null and void, as you had not true sorrow and purpose of amendment.

And confession is useless, too. Shown by a simile.

It is with your confessions as with king Saul when he had overthrown the Amalekites, as I have mentioned already. God had commanded him to destroy the Amalekites, and not to spare even a beast belonging to them; but he saved from destruction the king and the best of the flocks. Meanwhile the prophet Samuel arrived on the scene, and Saul went to meet him, boasting of what he had done, as if he had fulfilled to the letter the command of the Lord: "Blessed be thou of the Lord, I have fulfilled the word of the Lord."¹ What? said Samuel, you have fulfilled the word of the Lord? "What meaneth, then, this bleating of the flocks, which soundeth in my ears, and the lowing of the hords, which I hear?"² Is that the way you fulfil the command of God? Such is sometimes the way with you, too, O sinner, when you come out of the confessional. Thank God, you say to your friend, or think to yourself, I have got rid of that much, at all events; I have confessed my sins, and am reconciled to God; "I have fulfilled the word of the Lord." But your friend might ask you, if he entered your house, what is this that soundeth in my ears? If you are freed from your sins, how is it I still hear in the house the voice of the person who has been the cause of sin to you? Why do I still see those indecent pictures on your walls, and those impure love-tales on your table, which have been to you the occasion of unchaste thoughts and desires? Has not God commanded you to put away all those things? Is that the way in which you fulfil His command? Ah, you deceive yourself! Sin is still in your heart; you are not at all reconciled to God; the unclean spirit is still in peaceable possession of your soul. No; the proximate occasion must be removed, or all your confessions will be of no help to you.

The best sign of true sorrow is to remove the

But if you wish to be able to say with truth that you are reconciled to God, and are freed from the state of sin, then hear what happened to the Apostle St. Peter. He was lying in

¹ Benedictus tu Domine, implevi verbum Domini.—1. Kings xv. 13.

² Et quæ est hæc vox gregum, quæ resonat in auribus meis, et armentorum, quam ego audio?—Ibid. 14.

prison, bound with chains, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles; “And behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shined in the room; and he, striking Peter on the side, raised him up, saying: Arise quickly . . . gird thyself, and put on thy sandals. . . Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.”¹ Peter went with him, and they passed the first and second ward till they came to the iron gate, which opened of itself to them; but still Peter did not know what was happening to him: “He knew not that it was true which was done;”² he thought it was all a dream; “he thought he saw a vision.”³ But when they had gone some distance through the streets, and Peter found himself really outside the gates, he began to realize what had occurred; oh, he said, with joy and wonder, “Now I know in very deed that the Lord hath sent His angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.”⁴ A striking picture this, my dear brethren, of the sinner who, living in the habit of sin for a long time, bound with ropes and fetters to some creature, and lying in a gloomy prison, at last becomes really converted to God. The light of divine grace shines on him, by which he is enabled to see the bondage in which he is held under the yoke of the devil. “Arise quickly,” says the angel of the Lord to him, when he hears a sermon, or reads a spiritual book, or hears of some sudden death; cast off the fetters of impure passion; save yourself from the slavery of sin. He hears the voice and is at the same time tormented by his conscience; the iron gate, which was closed so long, opens at last; that is, he opens his mouth to declare his sins in confession. This is an excellent beginning he makes; but it cannot be trusted much yet. Like Peter, he may still have good reason for doubting if he is really freed from prison, or if it is only a dream, an imaginary penance that he has done: “he thought he saw a vision.” But if he gets so far as to see the gate shut behind him, that is, if he has removed the proximate occasion of sin; if he has determined not to go near that house, that person, that company any more, and really keeps away from them altogether, for a month or two, so that he can say with truth that he is done with them, then, indeed, he can

occasion of sin. Shown by another simile.

¹ Et ecce, angelus Domini astitit, et lumen refulsit in habitaculo, percussoque latere Petri, exclavit eum dicens: Surge velociter . . . Præcingere, et calcea te caligas tuas. . . Circumda tibi vestimentum tuum et sequere me.—Acts xii. 7, 8.

² Nesciebat quia verum est quod fiebat.—Ibid. 9. ³ Existimabat se visum videre.—Ibid.

⁴ Nunc scio vere quia misit Dominus angelum suum, et eripuit me de manu Herodis, et de omni expectatione plebis Judæorum.—Ibid. 11.

rejoice with Peter, and say: "Now I know in very deed that the Lord hath sent His angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of the hellish Herod." Blessed be God, I am at last freed from the state of sin! I can now be certain that my repentance was genuine; I am really reconciled to God; I am on the right way again; my only care now need be to keep on it and advance towards heaven. Oh, what an unusual consolation for such a man! A consolation which he has hitherto known nothing of, while in the state of slavery. How grateful the repose of conscience he enjoys! A repose of which he had no experience while his conscience was tormenting him, even in the midst of his forbidden pleasures.

Conclusion,
exhortation,
and purpose
to shun the
occasion at
once.

I conclude, my dear brethren, with the words of Samuel to the Israelites, "If you turn to the Lord with all your heart, put away the strange gods from among you."¹ Do you wish, O sinners, to free yourselves from the state of sin, to be reconciled to God, and to enjoy the peace and repose of a good conscience? Then you must "put away the strange gods from among you." Is there one among you who is in the habit of sin, especially of impurity, and who always comes to confession with the same story? Let him examine himself to see what is the cause of it, and he will perhaps find that it is some person for whom he has an impure attachment, or some house, or company in which he is accustomed to sin. Thus he will discover the stone against which he so often stumbles, the idol which he adores instead of the true God. Away, then, with that person; shun that house, that company; the occasion must be removed at once; there is no other means for you to regain the grace of God and to escape eternal damnation. Put away the strange gods from amongst you without delay, do not remain a moment longer in the occasion, for the longer you delay the more difficult will your conversion become. On this depends the fate of your soul and its eternal happiness or misery. Nothing in the world should be too difficult for one to undertake with readiness, in order to avoid an eternal hell, and to gain an eternal heaven. Put away the strange gods, then; remove the occasion at once, no matter what it costs you. But that intimacy has now lasted for such a long time, and it is a source of such pleasure. No matter; that is only another reason for breaking it off all the sooner. Away with it! It is better for you to go to heaven without your dear

¹ Si in toto corde vestro revertimini ad Dominum, auferite deos alienos de medio vestri.—
I. Kings vii. 3.

friend, than to go to hell with him or her. But that person is very useful to me in my house-keeping, and is a source of great profit? No matter; if it were to reduce you to beggary, the person must go; it is better for you to go to heaven without sensual pleasures, than to go to hell to be tortured forever after the short-lived joys of this earth. I acknowledge, O Lord, the truth of all this, and therefore I willingly give up the occasion of sin, with the determination never to venture into it again! Thou wilt help me by Thy grace to overcome the difficulty I may at first experience in doing this. But no matter what happens, if it were a thousand times more difficult, it must be done at once. I cannot and will not burn in hell forever; I must go to Thee in heaven. Therefore farewell to all you who have hitherto been an occasion of sin to me; I know you no longer! My God alone will I serve, and Him will I love above all things, with my whole heart. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the Feast of St. Bartholomew, Apostle.

Text.

Qui vexabantur a spiritibus immundis, curabantur.—Luke vi. 18.

“And they that were troubled with unclean spirits were cured.”

O how good it would be, and how necessary for Our Lord, still to remain on earth, and to heal diseases! For what a number of people there are who suffer, not merely in their mortal bodies, but who are in a most desperate state as regards their souls; especially they who are plagued by the unclean spirit, that is by the demon of impurity. But after all, have we not Christ amongst us, and can we not go to Him every day, in order to be healed? Are not the confessionals, in which we can lay down the burden of our sins, always open? Does not Christ give to all who approach Him His own virginal Flesh and Blood in the holy Communion, in order to cleanse us from the filth of our sins? Truly, my dear brethren, if we only would approach Our Lord with contrite hearts and a firm purpose of amendment, our sickness would soon be healed. But, alas! How many there are, possessed by the unclean spirit, whom neither the sacrament of penance nor the holy Communion can help to recover their health; for they continue in the proximate occasion of committing sins against holy purity. Such people as these have no means of salvation left, unless, like the holy Apostle, St. Bar-

tholomew, they allow themselves to be flayed alive; that is, unless they renounce the occasion to which, generally speaking, they are more attached than the skin is to their body, as I shall now prove.

Plan of Discourse.

He who is possessed by the unclean spirit of impurity must remove the proximate occasion of sin and shun it altogether; or else he cannot be helped out of the state of sin. Such is the whole subject of to-day's sermon. What I now say of the vice of impurity in particular can and must be understood, due proportion being observed, of the proximate occasion of all other sins.

And that all here present may profit by it, let us make an earnest resolution to avoid even the least danger of sin, as far as possible. Give us Thy grace to this end, O Almighty God, through the intercession of Thy Immaculate Mother and of the holy and most pure angels.

TWENTY-SEVENTH SERMON.

ON THE VAIN EXCUSE OF THE SINNER WHO SAYS HE IS NOT IN THE PROXIMATE OCCASION.

Subject.

Many do not wish to remove or avoid the proximate occasion of sin, because they persuade themselves, either that it is not a proximate occasion for them, or that in future it will not be so dangerous for them.—*Preached on the fifth Sunday after Epiphany.*

Text.

Inimicus homo hoc fecit.—Matt. xiii. 28.

“An enemy hath done this.”

Introduction.

“Man is a wolf to his fellow-man,”¹ says the old proverb. “A man's enemies shall be they of his own household,”² says Jesus Christ, the eternal Truth. This is especially the case in

¹ Homo homini lupus.

² Inimici hominis domestici ejus.—Matt. x. 36.

what concerns the salvation of our souls, wherein we often find those who are most dear to us to be our worst and most dangerous enemies, and who, the more we love them, are the more to be dreaded by us. I now allude specially to the society of those who are the proximate occasion of sin to us, principally in the matter of impurity. Oh, what a multitude of sins are caused by such an occasion. He who is once entangled in it has his soul sowed like a field with all sorts of weeds of carnal thoughts, desires, words, and works. If he asks, who has done that? his own conscience will answer him, "an enemy hath done this," it is the work of that person, that house, that company, that proximate occasion. Therefore he who wishes to keep his soul free from those weeds must at once remove and avoid forever the proximate occasion; otherwise there is no chance of saving him from eternal ruin, as I have shown in my last sermon. But, O blindness and stupidity of man! He who is once entangled in an occasion of the kind loves nothing more than the enemies of his soul; he tries to deceive himself in all sorts of ways; he has all sorts of false arguments to prove that the bad company he keeps, although it is in reality an occasion of sin to him, is not likely to do him harm. I cannot avoid that company, he says, or else, I am not bound in conscience to avoid it. So that, no matter how you exhort him, you can never persuade him to make up his mind to give it up. We shall now consider the excuses which some people bring forward in this matter.

Plan of Discourse.

Many think they are not bound to remove or to avoid the proximate occasion of sin, because they persuade themselves, either that it is not a proximate occasion for them, or that in future it will not be so dangerous for them. A vain and idle excuse. Such is the whole subject of this sermon.

That those whom it concerns may understand it, and that we may all be on our guard against the enemy of our souls, that is, the occasion of sin, we beg of Thy grace, O Lord, through the intercession of Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

To come to the subject at once. Of the first class of those who try to persuade themselves that this or that occasion is not a proximate one of sin to them, or that it will not be so dangerous for them in future, there are some who say by way of excuse: I keep that person in my house, not for the purpose of committing sin and offending God, but because that person is useful or

First excuse: I do not go into the occasion for the purpose of sinning.

necessary to me in the management of my domestic affairs. I go to that house, or into that company, not to commit sin, but to visit my friends, according to the requirements of courtesy, or to pass away the time in lawful amusements. In looking at or speaking to that person, who is pleasing to me, I seek nothing but a pleasure and delight such as one experiences in eating and drinking, in looking at a play, or in listening to good music. That is all I want. I do not seek carnal or forbidden pleasure, and if I feel it, it is against my will and intention, and I protest that I never will voluntarily seek such pleasure, for I do not wish to offend God by a mortal sin, etc.

It is a self-deceit.

But what a wretched excuse that is! I thought that the deceit that Satan practised in paradise, and that has since produced such lamentable fruit in the world, was detested by all, but now I am forced to believe the words of the philosopher Seneca: "In what do we rejoice more than in deceit?"¹ And, in fact, we even try to deceive ourselves, especially in things that concern our spiritual welfare; and the more crafty and cunning our deceit, the more we love it. But this is that deplorable blindness, that most terrible punishment, which God inflicts on our sins in this life. Nor do I ask you to believe this on my authority, but on that of the Apostle, St. Paul, who, writing to the Thessalonians, says: "Because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved, therefore God shall send them the operation of error to believe lying."²

For he offends God, after all.

What, in the name of wonder, is the meaning of your excuse, I will keep in my house or I will go to visit the person who pleases me, but not with the intention of committing sin and offending God? Where is the sinner in the world so wicked, what robber or murderer is so abandoned, as to sin only for the purpose of offending God? Ask them about it, one after the other, for instance, why did you steal? To get the money, the thief will answer, that I want for my support. Why did you kill that man? To have revenge on him. Why did you commit adultery? To satisfy my passion. None of them will acknowledge that his object was to offend God. To sin merely for the purpose of sinning, and through hatred of God, belongs rather to the demons in hell than to men who are still living on earth, and if one of the latter were found to be guilty of such malice,

¹ Quo nisi mendacio gaudemus?

² Eo quod charitatem veritatis non receperunt, ut salvi fierent. Ideo mittet illis Deus operationem erroris, ut credant mendacio.—II. Thess. ii. 10.

he should be looked on as an incarnate demon rather than as a reasoning human being. I have not the least difficulty, then, in believing that you, who are in the proximate occasion, do not keep in your house or visit that person for the purpose of offending God. You even wish that what you do were not forbidden by God, and therefore you seek after all sorts of subterfuges to excuse yourself from sin in what you do. Meanwhile, however, in your looks, desires, thoughts, words, and gestures, without saying anything of other actions, you do what God has forbidden under pain of eternal damnation, and what can not be done without sin, as, I suppose, your own experience has taught you before this, if you wish to be candid with yourself, and therefore it is in vain that you try to excuse yourself by appealing to your intention.

It would be a ridiculous thing for a man to sit down in a house which is on fire, and to say, I am sitting here, not that I may be burnt, but because I want to finish my business. This intention of his will not save him from the flames. You maintain, with a certain amount of hair-splitting casuistry, that you do not seek in the society of that person a carnal and forbidden pleasure, and that your only intention is to gratify your inclination and your outward senses. But supposing I were to set fire to your house, and that to your just complaints my only answer would be: Oh, I did not mean to do you any harm, nothing was farther from my intention; my only wish was to see the fire and to warm myself at it, what would you think of that? Yet it is worth as much as your lame excuse. You say you do not seek for carnal pleasure; but you voluntarily place a cause which is, of itself, apt to awaken carnal pleasure, and must, of necessity, give rise to it; now, he who wills the cause wills also the effect that comes from it. Therefore that occasion is a proximate one for you, and you are not allowed either to go into it, or to remain in it, and no matter what it costs you, it must be removed.

I acknowledge, another, apparently more reasonable than the first, says, that that house, person, or company has hitherto been a proximate occasion of sin for me; but I have never had such a clear knowledge of the malice of sin as I now have, and I have just confessed my sins with such a lively sorrow, and such a firm resolution, that I feel I would bear all the evils in the world, and die a thousand times rather than commit another mortal sin; nor, in fact, have I any desire or inclination now for carnal pleas-

A ridiculous
excuse.
Shown by
stiles.

Second ex-
cuse: I
have re-
solved after
confession
not to sin
in the oc-
casion any
more.

ures, but rather horror and dread at the thought of offending God and exposing myself to the danger of eternal damnation. Therefore I am fully persuaded that I run no danger now by keeping that person in my house, or by going into that company, in order to satisfy the requirements of friendship, as the law of Christian charity commands. What a sudden change has come over you! It may be as you say, and if it is, you ought to rejoice and to thank God from the bottom of your heart. But let me give you one piece of advice; do not trust too much to the future, nor venture again into the occasion of sin, or you will certainly find that your present firm purpose and your horror of sin will soon come to naught.

This resolution will not be kept long. Shown by a simile.

The Prophet Isaias says of sinners that they multiply their offences as spiders make their webs: "They have woven the webs of spiders."¹ When a man sees a spider's web on the wall or the window of his room he calls at once to his servant and says to him: See what is hanging there; is that all the care you take of my room? Get your broom and sweep it away at once. The servant obeys, and in a few moments the room is quite clean. But in a few days' time the man sees the cobwebs there again. What is the meaning of this, he asks his servant, did I not tell you to be more careful? What is the use of my paying you your wages if you do not do what I tell you? Sir, answers the servant, I swept away the cobwebs when you told me to do so; there must be some fresh ones there since. But, says the master, it is not enough to sweep away the cobwebs, you must kill the spiders, or else they will begin a fresh web every day. "Decline from evil,"² says the Lord to the sinner; amend your sinful life; away with the webs of vice. And what does the sinner do? Driven by the anguish of his conscience, or touched by something he has heard in a sermon, or moved by the fear of death in a dangerous illness, he makes a general confession and repents of his sins with a firm resolution to avoid them in future. Thus he sweeps away the cobwebs from his soul. But what follows? In a short time the webs are there again; he falls into grievous sin. How does that happen? The spider is not yet killed; the proximate occasion of sin is not removed, and, as sure as he goes into it again, he falls, no matter how firm his purpose of amendment was.

But he will fall again.

Have you done penance? asks St. John Chrysostom; have you repented of your sins and blotted them out? If so, I con-

¹ Telas araneæ texuerunt.—Isa. lix. 5.

² Declina a malo.—Ps. xxxvi. 27.

gratulate you with all my heart; “but are you therefore changed into a stone or into iron?”¹ No; you are and remain straw, as you were before; “can you, then, touch fire and not be burnt?”² Therefore I implore of you to remain away from the fire, no matter how firm your resolution is. You are now, says St. Peter Chrysologus, like a fire that is extinguished, but is still smoking, for the heat is not gone out of it altogether; all it requires to make it shoot up again into flame is to put a little fire into it, or to blow on it. Try it with a candle; blow the candle out, and immediately hold it to another lighted one, and, even before the wick touches the flame, it will take fire. So it is also with the proximate occasion of sin, especially in the matter of impurity. No knowledge on the part of the understanding, no purpose or resolution on the part of the will, is of any use; you have detested your sins from the bottom of your heart, and are firmly determined rather to die a thousand times than to commit them again; the candle is blown out; the fire of concupiscence is somewhat subdued; but if you go into the occasion again, into the society of the person with whom you have so often sinned, the pleasure you formerly enjoyed must of necessity recur to your mind, the former impure love you felt will be awakened in you anew, and the fire of impurity will burst forth into a flame. In the Holy Scripture we find almost the same simile employed to confirm this truth. When the Jews were brought into captivity into Persia, the priests secretly took away the fire that used to burn on the altar and hid it in a well that was dried up. After many years their descendants came back and looked into the well for the fire, but, says the Scripture, “they found no fire, but thick water.”³ The priest Nehemias bade them draw it up, and sprinkle it on the wood that had been placed on the altar, ready for the sacrifice; and behold, hardly was it done, when “there was a great fire kindled, so that all wondered.”⁴ Mark this, my dear brethren, when the fire was placed in the well, which usually contained water, it became water: “they found no fire, but thick water; and when they drew up the water, and used it for the sacrifice, as fire is wont to be used, it became fire again; “there was a great fire kindled, so that all wondered.” Now I repeat, O sinner, that after that clear knowledge of the wickedness of sin,

Another simile.

¹ Numquid lapideus es, aut ferreus?—S. Chrysos., hom. 1. in ps. 1.

² Igni conjungeris, et non ardebis?

³ Non invenerunt ignem, sed aquam crassam.—II. Mach. i. 20.

⁴ Accensus est ignis magnus, ita ut omnes mirarentur.—Ibid. 22.

of which you speak, the heartfelt sorrow you feel for having offended God, and the firm purpose rather to die a thousand times than commit sin, the fire of your former carnal desires does not burn so fiercely, and your soul is turned, as it were, into water by your tears of penance; but if you go again into that house or company in which the fire of sensuality formerly overcame you, the water will soon be changed into a fire which will consume your soul worse than before.

For even the place in which one has sinned is dangerous.

Therefore St. Paul warns us, saying, "give not place to the devil;"¹ for even the place, says St. Isidor, in which one has sinned becomes dangerous, since the mind recalls what occurred there, and thus awakens desires anew; much more, then, will the actual, living presence of the person with whom one has sinned have that effect. "Where art Thou?"² said the Lord to Adam after he had sinned. Did not God know that Adam had hidden himself in the garden, full of shame and confusion at the transgression of which he now realized the full enormity? Certainly, He knew it well; and, as St. John Chrysostom says, He did not ask in order to find out where Adam was, but to remind him that he was still in the place in which he had sinned, after having repented of his guilt. Adam, where art Thou? In the garden. Away with you at once; the place is dangerous for you; if you look at the forbidden tree again, the desire to eat of its fruit will again come to you; therefore you must go away at once. "And the Lord God sent him out of the paradise of pleasure,"³ and placed an angel with a fiery sword at the entrance, so that he might never return to the place where he had sinned. O sinner! since you now acknowledge your guilt and repent of it, let me ask you, "where art thou?" Where do you intend to remain for some time to come? In the house where that person is still living? In the house or company where you will often meet with that person? Ah, that is no place for you! You must never go there any more; the entrance to it must be closed to you, or else the old Adam will get possession of you again.

It is a snare of the devil that one does not feel temptation in the occasion.

You say that you do not feel any temptation any longer, and that all sinful desire seems to have left you. If that is the case, why are you so anxious to see that person again? Why are you so troubled when he or she is absent? Why do you find it so difficult to break off that intimacy? That is an evident, unmis-

¹ Nolite locum dare diabolo!—Ephes. iv. 27.

² Ubi es?—Gen. iii. 9.

³ Et emisit eum Dominus Deus de paradiso voluptatis.—Ibid. 23.

takable sign that you have still something left to fight against in secret, and that the sinful desire has not entirely abandoned you. If you really feel no temptation any more, then one of three things must be true: either the devil does not know you any longer, as the Abbot Apollo once said to a religious who had never experienced a temptation from which the holiest servants of God are not free, in spite of their penitential lives; or the devil takes no further trouble about you, as he knows that he is sure of you while you are in that occasion; for a dog does not bark at the friends of the house, but only at strangers whom he does not know, and so perhaps the hellish dog looks on you as one of his own, since he leaves you in peace; or else he is deceiving you, and is preparing some trap to ensnare you, since he now refrains from tempting you after you have done penance, in order to be more sure of bringing you to destruction afterwards.

This crafty enemy sometimes acts with souls like the Norman prince, Hastings. The latter, having besieged for a long time unsuccessfully the Italian town of Luna, at last commanded all hostilities against the town to cease, and caused the rumor to be spread about that he, the general in chief of the besieging army, had suddenly taken ill and died. The news of his supposed death was brought to the citizens by an envoy, who made known to them at the same time the last will of the prince, namely, that his body should be carried in state to the cathedral of the town, to which he left a rich legacy, and be there buried. The citizens believed the story, and that all the more readily as hostilities had ceased for such a considerable time. Hastings was then brought into the town, accompanied by a number of courtiers and officers, and some thousands of soldiers bearing lighted torches. While the citizens were admiring the spectacle, the prince suddenly opened his coffin, and, to their greatest astonishment, leaped out into the midst of his men, who were all well armed. He was thus enabled to take possession of the gates of the town, and to allow his army to enter, so that, in place of being a corpse himself, he made one of the unfortunate town, and reduced it to subjection. Thus, when the people thought him dead and unable to harm them, he showed them that he was really alive; but they did not learn the fact until he had already subdued them. O mortal, you have, as we have seen, closed the doors of your soul against the devil; you have by repentance and a purpose of amendment placed yourself, as it were,

Shown by a simile.

in a well fortified citadel, where the enemy does not dare to attack you. But I beg of you, keep the gate closed fast against him, see that you do not venture to open it once to the proximate occasion of sin. The enemy pretends for a time to be dead; he leaves you in peace; you do not feel carnal desires any more, and you seem to be quite a new man; nay, the next time you go into the occasion, into the presence of that person, he will be careful to keep away from you all evil desires, so that you may come away without sin. Why does he act thus? In order, as St. Gregory says, that, when you think yourself safe and removed from all danger, so that you go fearlessly into the occasion, he may suddenly surprise you, fan into a more violent flame than ever the sinful desires that seemed to you to be quite extinguished, and thus make sure of bringing you to eternal ruin.

Many are
thus be-
trayed.
Shown by
an example.

Oh, how many there are like you, who made even a far stronger resolution to remain steadfast in their fidelity to God, and who have found out by sad experience the truth of this! For, though they did not seek the occasion deliberately, but happened on it by chance, their good resolutions were thrown to the winds, and they became worse than before. Father Paul Segneri of our Society, in his book called "the Christian Man," tells us of a thief who, while he was in prison, under sentence of death, repented of his sins, and made a good general confession of his whole life, and accepted his death as a well merited punishment, with full resignation to the will of God. As he was being led out to execution, to his great and perhaps eternal misfortune, he passed by a house in which a person with whom he had formerly maintained an unlawful intercourse was looking out of the window; the sight of her inflamed his desires anew, he consented to them, and was immediately delivered over to the executioner. You may see from this, my dear brethren, what great power the proximate occasion, though it has been long abandoned, has over the human heart. There was a man who a moment before had repented of his sins with true contrition, and was going out to meet his death, which he accepted with resignation to the will of God, so that there was only the gallows between him and his Judge; he had the crucifix in his hand and his confessor at his side; he was surrounded by people who were praying for his soul, knowing well that he would be in eternity in a few moments; and that man was so changed by a chance sight of a person with whom he had been accustomed to sin long before, that neither the justice of man, which had con-

demned him to death, nor the justice of God, which would condemn him immediately after to the flames of hell, could extinguish in him the fire of impure love. O my God, who, then, will dare to trust himself wantonly into the occasion of sin? Can you, O sinner, believe that you may rely so firmly on the good resolution you made in confession, that the occasion of sin has no dangers for you?

O no! "If thy eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee." No matter how great the change you think has come over you, pluck out the eye that has hitherto been the occasion of sin to you, and throw it far away from you. Even supposing there were no danger of your committing sin in the company of that person (and if one uses the means that confessors generally prescribe at first, the proximate occasion may be turned into a remote one; but that is seldom done; and in the matter of impurity, when they who have an improper affection for each other live in the same house, or are in the habit of seeing each other frequently, it is almost impossible), supposing, I say, there is no danger of sin for you, how do you know that there is none for the other person? The latter you certainly place in the proximate occasion of impure thoughts and desires by your presence or conversation. Nor will I say anything now of the scandal you give the whole neighborhood, who are, perhaps, aware of the unlawful intercourse you have been maintaining. Therefore I repeat that it is not lawful for you to remain in such an occasion, or to seek it again; but you are bound, under pain of grievous sin, to remove it altogether and to avoid it completely.

I am well aware of all that has been said hitherto, thinks a third by way of excuse; but I will, at all events, go to that person once more and represent the dangerous state in which we have both been living, so that by fraternal correction I may perhaps induce him or her to do penance like me, and thus we may change our former unlawful love into a holy friendship, which will not hurt us; if I do not do that, the poor soul will probably continue in the state of sin and be lost forever. What a pious, holy zeal for souls you have all of a sudden! I imagine the devil must have a hearty laugh at your devotion. Do you think you can convert souls by your presence and conversation, and save them from the jaws of the hellish wolf, although it is only very recently and with great trouble that you have succeeded in escaping him yourself? You are not afraid to venture on the

Even if one were to keep his resolution, it would still be dangerous to go into the occasion.

I will go to that person to convert her, and for no other purpose; third excuse.

conversion of a soul from sinful lust by presenting to her the object of her passion, that is, yourself. You wish by your presence and conversation to inspire a soul with a horror of the vice of impurity, and to lead her to love God above all things, and that, too, the soul whom you have led so far astray, that for the sake of carnal pleasure she has more than once renounced God and heaven, so that she could not be brought to see the error of her ways by preaching or exhortation, or by the divine inspirations? You wish to preach penance to a soul who has so perverted you, that you have often given yourself over to the devil and to the eternal flames of hell? I am very much afraid that you are hardly clever enough to bring such a great undertaking as that to a successful conclusion.

They will
both fall
again into
sin.

I know well that the Holy Ghost has imposed on you by the wise Ecclesiasticus the duty of helping your neighbor to be converted and to save his soul: "Recover thy neighbor," He says; but hear what He adds immediately after: "recover thy neighbor according to thy power, and take heed to thyself that thou fall not;"¹ that is, do not attempt anything above your strength, and be careful that in trying to help him you do not injure yourself. If a heavy burden is placed on a newly-built wall, that is not yet dried, it will fall down. You have been only recently restored to the grace and friendship of God, and yet do you trust so much in your virtue and strength that you are not afraid to undertake such a difficult and important business as the conversion of a soul, and that, too, in such circumstances and by such means as God has strictly forbidden, lest your soul should be perverted again? Which is the more likely, asks St. Gregory of Nazianzen, that a man in good health will give strength to a sick man by his company, or that the sick man will infect him who is in good health? The latter is more likely, and is generally the case, when there is question of a contagious illness. You may be quite certain that your presence and company will infect the person whom you visit in that way with another spiritual malady, that is, you will at least cause her to commit a mortal sin in thought, while you yourself will not come away without having imbibed some of the poison.

Shown by
an example.

About nineteen years ago I was told by a priest that he once heard the confession of a man who was at the last extremity, and who shed tears of sorrow while telling his sins. Hardly had the

¹ Recupera proximum secundum virtutem tuam, et attende tibi ne incidas.—Eccius. xxix. 27.

priest left the house, when a woman came running after him, weeping and trembling in every limb, who begged him to come back; could you guess why, my dear brethren? When the priest left the house, that woman, who had been an occasion of sin and a stumbling-block of scandal to the sick man, entered the room of the latter with the pious intention of helping him and praying for him (ah, would that she had never thought of such a thing!) and the unhappy man, with death already in his face, gathered all his remaining strength together, and gave her to understand that he had consented anew to unchaste desires. The woman, horrified at this, ran after the priest, who tried to move the dying man to repentance, both by prayers and threats; but whether he succeeded, or not, is doubtful. This is an example worthy of deep consideration; the person who had been the occasion of sin to that man thought she could enter his room in his dying moments, for a good and holy purpose, but in reality she was the cause of the greatest misfortune and perhaps of eternal damnation to him. A nearly similar incident is related by Father Joseph Prola, of our Society, of a young man in Italy. The latter had kept up an improper intimacy for some time, but at length, enlightened by a ray of divine grace, he repented of his sins, and made up his mind to give up that sinful intimacy and to be converted to God with all his heart. Full of this intention, he set to work and wrote down a general confession of his whole life, with which he hastened to a confessor; but as he was on the way, the devil inspired him with the thought of going to see his accomplice in guilt, in order to persuade her to do the same, and to repent of her sins. The foolish young man took this thought as an inspiration of God; he goes to the house, and finds the person there alone. At the first sight of her, all his repentance vanished at once; the fire of impure love was kindled anew; he made up his mind to sin with her once more, and hardly had he come to that conclusion, when another young man, a rival of his, entered the house and plunged a dagger into his heart; thus his unhappy soul was hurried down to hell while he actually had his general confession on his person. That is what must be expected when one goes again into the proximate occasion of sin, even under the pretext of devotion and with the intention of doing good to others.

No, no; in such circumstances there is no safety unless in flight. And if you wish to convert the person with whom you have sinned, then, says St. Gregory, the only advice I can give

Conclusion
and exhortation to
shun the

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occasion
completely.

you is to do it “not in word, nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth;” not with exhortation and advice, nor even by letter, but in deed and in truth, that is, by good example. Keep away from that person; do not take any notice of her if she should salute you, or send messages to you by others; send back her letters unopened; shut your door in her face and act towards her as if she were your mortal enemy. Then she may perhaps enter into herself and say: that man is evidently quite changed; it is clear that he is really converted; I must follow his example. If she does not follow it, then, at all events, you have done what God required of you, and have placed your own soul in safety. In a word, without attempting to seek any excuses, “flee from sins as from the face of a serpent;”¹ dread the occasion of sin, as you would a venomous reptile. Commentators on this passage ask why God does not tell us to fly sin as a raging lion or tiger, for such animals could do us more harm than a mere crawling reptile? And they answer by saying that those animals, although they are cruel and dangerous, are not to be feared at all times; for while they are young, one can play with them without running any risk; nay, they may be tamed so that they run after the person who feeds them, as if they were faithful dogs; a fact which experience abundantly proves. On the other hand, serpents are always to be feared; they can never be tamed, and whether they are young or old, they can always kill a man, if they but touch him with their poisonous fangs. Therefore we must avoid the occasion of sin as we would a serpent; and under no pretext are we allowed to go into the proximate occasion; no subterfuge or excuse will exempt us from this obligation. If you do not wish, then, to lose your soul, there is nothing else for you but flight. Fly the occasion. Amen.

TWENTY-EIGHTH SERMON.

ON THE EXCUSE OF THE SINNER WHO SAYS THAT HE CANNOT AVOID THE OCCASION.

Subject.

The proximate occasion can and must be avoided at once; no matter what excuse is alleged to the contrary.—*Preached on the sixth Sunday after Epiphany.*

¹ Quasi a facie colubri fuge peccata.—Eccles. xxi. 2.

Text.

Cum autem creverit, majus est omnibus oleribus, et fit arbor.

—Matt. xiii. 32.

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

Introduction.

To prevent a tree from growing in your garden, where you do not wish to have it, nothing more is necessary at first, than for a little bird to carry off the seed. And if the young plant has already made its appearance over ground, all you have to do is to catch it with both hands and pull it up, root and all. But if it once grows to a tree, then the birds, with their picking, and the hands, with their pulling, cannot force it out of the ground. It must be cut down with the axe, and the roots carefully dug up. It is the same, my dear brethren, with the dangerous occasion of sin. The daily occasions, common to all men, which arise from company and society that one cannot avoid, are, so to speak, the little seedlings, from which sin remotely springs; and in such occasions it is enough for one to have recourse to God by daily prayer, and to keep his outward senses and his heart free from any disorderly affection. The frequent and unnecessary intercourse of the sexes, which is allowed under pretence of amusement, is a far more dangerous occasion of sin; but the only difficulty in avoiding sin, even in that case, is to keep away from such promiscuous gatherings, unless necessity or decency requires otherwise, and not to seek such occasions deliberately. But if the intimacy has grown into a tree, that is, if it has become a proximate occasion, so that sin is generally committed on account of it, especially in the matter of impurity, then, indeed, great labor and trouble are necessary to break off that intimacy, to remove the occasion, and to tear up the roots of sin. Uncertainty of death! Strict justice of God! Eternal joys of heaven! Eternal torments of hell! you may be represented a hundred times in sermons; but you are of hardly any use in moving the hearts of those who are once entangled in such an occasion, to make up their minds firmly to avoid it altogether. For, not only do such people seek all sorts of vain pretexts to deceive themselves and to persuade themselves that they are not bound to shun it, as we have seen in the last sermon, but, as a last resource, they put forward as an excuse what they call the insuperable difficulty of shunning it.

Plan of Discourse.

I cannot, or I cannot yet, they say, avoid or remove the proximate occasion. But I say that you can and must remove and avoid it at once, no matter what you urge to the contrary. Such is the whole subject of this sermon. I hope firmly, with the help of God, that it concerns no one here present, and that the only good they will derive from this sermon will be that they who were formerly in the proximate occasion may thank God for having freed them from it, while all the others may shun the least occasion of evil before it develops into a proximate occasion.

Give us Thy grace to this end, O God, through the intercession of Mary, Thy Immaculate Mother, and of our holy guardian angels, who are most careful of the salvation of those entrusted to them.

First excuse: I will do away with the occasion gradually; I cannot leave it all at once.

Let us hear the first excuse. What is the reason that you cannot remove or avoid the proximate occasion? Ah, the answer is, I find it too hard and almost impossible to leave that house or that company, or to shun completely a person whom I have known for such a long time. I will try to give up the occasion little by little, and to reduce the number of my visits week by week, until at length I can give up going altogether. Ah! I see the knot is a hard one for you to loosen; you think you will be able to do it by degrees; but that will not do. You must cut the knot, not loosen it, says St. Paulinus.¹ If you really wish, you can keep from all grievous sins, for God has given you absolute freedom in the matter; therefore you can also give up at once the proximate occasion of grievous sin; for God has commanded you, under pain of grievous sin, to shun the proximate occasion. We must leave sin, not gradually, but at once and forever. God will not make peace with his enemies gradually, but at once and for all time. To be determined to sin in this week, and to lessen the number of your sins gradually in the succeeding weeks, is not doing penance and being converted, but rather going off gradually farther from God, and nearer to the eternal flames of hell.

How foolish that is! Shown by a simile

Tell me, what would you think if one, wishing to go to Metz, says to himself: the road is very long and difficult, I could not do the journey in a day on foot; I will go by the Moselle, although it leads in the opposite direction; the first day I will travel six hours, the second four, the third three, and by thus lessening the distance daily, I will, no doubt, arrive at Metz in good time. Eh?

¹ Succide, non solvas.

Foolish man that you are, you would say to him with reason ; it is true, you are travelling shorter distances every day ; but still you are going every day farther from Metz ; and if you continue that, you will never arrive there. That is exactly the folly you are guilty of when you determine to break off the occasion of sin little by little. It is too difficult, you say, to give up that person's friendship all at once; it must be a work of time. Will it, then, be easier for you after you have given way still more to your carnal appetites? Easier, when the fire burns more fiercely? Easier, when the sinful habit has become more inveterate? Certainly not. The deeper the wound, the more difficult it is to cure. You think you will afterwards get rid of the occasion by degrees. Alas, unfortunate " afterwards," how many souls have you already hurled into hell ! I should like to see the strong box, in which you keep your time locked up, so that you can take it out to do penance in, whenever you wish. Now you have the time; now God has given it to you, and now you should use it for your conversion, not little by little, but at once, as God commands you to do under pain of sin. Do away with the occasion of sin immediately, and give up that bad company; who knows what will become of you afterwards?

Others say, I cannot leave the house in which I am in the habit of sinning. Why not? Because I am a servant, and my year's service has not expired ; but next October, when my time will be up, I shall try to get another place ; till then, I must remain as I am. So the year is not finished for you yet, as far as sin is concerned, and you will go on offending God until next October? How do you know that you will be in better dispositions next October? The chances are that by the end of the year you will become more hardened in vice, and you will re-engage with your present master, and so spend another year in the proximate occasion of sin. And, besides, how do you know that you will live till next October? Perhaps (and it may easily be the case) by next October you may be in hell, where you will have to remain, not for one year, nor two, nor twenty, nor a thousand, but for all eternity, in the midst of all imaginable torments, in a lake of fire and brimstone. Answer this question: if the plague broke out in the house in which you are in service, or if there were a fire even in the neighborhood of it, would you like to remain in it till next October, because your time is not up, and you must wait till it is? I am pretty sure that you would not stop to consider the matter, but would make your escape at once. Is, then, that

Second excuse: I am a servant and cannot leave my place till the end of the year.

plague of the soul, that hellish fire which you find in that house. less to be dreaded by you, than a calamity which affects only the mortal body.

Such persons must leave at once, no matter what tollows.

But, you say, I must keep my contract with my master, otherwise I should lose my wages for the whole year, and, besides, if I were to leave now, where could I find a place, since now, in the middle of the year, every family is supplied with servants? Do you, then, prefer to perjure yourself to your God, who has commanded you under pain of hell to leave, rather than to break your contract with a mere mortal, who can at most deprive you of your wages? If you are in earnest about leading a better life, tell your master in confidence of the danger which threatens your soul in his service, and if he is a good Christian, and fears God, he will find some means of removing it, or, if that cannot be done, will give you a good recommendation, along with the wages that are due to you for the period of your service. If your master himself is an occasion of sin to you, and it is unfortunately only too often the case that masters, who ought to give their servants good example, and help them to save their souls, use them simply as a means of gratifying their foul lusts, and thus give them over to the devil; if, I say, it is so with you, then away out of the house with you, at once. It is no place for you, even if you were to lose your wages by going. For you should think a great deal more of the eternal recompense you lose by remaining, than of the few shillings you have to expect from your master. Remember the impressive words of Our Lord: "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul? Or, what exchange shall a man give for his soul?"¹ Confess the truth to your own conscience: if another master were to promise you fifty dollars more wages, and you were not in the occasion of sin in the house in which you now are, would you hesitate long about accepting this offer, and leaving your present situation? I think not; for fifty dollars a year would more than compensate you for the loss of your present salary. But the great King of heaven and earth promises that, if in obedience to Him you leave the proximate occasion of sin, and overcome yourself, He will give you His grace and favor, and the kingdom of heaven into the bargain; and yet you say, I cannot; I must wait till the end of the year, or I shall lose my wages! Where is your understanding? What

¹ Quid prodest homini, si mundum universum lucretur, animæ vero suæ detrimentum patitur? Aut quam dabit homo commutationem pro anima sua?—Matt. xvi. 26.

has become of your reason? Oh, you say, it is all very well to talk in that way, but who will take me into his service in the middle of the year, and what can I do, if I do not find a place? Whether you find a place or not, and even if you were obliged to beg your bread your whole life long, or, what is still worse, to suffer a painful and disgraceful death, you should make up your mind to do it, rather than offend your God and lose your soul by committing mortal sin. Ah, if you were not held fast by carnal love and sensual pleasure, and if you were in earnest about abandoning sin, I believe you would find ways enough of leaving your present situation, even in the middle of the year, without my saying anything to you about it; but what is wanting in most cases is an earnest resolution to overcome the difficulty and burst the bonds of sinful affection. Is not that so? Your own conscience says, yes.

I cannot, a third says. And why not? Oh, what would people say, if I were to leave my situation, or the house in which I am lodging, before the end of the year; if I never went to that place to which I have been accustomed to go for such a long time; if I never spoke to that man, with whom I am now known to be on friendly terms; if I sent away that person, who has been with me for so many years? What would people think of me? Oh! And is it that, that makes it almost impossible for you to avoid the proximate occasion of sin? Why do you not take a sensible view of the matter? You say, what will people think of me, if I leave that house, etc.? And I ask you, what will the angels in heaven think of you, if you continue in the indulgence of your sinful passions, and if they see you always adding to the number of your sins? What will the devils think, when they see that you are daily increasing your eternal torments, according to their wish and desire, and in contempt of their Creator? What will the almighty God, who is present in all places, and who sees all you do, think of you, if you continue to offend and insult Him before His very face? What will all mankind, the elect in heaven, and the reprobate in hell, think of you on the Last Day, when they will see you hurried down to hell after having received the sentence of your condemnation? What will you yourself think, when you reflect that, for the sake of a few years' pleasure which you had in that house, you have to suffer the eternal torments of hell?

But, putting all this aside for the present, although it is of the utmost importance, I will speak of the matter with you accord-

Third excuse: what will people say if I leave that house, etc.?

If people know tha

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he is in the occasion of sin, his good name is already gone.

ing to the natural light of reason. Either people know and have a well-founded suspicion that you are keeping up an unlawful intimacy with that person, or that the visits you pay are for no good purpose, or they do not know it. One of these two must be the case. Do they know of it? And, indeed, it is, humanly speaking, impossible for a thing of the kind to be kept secret very long in a neighborhood, although you may imagine that no one suspects what you are doing in that house, or the nature of your relations with that person; yet your own behavior and that of your accomplice in guilt is enough, even without the frequent visits you pay, to betray what is going on, so that, while you stupidly think your guilt is known only to yourself and your accomplice, it is, so to speak, town-talk already. Suppose, then, I say, that they are aware of it; do you know what they have thought of you up to the present, and what they will continue to think of you if they see you keeping up that intimacy. They have hitherto thought that you are leading a scandalous life, unbecoming a Christian, and that it would be far better for your spiritual welfare and for your good name before men if you left that house, or sent that person away, or broke off that unlawful connection. The hardest things possible are said of you, everyone is shocked at your conduct, and you make yourself, moreover, responsible for the sins you occasion by your bad example. See, O blind mortal, you do not fear to be made the subject of such talk, and to have such a bad name, as long as you remain in the occasion of sin, and yet you are afraid of what people will think of you if, as you are bound in conscience before God, you avoid that occasion, shun that house, and amend your life! If you do this latter, then I can tell you what all good, pious, and decent people will say of you; they will think and say that you have done quite right; that you should have done it long since; that you are now in earnest about saving your soul and going to heaven; and they will thank God for having given you the grace to get rid of that person, to shun that house, etc. It is no disgrace for people to think of you in that way; it rather helps to restore the good name you have lost by continuing in the occasion of sin.

If they do not know, his reputation will not suffer by his leaving the oc-

But suppose the people know nothing at all, and have not the least suspicion of the sinful life you are leading; what can they think of you, if you turn that person away, or give up going to that house? Is it such a wonderful thing for one to get rid of a servant, or to seek for another situation, or to break off a friend-

ship? It is done every day in the world, for all sorts of reasons. Sudden changes of the kind are sometimes caused by a few words that one lets drop without meaning any harm by them. Yet, let people say of you what they please, what is it to you, as long as the almighty God has a good opinion of you, and your own conscience approves of what you have done? If a wild ox were to attack you in the street, would you be ashamed to run away, because the people would laugh at you, and point at you? Oh, no; in a danger of that kind you would let the people say what they wish, for your life is more valuable to you than their good words. And you would be quite right. But should you not think a great deal more of your eternal salvation, which is in the greatest danger as long as you are in the proximate occasion of sin? The philosopher Diogenes once saw a young man coming out of a house of ill fame, and the latter blushed with shame at being detected; "do not be ashamed," said the philosopher to him, "of coming out of that house; but be ashamed to go into it."

It is well known what a temptation the chaste Joseph had in Egypt, when his mistress tried to induce him to commit sin. He refused to listen to her solicitations; but she lost all shame, and threatened to accuse him to her husband of having offered violence to her, if he did not consent to her wishes. How did Joseph act in such dangerous circumstances? Without saying a word, he ran out of the house, leaving his mantle in the hands of his mistress, who had caught hold of it to prevent his flight. You are justly surprised, my dear brethren, at the extraordinary virtue of the young man, and that he was able to defend himself from a danger to which the pious David and the wise Solomon succumbed, and that he immediately took to flight. And, certainly, he has left an example for all time to show how flight is the only means of preserving holy purity from the dangerous occasions of sin. But what surprises me is the fact that he ran out of the house so hurriedly as to leave his mantle behind in the hands of the wicked woman, who sought to seduce him; for he might at least have remained long enough to take it from her, since it would serve as a proof against him. And in reality the woman used it to show that he was in the room, and to substantiate her false charge, so that the innocent Joseph was cast into prison as an adulterer. Why, I ask, was he so incautious as to leave his mantle behind him? Do you know why? Joseph was in such imminent danger of losing his virtue, that he would

No matter what they think, he must leave the occasion, like the chaste Joseph in Egypt.

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not stop to dispute with himself as to what he should do; let her keep my mantle, he thought; men may think of me what they please; I must go, and at once, in order to save my soul; I would rather go to prison, than sin against holy purity. That is how the wise Joseph acted. You, too, should do the same, if you are in the occasion of sin; away, out of the house, at once, even if you had to leave everything behind you; and let people think what they will. But you may rest assured that you will not be put in prison, like Joseph, but will rather earn great praise before God and man. Try it, and you will find that what I say is true.

Fourth excuse : that person has been very kind to me, and I expect more kindness from him.

I cannot! sighs a fourth. And why? Because that man has always been so kind to me; he has looked after me as if I were his own child; if it were not for him, I should have to beg my bread, or, at all events, I should find it very hard to make a living; besides, I am in hopes that he will do still more for me; must I now be so ungrateful as to leave him against his will, or to turn him away from me? Oh, no; I cannot bear to be so cruel! But tell me, who has done you the most good, that person, or God? Did that man create you, when you were still in the abyss of nothingness? Did he redeem you, when you were lost? Did he shed his blood for you? Did he die a shameful death for you? Did he save you from the flames of hell? All that your God has done for you. From whom have you the greatest help and happiness to expect? Can that man free you from the attacks of the devil, and protect you from his cruel machinations? Can he remit the great debts you have contracted with God by your sins? Will he lighten the anguish of your last moments, give you the grace of holy perseverance, and bring you to heaven? The good God, who is faithful to His promises, has undertaken to do all this for you, if you abandon your senseless love for creatures, and serve Him alone in future. But, ungrateful mortal that you are, you despise and abandon your sovereign Benefactor, and attach yourself to a vile creature, destined to be the food of worms, who with all his caresses and kindness, is preparing you for nothing else but perpetual hunger and thirst in the flames of hell. God preserves you and has looked after your welfare even while you were offending Him in the occasion of sin; and now you are afraid you will have to suffer want if you make up your mind to be His true and faithful friend in future? You should have more confidence in that good and loving Father, who feeds the ravens and the sparrows, although they sow not,

and neither do they reap; and who is so much more careful of His rational creatures, that He Himself warns us in the Gospel not to be solicitous for the morrow, nor to be troubled as to what we shall eat or drink, or as to wherewith we shall be clothed; for our heavenly Father knows what we are in need of, and will provide for us, if we only do His holy will. "I have been young," says the Prophet David, "and now am old," and I have seen a great many things during my time; but "I have not seen the just forsaken, nor his seed seeking bread;"¹ nor have I ever heard that the just man, who trusts in God, has suffered such want as to die of hunger. Is it not God Himself who says to us, "Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God. . . and all these things shall be added unto you:"² namely, food, and clothing, and every other necessary of life? Do you, then, trust in the devil, the father of lies, and in a mere mortal, who is leading you to the devil, rather than in the almighty God, who tells you to leave that person, quit that house, shun the proximate occasion of sin, and serve Him alone? "Seek first the kingdom of God," and you may rely on His promise that all the other things shall be added unto you. He will provide for your support, and will give you, moreover, eternal riches in His heavenly kingdom. Even if by leaving that person you were to be reduced to extreme poverty, you must not forget that you deserve it on account of your sins, and that you ought to do severe penance by right. Even the holiest and most innocent men have given up all they possessed and became voluntarily poor, in order to make surer of heaven; and you, who have so often deserved eternal poverty in hell, should you not make up your mind to suffer a little want in this life, in order to save your soul?

I cannot, exclaims a fifth. And why not? Because, says a maid-servant, or a daughter of the house, I have already promised to marry that man; and if I go away now, he will not keep his word, and all my happiness in life is ruined forever. But even if you have made a mutual promise of marriage, you are not allowed, on that account, to do what is wrong with each other, although there are many people ignorant enough to think that a promise of marriage renders everything lawful between the contracting parties. Such, I repeat, is not the case; nothing more, even in thought or desire, is allowed to you than to others. Do you intend to marry? Then do so as soon as possible; or, else,

Fifth excuse: we made a mutual promise of marriage.

¹ Junior fui, etenim senui; et non vidi justum derelictum, nec semen ejus querens pœnem.—Ps. xxxvi. 25.

² Querite ergo primum regnum Dei . . . et hæc omnia adjicientur vobis?—Matt. vi. 33.

avoid each other's company, if there is danger of sin in it. Unhappy, indeed, is the marriage, as experience teaches, which has been preceded by sin. How can the blessing of God, or happiness, or grace, be expected by those who enter on the married state in opposition to God, and in God's enmity? But I have already said enough on this subject. Fly the occasion, then; you must not go into it even on the pretext of future marriage, for every time you see the person to whom you are engaged, when the presence of that person is an occasion of sin to you, and see him or her alone, you commit a sin.

Sixth excuse: I love the person too much and cannot leave him.

Alas, I cannot, cries out the last. And why? Ah, I am too fond of that person. It seems to me that I am bewitched, and that I can hardly live out of his or her company. Yes, I can easily believe that matters would go so far with you; generally speaking, the only foundation for all the other excuses for not avoiding the proximate occasion is foolish, sinful love. If such is the case with you, then I am sorry for you; all my preaching and exhortation will be of little service to you. But is that really love? To love is to wish well to one, to desire and rejoice at his happiness, and to do him good. Now, can you say that you wish well to him or her, whom you make miserable by your pretended love, and whom you defraud of all rights to heaven, and deliver over to the devil? Is that wishing well to a person, or is it not rather wishing him or her a most frightful evil? Could any greater hatred be imagined between two people, than for them to agree to bring each other's soul to eternal damnation? "If you love a person ill," says St. Augustine, "then you hate him."¹ If you really wish to love the person with whom you commit sin, then you must hate him, and shun him as your worst enemy; "if you hate well, then you love in reality."²

This latter is a desperate case.

Yet you think that your love is truly deserving of the name, and so, in order to please the object of it, you have made up your mind to go to hell, for nothing else can come of it. If that is the way with you, please yourself, and lose your soul; I cannot help you! But one request I must make of you. A man does not determine to throw a large stone into the air until he first sees whether he can lift it off the ground. You, too, should try first whether you can bear the pains of hell, I will not say forever, but for a very short time; nay, not even the fire of hell, for we have no experience of that here; but, like the hermit of old,

¹ *Si male amaveris, tunc odisti.*—S. Aug. tract. 51, in Joan.

² *Si bene oderis, tunc amasti.*—Ibid.

when he was tempted to impurity, put your finger in the fire, and see if you can hold it there while you say one "Miserere," for the love of that person. Can you do that? Then try if you can keep your hand in the fire a whole day for that person's sake; and if, as I am sure would be the case, that would seem too much for you, then should I cry out to you: oh, think of that person! will you not bear something for his sake? Ah! you would answer, clenching your teeth with pain, I cannot bear it any longer. But if you cannot bear to hold your hand or your finger in the fire for a day, or for as long as it takes to say the "Miserere," how will you bear to burn and roast in hell for all eternity, body and soul? If, nevertheless, you are so far gone in your madness as to resolve to expose yourself to such a terrible fate, then you must know that, when you both shall go down into hell, and that may occur to you at any moment by a sudden death, you will regard each other with the greatest hatred and aversion, and against no one shall your curses and execrations be more bitter for all eternity, than against the person who is now the object of your foolish passion.

But, for God's sake, think of what you are doing! Leave at once, of your own free will and for the love of God, the person whom death will deprive you of one day against your will. Is it not better for you to give up for a short and uncertain time that unlawful affection, and thereby to become a friend of God, to enjoy peace of conscience, and to gain heaven as a reward, than to lose that same person forever, and also the society of the angels, of Mary, the Mother of God, and of the saints, and, besides that, to suffer the loss of your own body and soul? Alas, does it require all these arguments to convince a Christian that he must give up an unlawful love for one who will soon be the food of worms? Heathens and Turks, where are ye? I should, it seems to me, have less trouble with you on this head.

By way of conclusion, my dear brethren, I will relate to you a heroic deed performed by a barbarian, in the year 1481. The celebrated Mahomet II. had a courtier whose advice he used to seek in every emergency, and to whom he gave full permission to speak out his mind freely on every subject connected with the welfare of the country. This courtier took courage on one occasion, and spoke in these terms to his sovereign: "The whole world wonders at your majesty's glory and power; compared to other monarchs, you are like the sun among the planets; every battle you have fought has been a victory for you; you have

Exhortation to leave the occasion, in spite of difficulties.

Heroic act of a Turk in this matter.

subjected to your sway six kingdoms, twenty provinces, and two hundred towns. There is only one thing (forgive me for mentioning it) which sullies your glory and lessens the greatness of your name before the world; and if it were not for that, you would be the greatest monarch on earth." "What is that?" asked Mahomet in anger. "It is," answered the courtier, "your too great friendship with Irene; and it is made a subject of frequent complaint that such a brave man should allow himself to be led by a woman." Irene was a young girl, whose beauty and attractions had captivated Mahomet's heart, so that he loved her more than himself. But hear what happened. Mahomet, without showing the least sign of emotion, sent for her; she came into his presence, and her beauty at once attracted the attention of every one. She greeted Mahomet in her usual manner, and then the latter, turning to his courtier, said: "you will now see that, after I have conquered so many nations, I will not allow the love of a woman to tarnish my glory, but that I can also conquer my own inclinations." Having said these words, he drew his sword, and with one blow cut off the head of his beloved Irene. It was an act of barbarous cruelty, which cannot be approved of; yet it was a wonderful act of heroism in a man to gain such a victory over himself.

He will rise
up in judg-
ment
against
Christians.

What do you think of this, my dear brethren? A monarch, who was subject to no one, an infidel, a Turk, influenced solely by the advice of his courtier, so quickly, nay, so cruelly, got rid of one whom he had loved more than himself, and whose love, according to the Turkish law, was not unlawful for him, simply because she seemed to lessen a little his glory before the world; and a Christian cannot determine to abandon an intimacy which is unlawful for him, and which not only takes away his good name before the world, but also deprives him of all right to heaven! O sinner, this Turk shall one day rise up in judgment against you! Your friends and acquaintances, who know of the sinful life you are leading, warn you; preachers and confessors, who cannot free you from mortal sin as long as you are in the occasion of sin, exhort you; your own uneasy conscience troubles you; your angel guardian speaks to you by his inspirations; God Himself tells you to pluck out the eye that has been a scandal to you, and to cast it from you. Are you still deaf to all these exhortations?

Conclusion
and resolu-
tion.

Quickly, then; do not hesitate any longer! What appears to you now difficult and almost impossible will, sometime after

you have done it, be easy and pleasant. You will rejoice and thank God a thousand times for having saved you from that slavery, as I have heard of many like you doing. Make, then, this resolution with me: away with everything in the world that has kept me away from God. Farewell, O creature, whom I have hitherto loved more than God! I will have nothing to do with you any more. I know you no longer. I prefer my soul, my supreme good, to you. Heaven, with its eternal joys, is too beautiful to be sacrificed for your sake. Hell, with its torments, is too terrible for me to go there for your sake. I have now resolved, once for all, to save my soul, to go to heaven, to serve my God, and to love Him steadfastly above all things. Amen.

ON DISCLOSING ONE'S SINS IN CONFESSION.

TWENTY-NINTH SERMON.

ON THE CHOICE OF A GOOD CONFESSOR.

Subject.

He who is in earnest about making a good confession must choose a good confessor.—*Preached on the ninth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Quia si cognovisses et tu, et quidem in hac die tua, quæ ad pacem tibi.—Luke xix. 42.

“If thou also hadst known, and that in this thy day, the things that are to thy peace.”

Introduction.

Unhappy Jerusalem, it is certainly high time for thee to open thy eyes, now that thou hast in thy midst the Saviour of the world, who, in His own person, calls out to thee, and offers thee eternal salvation, and invites thee to repent of thy sins and be converted to God! The time will come when thou wilt have to open thy eyes; but it will then be too late; for thou hast not known the time of thy visitation. This was the thought that drew tears from the eyes of the compassionate Jesus at the sight of the city. Sinful Christian, “if thou also hadst known,” such are the words the same merciful God so often speaks to your heart; if you only knew the unhappy state in which you are, and the graces that are now offered you. I have prepared for you, in the sacrament of penance, a necessary, easy, and advantageous means, by which you can escape eternal destruction and save your soul; but woe to you if you disregard that means, or defer

the use of it too long ! The time will come when your enemies will surround you in your death-struggle, and will carry off your despairing soul into the abyss of hell, because you have allowed the time of grace to pass by. Is it not deplorable, my dear brethren, that, although we can free ourselves from the miserable state of sin at any moment, there are yet so many who do not wish to be converted, or who, although they approach the sacred tribunal of penance, do not receive that sacrament as they ought ? What a number of Catholics go to confession, but what a few, I fear, who really deserve the name of penitent. Alas ! how many bad confessions are made; how many grievous faults are committed, with regard to this sacrament, which turn a useful and easy remedy into a deadly poison ! We shall see what these faults are, as I go on explaining one by one the different parts of confession. To-day I make a beginning by speaking of the choice of a confessor, in which choice many show that they are not in earnest about their confession.

Plan of Discourse.

He who is in earnest about making a good confession must choose a good confessor. Such is the whole subject of this sermon.

O dear Saviour, who didst weep over our sins, give us all light and grace to this end, through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

What is the meaning of saying that one must choose a good confessor ? Are not all confessors the same, as far as their office is concerned ? They all have ears to hear my sins. They have a tongue to give me absolution, and to impose a salutary penance on me. They have all received power from God in their ordination to free me from my sins. That is all very true, as you say; but I, too, have a question to ask you. You have, let us suppose, an important lawsuit on hand, on which depends the loss or gain of a large sum of money; or else your wife, or husband, or only child is threatened with a serious illness. What would you do in both those circumstances ? You would at once look out for a clever lawyer to manage the lawsuit, and for an experienced doctor to attend to the sick person. Quite right. But, of course, it makes no matter what lawyer or doctor you employ ? One is as good as another, and you can take the first you find ? God forbid, you say; the thing is too important for that; I must have the very best I can get. But is not one lawyer as good as another, one doctor as good as another, at least as far as their

One must give all lawyers and physicians the credit of knowing their business.

profession is concerned? The lawyers have all pen and ink to write down a statement of your case; and all doctors are able to write a prescription for you, and to send it to the apothecary's to be made up. They all have their degree in law or medicine, along with full power from the lawful authorities to practise their profession publicly.

Yet, in an important law-suit, or a dangerous illness, one selects the best lawyer or doctor.

Yes, you say, that is true; but still there is a difference. One is more learned and clever than the other; nothing very wonderful has yet been heard of that doctor or lawyer; I will not be the first to entrust an important case, or the health of one who is dear to me, to one of whom I know nothing. They may be good enough in their way, but they are not good enough for me. In any case, I have to pay, and so I will get the best doctor or lawyer I can for my money, that I may be all the more certain of gaining my case, or of having him or her, who is so dear to me, restored to health. And you are quite right to act thus in a matter of such importance. If you did otherwise, if it were a matter of indifference to you whom you employed, I should be inclined to say that you did not care whether you gained the case or not, or whether the sick person recovered or not. Generally speaking, people are so careful in affairs of the kind, that rich men are sometimes not satisfied with the doctor who usually attends them, but call in, at great expense to themselves, the services of some one who has a great name before the world for skill and experience. Louis XI., king of France, selected as his doctor the most celebrated physician in the whole country, and gave him a monthly salary of ten thousand crowns to attend on him. He certainly did not consider it a matter of indifference who his doctor was.

The sinner is dangerously ill, and he has an important law-suit on hand.

Now to our subject, my dear brethren. If we are so careful in things that concern our mortal bodies and our temporal and transitory goods, should we use less care in a matter on which the welfare of our immortal souls and our eternity depend? "If," says St. Augustine, "the best doctors are sought for to cure the diseases of the body, how much more skill should not he have who is to cure our souls?"¹ Your soul, O sinner, lies sick of a most grievous malady, that one, only soul of yours, which, if it dies, or anything happens to it, dies and is lost forever. You are engaged in a lawsuit, and that with the almighty God; if you lose it, then soul and body, God and heaven,

¹ Si morbis corporum medici probatiores exquiruntur, quanto magis spiritualibus animarum adhibendi sunt medici subtiliores? — S. Aug., L. 1, de *visitat. infirm.*

are lost forever; a lawsuit which already is as good as lost, for the sentence of eternal damnation is pronounced against you, and it will assuredly be carried out, unless you speedily appeal to a more merciful tribunal, that is, to the sacrament of penance.

Your confessor is the lawyer to whom you must entrust your case, or rather he is the judge in the place of God, who has to decide it; and this is the first and chief office of the confessor. He is the physician who has to heal the maladies of your soul, and to preserve you from them in future, prescribing salutary medicines to that effect; and this is the second part of the confessor's duty. In order to fulfil this twofold obligation properly, what great knowledge and prudence, experience and piety, are required.

The confessor is judge, lawyer, and physician.

In the first place, he must have the necessary knowledge, so as to be able to pronounce judgment on all sins, and to distinguish their different natures and malice; he must know the obligations of different states of life, in order to be able to give the necessary exhortations to his penitent; he must know, in the matter of injustice, whether, to whom, and in what degree his penitent has to make restitution for stolen or unjustly retained goods, for injury done his neighbor's property or character, so that he may not exempt from this obligation one who is bound by it, and thus injure the right of the third party, or impose on his penitent a grievous obligation to which he is not bound; he must know how to act with those who have been addicted to a certain vice for a long time, or who are still in the proximate occasion of sin. He must also be able to decide whether, when, and how he has to give or refuse absolution, that he may not refuse any one that to which the latter has a right, nor give absolution to one who is unworthy of it, and thus allow the holy sacrament to be profaned by a sacrilege. He must know nearly all the sins that are wont to be committed in different states of life, that he may instruct those whom he finds to be ignorant of their duty, and question those who have not carefully examined their conscience. He must know how to deal with the ignorant and simple-minded in things that are necessary to salvation and to the reception of the sacraments, that he may give them the required instruction about absolution, and dispose them to real, supernatural sorrow for their sins. He must know how, according to the sins that have been committed and the circumstances of the person, to give good advice and to suggest means for the amendment of his penitent, and many other things of the kind.

Hence the sinner must select one who has the knowledge necessary for his office.

Certainly, no ordinary degree of knowledge is required for this; and if one has it not, or has forgotten it, how can he be a good confessor, that is, a good judge, teacher, and physician of souls? Be on your guard, says the philosopher, against those physicians who, having but a little learning, kill many;¹ who spend their time in visiting, and know how to pay compliments, but know little of their profession, and are good for nothing but to hurry off the sick man somewhat sooner to the grave. Such is the warning that St. Augustine gives to all Christians. "He who wishes to confess his sins," he says, "must seek out a priest who knows how to bind and loose, or else they will both fall into the ditch."²

As well as
prudence
and expe-
rience.

In the second place, a confessor must have great prudence, so that he may not be too severe or too lenient with his penitent, but, according to circumstances, be able to unite mildness and affability with a holy zeal and earnestness. For he has to encourage the pusillanimous and to avoid troubling the scrupulous and the shamefaced with his observations, lest he should be the occasion of their concealing a grievous sin through fear and shame; nor must he, by being too exact in his questions, give scandal to the innocent, and perhaps teach them sins of which they were ignorant, and which they would never have known anything about otherwise. Cardinal Hugo says of confessors of this kind, "by being over-exact in questioning, they sometimes make new sinners of those whom they should make new men."³ Thirdly, just as one does not like to entrust a serious illness to a physician who has had little experience, no matter how well he has made his studies, so also, in addition to learning and prudence, the confessor must have great experience in hearing confessions.

He must
also be a
conscien-
tious and
pious man.

Finally and principally, he must lead a holy life, so as to do his duty as he ought in the sight of God, and not allow himself to be blinded by human respect or fear in dealing with his penitent; nor keep silent when he should speak; nor flatter when he should reprove; nor permit what he should forbid and condemn; nor give absolution when he should refuse it or defer it; and that he may always meet the sinner with proper patience, mildness, and charity. "If a man is bad to himself, to whom

¹ Qui, parum docti, multos occidunt.

² Qui confiteri vult peccata, querat sacerdotem scientem ligare et solvere, ne ambo in foveam cadant.—S. Aug. lib. de veris et falsis poenitent.

³ Nimis inquirentes quandoque faciunt novos peccatores, quos debebant facere novos homines.

will he be good?"¹ says the proverb. He who does not care for his own soul and its salvation will not take much interest in the souls of others. He who is full of filth will not go to much trouble to cleanse others. He who is unfaithful to God in other matters of his duty will not trouble his conscience much about how he performs his duty in the confessional; nor, if he is not enlightened by the Spirit of God, can he be of any avail to enlighten the souls of others or to lead them to God.

In the other sacraments it is a matter of indifference, as far as the recipient is concerned, of what kind the priest is from whom he receives them, whether he is learned or ignorant, pious or wicked, as long as he has the necessary power, uses the necessary outward signs, and has the necessary intention when uttering the words of the form. Holy and valid is baptism; holy and valid, the sacrifice of the Mass; holy and valid, confirmation and Extreme Unction, although they are administered by an ignorant or impious priest or bishop; for the sins of the minister cannot hurt him who is baptized, confirmed, anointed, or who hears the holy Mass. But it is quite different with the sacrament of penance, in which the confessor must act the part of a learned judge and of a skilled physician; and if he is wanting in the necessary knowledge, prudence, virtue, and piety, then, indeed, the unfortunate souls of his penitents have a bad lawyer to plead their cause, and a bad physician to attend to their diseases. If it happens now and then that one or another of them, who is well prepared for confession, and who has told his sins properly, is validly absolved, there are on the other hand twenty for that one who are not helped as they ought to be before God, and who, on account of the want of the proper dispositions, and of the will to fulfil their obligations, to which their confessor does not exhort them, go away from the confessional with the guilt of their sins still on their souls.

Come on now with your excuse that it does not matter what confessor you choose, since one is as good as another, and one can absolve you as well as another! Do you mean to say that they have all the same learning and prudence, and that they are all equally experienced, pious, and conscientious? A likely thing indeed! "As star differs from star in brightness," says St. Augustine, "so does one priest differ from another,"² as far as the performance of his duty is concerned. I am not

This is all specially required for the sacrament of penance.

Not all who say they are confessors have those qualities.

¹ Qui tibi nequam, cui bonus?

² Sicut stella differt a stella in claritate, sic sacerdos differt a sacerdote.—S. Aug., lib. de visitat. infirm.

preaching to confessors to-day, and therefore I will say nothing of their faults. Would to God that there were not to-day amongst Catholic priests some of those of whom the Lord complains, by the Prophet Ezechiel: "They violated Me among My people, for a handful of barley and a piece of bread, to kill souls which should not die, and to save souls alive which should not live."¹ Such are, according to the explanation of St. Gregory, those confessors who are severe with the innocent and lenient to the wicked; who are harsh to poor, simple, pious souls, and have not a word of reproof for great sinners, either through human respect, or because they hope for something from them, and, after having heard their sins, absolve them at once, although they may be in the habit of sin, without any effort to amend, or in the proximate occasion of sins against purity; thus they declare as living those who are really dead, and they damn themselves with their penitents.

Therefore those penitents are to be deplored who seek out incapable confessors.

There is one thing, which belongs more properly to the subject of my sermon, and which I must deplore rather than reprove; and that is, that there are Christians who, when they have sinned, not only do not care what confessor they may happen on, and do not make the least attempt to choose a good one, but actually seek out on purpose the most ignorant and incapable confessor they can find. If they hear of one who has the name of being exact in his duty, and careful in looking after the consciences of his penitents, they shun him; and if by chance they go to one who exhorts or reproves them, they do not go to him a second time. They run from one church and one confessional to the other, or they even send out spies to reconnoiter and bring them word as to how a certain priest behaves in the confessional, until at last they have found one who knows little or nothing, who listens patiently to all they have to say, gives them absolution without difficulty, and never reminds them of what they must do or avoid in their state of life; for they do not wish to hear anything about that. They want some one who will speak soft and soothing words to them, according to their own ideas, who will look on the malice of their sins as mere weakness, who will excuse their faults, and consider their un-Christian customs as harmless, and approve of them, so that they may continue in them unhindered by re-

¹ *Violabant me ad populum meum propter pugillum hordei, et fragmen panis, ut interficerent animas, quæ non moriuntur, et vivificarent animas, quæ non vivunt.—EZECH. xlii. 19.*

morse of conscience. (For they think that, if one such confessor, either through ignorance or human respect, or through fear of displeasing them, approves of those customs, it is all right, no matter what theologians or the holy Fathers have to say against them, according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.) In a word, they want one who will touch the wounds of the soul so gently as to leave them unhealed. They are like those of whom God has said, by the Prophet Isaias: "Children that will not hear the law of God. Who say to the seers: see not; and to them that behold: behold not for us those things that are right; speak unto us pleasant things, see errors for us."¹ That is, allow us to go wrong and to be deceived; make the road to heaven broader for us than it is in reality. It is the same as if a sick man were to say to the doctor, give me an agreeable medicine, whether it is good for my health or not; prescribe sugar for me, even if it is the worst poison I could take; allow me to drink good wine, although it will only increase my fever; do you only approve of what I do, and then in God's name, let me die. These penitents show that they have not the least desire for instruction, or to amend their vicious lives, or to be truly converted to God by sincere repentance.

I do not wish to speak of those hypocrites, who are Christians only in name, and who, being addicted to certain vices, continue from one Easter to the other in their old sinful habits of injustice and usury, of retaining ill gotten goods, of remaining in the proximate occasion of sin and of impurity, and yet, in order to obey the command of the Church outwardly before men, and at the same time to have favorable judges who will always give them absolution, bribe one of those incapable confessors with presents and gifts, so as to pervert his judgment, and make him either excuse their vices, or at least say nothing about them, and give them absolution whenever they go to him. Ah! how the devil must laugh at such confessions and absolutions, for in that way two big fishes fall at the same time into his net! Blind and unhappy people, who do not wish to have a guide to lead them on the way to salvation; but still more blind and unhappy those who have a blind guide, for of a certainty they will both fall into the ditch!

Woe to those confessors who thus dishonor their sacred office, and treat in such an unseemly manner the Blood of Jesus Christ

Who bribe their confessors to overlook their favorite vices and give them absolution.

Woe to such confessors

¹ Filii nolentes audire legem Dei. Qui dicunt videntibus: nolite videre; et aspicientibus: nolite aspicere nobis ea, quæ recta sunt; loquimini nobis placentia; videte nobis errores.—Isa. xxx. 9, 10.

and penitents.

in the sacrament of penance! If a judge, whether through malice or ignorance, pronounces an unjust sentence, he is bound in conscience to make good all the harm resulting therefrom. Hear, ye unjust judges in the tribunal of penance, what the Lord God announced to king Achab, when the latter had spared the life of king Benadad of Syria: "Because thou hast let go out of thy hand a man worthy of death, thy life shall be for his life."¹ The same words will be verified in you, who thus give absolution to sinners who are unworthy of it. You are worse than the tyrants who shed the blood of the martyrs of Christ, but thereby sent their souls to heaven, whereas you, by your silence, connivance, flattery or approval, and absolution, instead of saving your penitents from hell and from the yoke of the devil, only confirm them in evil and hurl them deeper down into hell; you must know that your souls will one day have to pay for the thousands of false penitents who are lost through you. And you, too, hypocritical penitents, who deliberately seek out judges of that kind, you will not escape damnation on that account; although you receive a thousand absolutions, you are not justified even once before God.

Both lose their souls. Shown by an example.

Cardinal Borromeo, a nephew of the celebrated saint of the same name, relates that there was a rich gentleman in Naples, who held a high position before the world, but was nevertheless notorious for his evil life. As he could not receive absolution from a learned and pious priest to whom he went to confession, he sought for another who would deal more leniently with him, and he found one who listened quietly to what he had to say, and who, through respect for him, gave him absolution without a word of reproof. The gentleman, bad as he was, was surprised at receiving absolution so easily, and, putting his hand into his pocket, he pulled out twenty crowns and gave them to the priest, saying, "keep that money, Father, for the journey we shall have to make together." "What journey?" asked the priest. "Well," answered the other, "we must soon go to hell, both of us; I, on account of my wicked life, and you, because you have given me absolution so readily, although you might easily have seen that I have not the least intention to amend my life." Oh, how many penitents there are nowadays, I fear, who will have to make the same unhappy journey, because they seek for absolution and receive it from imprudent confessors, without

¹ Quia dimisisti virum dignum morte de manu tua, erit anima tua pro anima ejus.—III. Kings xx. 42.

having any purpose of amendment! I repeat what I have already said: all your confessions and penances are worthless; you are not in earnest about your conversion, or else you would seek for a spiritual physician who at least knows how to cure the maladies of your souls.

Alas! some say, must I disclose my sins to a pious, learned, and experienced priest? I have so many fearful things to tell; what would the good man think of me? What will he think? He will think, as St. Augustine says, since his virtue makes him humble, "there is no sin which another has committed too great for me to commit, unless a special grace of God preserves me from it." His piety will make him more compassionate towards your misery, more gentle and charitable in his efforts to save you from the unhappy state of sin. For pious people are severe only towards themselves, while they are full of goodness towards others, after the example of Jesus Christ, who received sinners with the greatest love. But at the same time he will be more zealous in studying the interests of your soul by warning you of your obligations, and he will suggest means to help you to amend your life. The more pious he is, the more he will esteem you if you tell your sins honestly; and the more grievous and horrible your sins, the more he will rejoice, not, indeed, that you have been so wicked, but that he has an opportunity of saving your soul from the clutches of the devil, like the hunter who kills a large head of game, or the fisherman who lands a large fish. Ah! but he will be horrified, you think, when he hears my sins. Horrified? The more experienced the confessor is, the less will he be horrified. Is a doctor who has spent a long time in a hospital, or who has served during a war, horrified when he sees a deep wound? Not at all; he has seen so many of them that he is quite accustomed to the sight; it is nothing new to him, and does not inspire him with disgust, so that he attends to his patient without the least repugnance. Do you think that it is a new thing for an experienced confessor to hear grievous and horrible sins? Between reading and hearing, he knows of countless such sins, more, indeed, than you can imagine. And on the other hand, by a candid confession, you take away from him all fear and dread, for you make him sure that you are disposed for absolution. The greatest, nay the only trouble that a conscientious priest, who understands his business, has in the confessional, is his anxiety as to whether his penitent is well disposed or not, and has a true sorrow for sin and a firm purpose

There is less difficulty in disclosing one's sins to a good confessor than to a bad one.

of amendment. Oh, how satisfied he is, when his penitent discloses candidly even the most terrible sins, but with a sorrowful heart, and thus shows that he really wishes to be helped!

For he knows better how to heal the maladies of the soul quickly.

Finally, you say, I am afraid to go to a learned confessor, lest he should probe the very depths of my heart, and bring my wickedness to light even in the least particulars. Certainly, he will do that, if he sees that you are not open with him, either through shame, or through ignorance. It is, in fact, his duty to do it, and you ought to be glad of it, if you are in earnest about turning to God with all your heart! That is the very reason why I have said that you should always choose as your confessor a learned, experienced, and pious priest, when you can. And for the same reason an ignorant one, who is not worth much, who never says a word in confession, makes no difficulty about absolution, and has not a clear idea of his duty in many things, is not fit to be your confessor; for if you choose him, you do not act honestly with God or with your own soul, and you only try to deceive yourself. Yes; but the other will make a sin of many a thing; he will forbid this or that custom, place all sorts of obligations on me, and will insist on my doing, omitting, avoiding, or restoring a host of things that will give me a great deal of trouble. Quite right, again! He will do all that if necessary; and he must do it, if he does not wish to lose his own soul along with yours. And that is again the reason why you should choose such a confessor, if you are determined to do true penance. From this you may see that the confessor's duty is not to try to please you, or to win your affection, but solely to save your soul from hell, and to bring it to eternal happiness, and thus to do you the greatest kindness that one man can do another. There is no doubt, it would be far easier for the confessor to hold his tongue, to let you have your way, to absolve you from all your obligations, and thus to win your esteem. What pleasure or profit can it be to him to place restrictions on you, to reprove you, and to make you uneasy by reminding you of your obligations? He certainly would never think of doing such things, if his conscience and the nature of the case did not oblige him to do them. Another, who does not know his duty, or who, through human respect, is little concerned for your soul or his own, can have it easy enough; for it does not cost him much trouble to say: sir, you need not be uneasy about that; madam, there is not much harm in that; it is not necessary in such circumstances to do away with that abuse, to avoid that house or that occasion, to

make that restitution, etc.; "I absolve thee from thy sins." There is no great art required for that. But what does he seek and gain by it? Either to please you, or to avoid trouble. Meanwhile, as to your soul's welfare, he thinks as the high-priests did when Judas brought back the thirty pieces of silver: "What is that to us? Look thou to it."¹ On the other hand, the confessor who speaks as his conscience suggests, although he may seem severe to you, shows that in reality he has your welfare at heart, and therefore you should value him all the more highly.

Yes, if you wish to lighten your confessor's burden, you must tell him candidly how the matter stands with you, and what are your doubts. See, Father, you should say to him, I appear before you as before Jesus Christ, my judge; I have done so-and-so; I have followed this or that custom; some say it is not lawful, and therefore I am disturbed about it; what do you think of it? What have I to do in future? I beg of you, for God's sake, to whom I wish from my heart to be converted, to tell me the truth plainly; do not flatter me; remind me of my duty; I take your soul as a pledge of the safety of mine in this business. In that way you would show that you are a true penitent and that you are earnestly resolved to be converted and to save your soul. There is no fear of my doing that, some say; I know very well that, if I were to speak in that style, I should have to give up certain customs of mine, break off that intimacy, send away that person, restore those ill-gotten goods, and avoid the occasion of sin. But I cannot do that, and therefore I will go to that other confessor; he is a good, easy man, who will not trouble me with questions and exhortations, and will give me absolution. Aha! so we have found you out at last! We have at length got to the bottom of the matter. For, generally speaking, my dear brethren, they who make choice of unlearned and inexperienced confessors are people who do not wish to amend their lives. And it is almost exclusively for them that this sermon is intended.

There is one request I have to make of such sinners, and I would take it as a great favor if they would grant it. What is it? Do not, I beg of you, go to any confessor at all. Do not confess your sins, even at Easter; and, if you are still of the same mind, not even on your death-bed; it is better for you to go to hell as you are. For without such confessions as you make, you will at least not be buried so deep in hell as you would be with the guilt of them on your souls, since all your confessions are

Therefore the sinner who wishes to do real penance should make known to him all his anxieties of conscience.

Conclusion and exhortation to select a good confessor.

¹ Quid ad nos? tu videris.—Matt. xxvii. 4.

sacrilegious. But if you are seriously resolved on doing penance, then I have a far greater favor to ask, which is more agreeable to me and more advantageous to you, and I ask it in the words of Tobias to his son, when he was sending him into a distant country: "Go now and seek out some faithful man to go with thee."¹ You do not know the way, and might easily go astray; look out for some one, then, to accompany you, and bring you on the right road. O sinner, I say to you, too, you have wandered far from the path that leads to heaven, and are in actual danger of eternal death; go, then, if you wish to return to God, and seek out some one who will bring you back to the right road; seek out a learned, prudent, and pious confessor, and open your conscience to him as thoroughly as you would to the almighty God, and follow his advice in all things.

and to keep
to him.

But if you have found one of the kind, do not leave him for another without necessity; keep to him as long as you can. This is another point in which many faults are committed, for there are people who do not remain with the one confessor, but are constantly changing. That cannot possibly be good for them; for, in the first place, they who fall into sin through inveterate habit, or who are in the proximate occasion of sin, must keep to the one confessor or, otherwise, tell their sins again to their new confessor, so that, at least, he may have some knowledge of their conscience; or else he will not be able to help them, and their confessions will be invalid. In the second place, they who do not usually commit mortal sins cannot receive proper guidance and direction if they have not always the same guide, who knows their conscience and can prescribe wholesome remedies for them. He who has been sick of a fever and has been cured by a good doctor, if he gets sick again, will send for the same doctor. Why? Because he knows the sick man's constitution and can prescribe for him at once, which a stranger could not do. So it is also, due proportion being observed, with the maladies of the soul. Therefore, if possible, keep to the one confessor, provided he is a good one, and pray to that effect often, that God may send His good angel to lead you and to keep you from wandering off the right road to salvation.² I am sick in my soul, O Lord; lead me to a physician who will certainly cure me. I am blind and ignorant; grant that I may find a guide who will keep me on the right path. Give me a confessor who will oppose my evil incli-

¹ Perge nunc, et inquire tibi aliquem fidelem virum, qui eat tecum.—Tob. v. 4.

² Mitte angelum tuum bonum.—II. Mach. xv. 23.

nations by his instructions, reproofs, and exhortations, and who will cleanse my soul from all stain, that I may be converted to Thee with my whole heart, and after this life arrive at that happy place where nothing defiled may enter. Amen.

THIRTIETH SERMON.

ON THE MATTER OF CONFESSION.

Subject.

One must confess sins, his own sins, and all his sins.—*Preached on the sixth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

At illi tacuerunt.—Luke xiv. 4.
“ But they held their peace.”

Introduction.

There is a time to speak, and a time to be silent, says the Wise Man. To speak when one should be silent is not right and may be the cause of many sins; to be silent when one should speak is also wrong, and may occasion much mischief. The Pharisees, as we read in to-day's Gospel, were silent, but not with a good motive, for partly they knew not what answer to make Our Lord, and partly they did not wish to answer Him, because they were filled with hatred and envy of Him. I have hitherto, my dear brethren, explained the necessary acts that must precede confession; now I have to speak of the confession itself, as a time, not for being silent, but for speaking and candidly acknowledging—What?

Plan of Discourse.

What must one acknowledge and confess? Answer: Sins. Such will be the first part. What sins? Answer: His own. Such will be the second part. How many sins? Answer: All the grievous sins he has on his conscience. Such will be the third part. One must confess sins, his own sins, and all his sins. There you have the whole subject of this instruction.

That we may understand this and observe it, gives us Thy grace, O Holy Ghost, which we beg of thee through the merits

It is sins
alone that
one must
confess.

of Mary and the intercession of our holy guardian angels. The only necessary matter that is considered in worldly courts of justice, when proceedings are instituted against an evil-doer, is what is called the "corpus delicti," or the crime of which he is accused. If the crime cannot be proved to have been committed, there is no case against him. So also it is in the tribunal of penance; the only necessary matter concerning which an accusation can be made and judgment pronounced is a sin that has been certainly committed by the penitent. Still, there is a great difference between the two tribunals. If I wish to be acquitted by the worldly court of justice, I must set to work to prove that I have not committed the crime I am accused of, and to convict my adversary of a falsehood; or, at least, I must so defend myself, that the judge will not be able to bring the charge home to me. But if I acknowledge my guilt, I have nothing to expect but that sentence will be passed on me. "Truly," says St. Zeno, speaking of the sacrament of penance, "that is a new kind of justice, in which the accused is condemned if he excuses himself, and acquitted, if he accuses himself."¹ But if he cannot bring forward any crime of which to accuse himself he has nothing to do with this tribunal, and cannot receive absolution, nor the grace of the sacrament. The necessary matter for this sacrament is sin, and sin that has been committed after baptism; for other sins do not belong to confession and are not capable of sacramental absolution; so that a Jew or heathen who is baptized in his old age, although he may have been guilty of every sin that can be committed, yet cannot make any of those sins the subject of his confession; and Christians who have never committed a mortal sin are not obliged to go to confession; for no one is bound to confess venial sins. Thus, if one has not committed either mortal or venial sin, he cannot receive the grace of the sacrament of penance in confession, and the priest who attempts to give absolution to such a man would commit a grievous sin, as well as the man himself who seeks absolution. Therefore Mary, the most Blessed Virgin and Mother of God, who never had the least stain of sin on her soul, could not have received the sacrament of penance, and the story told about her having received absolution from St. John, in order to obtain an increase of sanctifying grace, is a mere fabrication. Therefore it is sins, and sins alone, that are the matter of confession; and

¹ *Novum profecto iudicii genus, in quo reus, si excusaverit crimen, damnabitur; absolvitur si fatetur.*—St. Zeno. serm. 2, ad neoph.

that which is not a sin, and is of no help to explain one's sins, is altogether out of place in confession.

From this it follows that they act inconsistently who confess in pharisaical style. The Pharisee, as we read in the Gospel of St. Luke, stood before the altar in the temple, and boasted in the sight of the Lord of his good works: "I fast twice in a week; I give tithes of all that I possess."¹ Such is the way in which many penitents act nowadays; instead of confessing their sins, they confess their justices,² as the venerable Bede says; they tell all about their virtues, their practices of piety, the troubles they have every day, and the crosses they have to bear. When they have told one or two insignificant faults, they say, that is all I know; I hear Mass every day; I say my prayers morning and evening; I wrong no man; if I hear anything bad of another, I say to myself, what is that to me? I have my share of troubles; many things happen to annoy me every day; it is hard to bear, but I try to have patience; I do not forget that we must do something for the sake of going to heaven; if people say anything against me, I hold my tongue, etc. But what has all that to do with your confession? Those are not sins. You do not come here to wipe out whatever good you have done, but to accuse yourself sorrowfully of the evil you have done. Hear what the penitent David says to instruct you on this point: "I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord."³ If you have no more to say about your sins, then you should make an end of your confession, and not bring into it what does not belong to it.

Hence they are wrong who relate their good works in confession.

The Evangelist says of the Pharisee in the Gospel: "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."⁴ It appears that there are some who have learned from him to make their confession, for they tell what they have not done. They say, I do not remember anything in particular; I do not curse, or swear, or steal, or speak badly of others, I do no wrong to any one, and am very careful not to injure my neighbor in any way, etc. I sincerely repent of all my sins, they say at the end. What sort of a confession is that? What sins are you sorry for? You have not confessed a single one yet. Have

Who confess sins they have not committed.

¹ *Jejuno bis in sabbato declinas do omnium, quæ possideo.*—Luke xviii. 12.

² *Confitentur justitiam suam.*

³ *Confitebor adversum me injustitiam meam Domino.*—Ps. xxxi. 5.

⁴ *Phariseus stans, hæc apud se orabat: Deus, gratias ago tibi, quia non sum sicut cæteri omnium, raptores, injusti, adulteri.*—Luke xviii. 11.

you ever told a lie? No, Father, is the answer; it is wrong to lie. Have you done this or that? God forbid; it would be a sin to do that. And what do you come here for, then? I come to confess my sins. What? Sins you have not committed? But they are not matter for confession. You must tell your own sins, or else the priest cannot give you absolution; if you have never committed a sin in your life, you can go away; the sacrament of penance is not for such as you. In the tribunal of penance one must act towards himself as he would in a worldly court of justice against one whom he is accusing. Now, would it not be a ridiculous thing for you to say of Peter, for instance, hear, O judge, I appear against this man; I do not know anything particularly bad about him, he has not stolen or committed murder, or wronged any one. That is all I have to say; it is for you now to pronounce sentence on him. Would it not be foolish to act in that way? But not less inconsistent are you, when you accuse yourself in that way in the tribunal of penance, where you should come to declare your own sins.

Who mix
up with
their sins a
number of
things that
do not be-
long to con-
fession.

There are others, finally, who, although they tell their sins, yet are not satisfied with that, but bring in a lot of things that are not matter for confession at all, so that the confessor has need of all his patience to listen to a whole string of useless talk. They could, if they wished, tell their sins in a few words, but that will not do them; they must needs give the whole history of the sin, they describe the time and place in which it was committed, what was going on at the time, what was the consequence, what was the cause of it, the manner in which the thing happened; all these things have to be told with the utmost minuteness, as if they had learned it off by heart, and wished to say it as children do a lesson. For instance, a woman comes to confession (I am merely supposing a case now, from which those whom this matter concerns may learn the faults they commit in confession). A woman comes to confession and begins as follows: ah, I wish I could live in peace and quiet at home, but I cannot manage it, no matter what I do. My husband is a great trouble to me; he is in the habit of drinking too much; he knows that it is bad for him, and I tell him so, too; but all to no purpose. But, the priest says, this is no sin, did you do any thing wrong on account of it? Wait, Father, and I will tell you all about it, is the answer he gets; and she goes on in her description; last Sunday he went to the ale-house again (God forgive those who lead him astray; if it was not for them he would never think of going

there), and he came home at ten o'clock at night; I was already in bed with the children, but when I heard the knock at the door, I knew who it was. Ah, said I to myself, here you are again, you drunken beast! How are you to go to work to-morrow? And I had to get up and open the door for him.

Wait a bit, says the priest, I will try to guess your sin; you gave way to impatience, did you not? and cursed him and called him names? No, Father, you must hear me out, and then you will know all about it. And then she begins again, until the unfortunate priest is obliged to let her have her way, or else the story would never come to an end. When she has found her cue, and taken up the thread of her story, she continues: yes, it was just as I expected; he was so far gone that he could hardly stand. I had made up my mind not to say a word to him, for I know from experience that it does not do to talk to him when he has a drop in. But, O cursed drink! the quieter I kept, the more noise he made, until he turned everything in the house upside down. Go to bed, I said to him; what will the neighbors think of you? But it was no use; he kept on flinging the chairs about the room. At last I could stand it no longer, for I am only human, after all; may so-and-so fly away with your body and soul, you drunken beast, said I; I was in such a rage that I hardly knew what I was saying, and that continued for some hours. The next morning I was sorry for having offended the almighty God, but it was too late, etc. And, says the confessor at last, did I not tell you how it would end? You might have said at once that you were in a passion for some hours, and that you cursed another while in that state; that would have been quite enough to make known your sins. All the rest was mere useless talk, that had nothing to do with confession. What do you think, my dear brethren, of that way of confessing? Is it not very stupid? Now all who in any way use superfluous words in confession can apply this to themselves. And there are many who make mistakes of the kind when confessing sins against holy purity; they imagine that it is necessary to give a whole history of the temptations and allurements that led them into sin; many, too, when accusing themselves of sins of anger and impatience, describe the crosses and trials they have to bear, and their motive in doing so appears to be to lessen the malice of their sin, although that does not properly belong to confession.

. Yes, you say, but if these things are not sins, then it is no harm to speak of them, as they help to explain the state of one's

To the confessor's great annoyance.

And to the great injury

of other
souls.

conscience, and thus one is easier in his mind, since he is sure of having told everything. So you think it is no harm? Do you wish to know what harm it does? In the first place, you by your useless talk occasion a loss of precious time, which you could have employed far better for the salvation of your soul. In the second place, you bother your confessor, who has perhaps been already a long time in the confessional; it would require an angel to bear such talk patiently, and therefore you are to blame if he is so tired that he is unable to attend properly to the other penitents who come to him. Thirdly, during the time that you waste in unnecessary talk, three or four people might have made their confession, instead of which they have to sit there waiting, and perhaps giving way to impatience, instead of exciting themselves to contrition for their sins, while the length of time you take fills them with all kinds of suspicions about you, and makes them perhaps use very strong language against you and the priest; nay, some of them may get up and go away altogether, thus losing confession and holy Communion. Is not that harm enough? Going to confession is like going to the mill, in this respect: when people bring their corn to be ground, they pour it out on the millstone, each one in turn, and when it is ground, they go away. What would you think of one who, because he happens to be the first, spends his time in talking to the miller, and keeps the others waiting? Eh? you would say, this is no place for talk; if you do not wish to attend to your business, then let us in before you. But, he might answer, I am the first. Well, if you are the first, leave off talking and get your corn ground; we cannot wait here the whole day. So it is also with those who are going to confession. No one has anything to do there but to tell his sins and hear what the confessor has to say by way of advice or command; when that is done, he must go away and make room for others, who have just as much right as he has to confess their sins.

The devil is
often the
cause of
such useless
talk.

It has happened more than once that the devil, who seeks to make mischief out of even the holiest things, has inspired witches and sorcerers to present themselves at the confessional, when there is a great number of penitents, and to take up the priest's time by telling a lot of the most fearful sins, with no other object than to disturb the others, and to prevent them from reaping the benefit of the sacrament. On one occasion the devil appeared in the confessional in human form; the priest, who was a holy man, began at last to suspect something, and he adjured his penitent, in the name of Jesus Christ, to tell

him who he was, when the latter acknowledged that he was an evil spirit. "But," asked the priest, "why do you come to confession, since it can do you no good?" "Oh," answered the other with a laugh, "it has done me enough good to-day; for while I have been in here some of those who were waiting outside have grown impatient and have offended God anew by their murmurs, and suspicions, and curses against you and me, and thus they have taken all the good out of their sorrow for their sins. Others, again, have gone away, so that I will be able to keep them under my yoke for a while longer, and, as they are in the state of sin, they will not be able to do anything for their souls during that time. Besides that, I have wearied you, so that you will not be in a position to help other sinners who may come to you to-day. Now I have made my confession, but I do not want penance or absolution." See what you gain by your useless talk in the confessional. It is another thing for one who wants advice to state his case when the priest is not busy; but if there are many people waiting for confession he should defer asking advice, until some more suitable opportunity. Sins alone are properly the matter of confession, and therefore every one should say with David; "I will confess against myself, my injustice to the Lord." Mark those words, my dear brethren. David says, in the name of all true penitents, "against myself," and, "my injustice." Therefore he who goes to confession must confess, not only sins, but also his own sins, as we shall see briefly in the

Second Part.

The sacred tribunal of penance has this feature in contradistinction to worldly tribunals, that the penitent appears there as his own accuser, and no one else's. We have seen already, when speaking of detraction, that one may sin grievously against his neighbor, and lessen his good name before the priest, in the confessional as well as outside of it, if he makes known the name of his accomplice in a grievous sin, and the priest knows that person, or can easily know him by learning his name (unless, by making known his name to the confessor, I can prevent grievous injury; for then Christian charity or the duty of fraternal correction would oblige me to disclose the name, that the person may be helped to amend). Otherwise we must be very careful not to say anything which would tend to lessen another's reputation in the eyes of the priest.

One must
confess
only his
own sins.

They err in this point who confess the sins of others and injure their neighbor's character.

They err grievously in this particular who, when confessing sins of impurity, mention the name of the person who led them astray; or who, when accusing themselves of suspicious and rash judgments, say who it was who gave rise to them. They act like Adam and Eve in paradise, and throw the blame of their sins on others whom they name: "The woman whom Thou gavest me to be my companion gave me of the tree, and I did eat," that was the cause of my sin. That is a custom very prevalent nowadays amongst married people; the husband tells his wife's sins, and the wife, as is more frequently the case, the vices of her husband. In the same way, servants accuse their masters and mistresses, while the latter, in turn, complain of the thefts committed by their servants. There are others who complain of the faults of their brothers and sisters, and of their neighbors, with whom they cannot live in peace; and thus they make others bear the blame of their curses, of their hatred and anger, of their quarrelling and dissension. But what is the good of it all? Why do you come to confession? Is it to tell other people's sins, or your own? For what do you expect absolution? For the sins of others? Do you intend to bring an absolution to your husband or wife, to your brother or sister, or your neighbor? You should let them tell their own sins. "Let every one prove his own work," says St. Paul, "and so he shall have glory in himself only, and not in another. For every one shall bear his own burden."² Every one, then, must carry his own burden to the confessional. Your husband or wife, your servant or neighbor, have not commissioned you to relate their transgressions to the priest, and if you do relate them you cannot bring any grace for the guilty ones home with you; all you do is to lessen the good opinion the priest had of them.

Penitents must be careful in this respect.

Confess only your own sins, then, and not those of others. Not without reason did the penitent David beg of God to "set a watch before his mouth, and a door round about his lips."³ Why? That, as St. Augustine says, he might confess his sins properly. David did not pray that his lips might be closed altogether, but that a door might be placed around them, which could be opened at pleasure,⁴ and closed when necessary. If a man has two birds in a cage, and wishes to let one of them free,

¹ Mulier, quam dedisti mihi sociam, dedit mihi de ligno, et comedi.—Gen. iii. 12.

² Opus suum probet unusquisque, et sic in semetipso tantum gloriam habebit, et non in altero. Unusquisque enim onus suum portabit. — Gal. vi. 4, 5.

³ Pone, Domine, custodiam ori meo, et ostium circumstantiæ labiis meis.—Ps. cxl. 3.

⁴ Non dixit claustrum, sed ostium.

how does he manage so as not to lose the other as well? He opens the door carefully, and when the bird he wishes to get rid of is out, he shuts it again at once. In the same way must you act when you go to confession. You have sometimes two kinds of sin shut up in your memory, your own and your neighbor's; you must open your mouth to tell your own sins, but so carefully that, when you have told them, you shut it again at once, lest a word should escape you about the sins of your neighbor. Finally, you must open your mouth so as to declare all your sins, as we shall see in the

Third Part.

No sin is forgiven without the others; no sin is forgiven unless it is declared in confession, when one has the opportunity of doing so; therefore all, without exception (I am speaking now of mortal sins only, for there is no obligation of confessing venial sins), which have not yet been taken away by the sacrament of penance, must be declared in confession. This is an undoubted command of God, according to the Council of Trent, so that it requires no further proof. And, moreover, all grievous sins must be declared as they are on one's conscience; doubtful sins are to be confessed as doubtful, and certain, as certain; as well as the number of times they have been committed, as far as it is known to the penitent, and the circumstances which change the species of the sin. For instance, a rash oath is a sin against the second commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." But if, in addition, that oath injures one's neighbor, it is a sin against the seventh commandment as well, "Thou shalt not steal." If, moreover, the oath is a false one, it is also a sin against the eighth commandment: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." Thus it is a threefold sin and must be declared with all its circumstances. The difference of the species of sins is principally to be observed in the matter of impurity; namely, what sort was the sinful act, and whether it was committed with a single or a married person, or with a relation, and in what degree of affinity or consanguinity, or with a person consecrated to God, or with a person of the opposite sex. Even in thought, the nature of the sin can change. It is one thing to have a deliberate pleasure in an impure and unlawful imagination; and another, to entertain a wilful desire, inclination, or purpose to commit an impure act; and in this latter case I must say what was the action that

One must confess all his mortal sins, as they are in his conscience.

formed the object of my desire, or the person with regard to whom it was formed; for all these circumstances change the nature of the sin of desire. In a word, I am bound to declare all the grievous sins I have committed and have not yet confessed, according to their gravity, and the number of times I have been guilty of them, as far as my conscience, after a diligent and reasonable examination, is aware of them. What I cannot remember without any fault of mine will be forgiven by the sacramental absolution with what I tell.

Herein
faults are
committed
by those
who confess
doubtful
sins as cer-
tain.

Herein many grievous faults are committed, firstly, through the pious simplicity of those who, in order to leave out nothing, make a certain of a doubtful sin, and even increase the number of their sins; thus, for instance, they cannot say for certain whether they consented to bad thoughts three or four times, and to make sure of saying the right number, as they think, they accuse themselves of having consented to the thought five times. But you thus declare too much, more than you really have on your conscience, and therefore your confession is not truthful. Or, else, if they cannot remember any particular sins, they accuse themselves in a doubtful way, through sheer ignorant fear and anxiety; perhaps I have done that, they say; perhaps I have joined in an uncharitable conversation; perhaps I have given scandal to others, etc.; or, if I have sinned in that way, if I have perhaps cursed, or said something against my neighbor, etc. What sort of a confession is that? Would you accuse a man before a worldly tribunal in this way: I accuse Paul, in case he has committed a theft, or, perhaps, he has killed a man? That would be a ridiculous accusation, and it would be impossible to pronounce any sentence in consequence of it. If you have good grounds for believing or doubting whether you have sinned or not, then your confession is not sufficient, but you must say straight out, I have sinned; I am in doubt as to whether I have consented to temptation in this or that instance. But if you have no grounds or reasonable cause to believe or to doubt, why do you say, perhaps I have sinned; perhaps I have injured my neighbor?

Or certain
sins as
doubtful.

There are others who do quite the contrary, and who make out of a certain number of sins, that they could easily find out, an uncertain and doubtful number. They use the word "about" with almost every sin they confess; I have done that about six times; I have cursed about four times; I have had bad thoughts about once. What do you mean by that? To say you had them

about once means that you had them twice or not at all. And as the "about" is appended to nearly every sin, how can the confessor form his judgment concerning what he hears? He must think to himself, either that man does not know the meaning of the word, or else he has not carefully examined his conscience, or he does not wish to tell the exact number of times he has sinned. That difficulty arises especially when the "about" is added to the confession of mortal sins that are accomplished in outward act, as if, for example, I were to say, I have committed impurity about three times. Grievous sins of that kind are not so easily forgotten, and one can readily remember the number of times he has been guilty of them; so that, if a person were to come to me with the "about," especially when the number of sins is small, I should say to him, you are not acting honestly with God and your conscience, nor do you wish to declare the exact number of your sins.

There are others who do not mention the number at all; they say simply, I have cursed; I have been drunk; I have sung impure songs; I have committed impurity; or else, I have often spoken impurely; I have often grievously injured my neighbor's character. Thus the poor priest, who, in order not to distract his penitent, has to keep silent till the end, is obliged to task his memory and to go over the whole thing again, in order to find out the exact number of times the different sins have been committed. Now, if you did not intend to declare what you knew to be the number of your sins, you have made a bad confession, and it would be better for you to have remained away, because you have thus incurred the guilt of a grievous sacrilege. But if you did intend declaring the number of your sins as well as you could, why did you not do so without waiting to be asked? Why should you compel the priest to ask you such a number of troublesome questions? The same holds good also with regard to those who, when accusing themselves in confession, say, I have had impure thoughts very often, but do not state whether they have consented to them or not, or whether they had a wilful desire or intention of doing anything against holy purity. But, you ask, if one does not know anything certain of the number of his sins; what is he to do then? My answer is that, in that case, you must declare the number of your sins as far as you have been able to discover it in a diligent examen of conscience. But if one is in the habit of sin (as is the case with those who keep up an impure intimacy), then it is, humanly

Or who do not give the number of their sins.

speaking, impossible to remember all the different times that sin has been committed in thought, desire, word, look, and act, so that it is enough for such a one to say that he has lived in unlawful intimacy with a person for so many months or years, that during that time nearly all his thoughts and desires had reference to the object of his passion, and that he was accustomed to commit sinful actions so often during the day, or the week. In circumstances of the kind, that is the only thing that can be done, and an experienced confessor will have no difficulty in forming a pretty exact idea of the number of sins that have been committed.

Those who
tell nothing
but what
the priest
asks them
about.

There are others who err through grievous and culpable ignorance, when they rely altogether on the questions put them by their confessor; and amongst them there are some who confess nothing except what the priest extorts from them, as it were. Nay, they sometimes boast afterwards and say, the priest was rather sharp with me, but he was not able to find out everything. Unhappy souls! Which of you is deceived? The priest, or you? Even if the latter succeeded in that way in discovering all your sins, your confession is nevertheless a bad one, if you are determined not to tell your sins as they are on your conscience, without being asked. We have an example of this in Holy Scripture. Contrary to the divine command, Achan had kept out of the spoils of Jericho a costly mantle, two hundred pieces of silver, and some other things, whereupon God commanded Josue to find out the malefactor. In obedience to this order, Josue cast lots on all the tribes of Israel, and then on all the families and households, until at last he found out Achan. "My son," said he to him, "give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and confess, and tell me what thou hast done, hide it not." ¹ On the discovery of the theft of which he was guilty Achan was at once stoned to death, and all his possessions were burned to ashes. But I ask here, was not that a severe punishment for such a small fault? Achan had acknowledged his sin to Josue, and had confessed it with all its circumstances. "And Achan answered Josue, and said to him: Indeed, I have sinned against the Lord the God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done." ² "For I saw among the spoils a scarlet garment exceeding good, and two hundred sicles of silver, and a golden rule of fifty sicles; and I coveted

¹ Fili mi, da gloriam Domino Deo Israel, et confitere, atque indica mihi quid feceris; ne abscondas.—Jos. vii. 19.

² Responditque Achan Josue, et dixit ei: Vere ego peccavi Domino Deo Israel, et sic & sic feci.—Ibid. 20.

them, and I took them away, and hid them in the ground in the midst of my tent, and the silver I covered with the earth that I dug up." ¹ That his confession was so far candid was shown by the event, for "Josue therefore sent ministers, who, running to his tent, found all hid in the same place, together with the silver." ² But why was not Achan forgiven? He did not deserve forgiveness, says Rupert, because he did not confess his sin until his guilt had been detected by casting the lots; if he had come of his own accord and confessed, he would probably have found grace. Christians, do not depend too much on your confessor; for even if he finds out all your sins by his questions, and you had not the intention of declaring them all candidly, that forced confession of yours will help you little to the pardon of your sins; and you are bound to repent of your evil disposition, and to confess that you did not intend declaring all your sins, unless the priest asked you about them. "Tell if thou hast anything to justify thyself," ³ says God to us by the Prophet Isaias, a passage which the Septuagint renders as follows: "declare thy iniquities first, that thou mayest be justified." ⁴

Finally, they who commit the worst fault in this particular are those who, through fear or shame, conceal a grievous sin knowingly in confession. This is a new and a terrible sin, which is the occasion of many bad confessions and unworthy Communions, especially amongst young people. Ah, wretched slaves of sin! why do you go to confession, if you do not wish to get rid of your sin? St. Sebastian once told Chromatius, the Roman prefect, that, if he wished to recover his health, he should give up all his idolatrous images. Chromatius at once gave up two hundred of them, but he did not recover. There is something wrong, said Sebastian; perhaps you have still an image hidden somewhere. You must get rid of them all, or else there is no hope for you; whereupon the prefect brought out some gold and silver idols that he kept in a box, and he was restored to health. Sinner, do you wish to regain the health of your soul, and to escape eternal death? Then you must give up all your idols, that is, you must declare all your mortal sins in confession; for, if you conceal one of them wilfully, your confession is worthless, and

Those who
conceal sins
through
shame.

¹ Vidi enim inter spolia pallium coccineum valde bonum, et ducentos siclos argenti, regulamque auream quinquaginta siclorum; et concupiscens abstuli, et abscondi in terra contra medium tabernaculi mei, argentumque fossa humo operui.—Jos. vii. 21.

² Misit ergo Josue ministros, qui currentes ad tabernaculum illius, repererunt cuncta abscondita in eodem loco, et argentum simul.—Ibid. 22.

³ Narra si quid habes, ut justificeris.—Isa. xlvi. 26.

⁴ Dic tu iniquitates tuas primus, ut justificeris.

there is no hope of eternal life for you, if you are determined to conceal it always. I say no more on this point at present, as I shall have another opportunity of speaking on it more at length.

Conclusion
and exhortation
to
confess all
sins.

Ah, dear Christians! I beg of you, by way of conclusion, to make an earnest resolution, like that hero who wished to encourage his soldiers to meet the enemy: "let us either conquer, or die."¹ We must either overcome our shame, and candidly declare all our grievous sins, or else we must die an eternal death. But we will not be so foolish as to choose the latter. We will rather say, with the penitent David, "I have said: I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord;" I will declare to the priest, who holds the place of God, sins, my own sins, and all my sins, even the most secret. "And Thou hast forgiven the wickedness of my sin."² Then, O God, according to Thy infallible promise, Thou wilt forgive my sins, that I may not die the death, but enjoy eternal life with Thee. Amen.

THIRTY-FIRST SERMON.

ON THE MANNER IN WHICH ONE SHOULD MAKE HIS CONFESSION.

Subject.

One should make his confession, 1. humbly; 2. candidly.—*Preached on the nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

At ille obmutuit.—Matt. xxii. 12.
"But he was silent."

Introduction.

But could not the poor man have implored mercy and pardon? There is no criminal so wicked or so desperate who does not ask for grace, even after sentence has been pronounced on him. "But he was silent," so that there was no merey for him. My dear brethren, when we offend the great God by mortal sin, we lose the wedding-garment of sanctifying grace and are doomed to eternal darkness; but we have an easy and advantageous

¹ Ant vincendum aut moriendum milites est.

² Et tu remisisti impietatem peccati mei.—Ps. xxxi. 5.

means of regaining our lost cause, namely, the holy sacrament of penance. And how comes it, then, I ask, that, in spite of this, there are countless numbers of sinners, even amongst those who frequently receive this sacrament, who still remain in their unhappy state? Do you wish to know the reason of it? They act like the unhappy man in to-day's Gospel: "But he was silent." That is to say, they wish to say nothing about their sins, inasmuch as they defer repentance; or they do not confess what they should confess; or they do not confess in the proper manner; and therefore they do not receive pardon from their angry Judge. I have already explained what one must confess, namely, sins, his own sins, and all his sins. But how must he confess all his sins?

Plan of Discourse.

One should make his confession humbly; as we shall see in the first part. One should confess candidly; as we shall see in the second part.

Help us all to do this by Thy powerful grace, O Lord, which we ask of Thee through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

There is no virtue which so wins the favor of God, as humility; it is almost the only thing that God has any regard to, when He wishes to admit man into His friendship, or to preserve him in it. "The Lord is high, and looketh on the low," says the Prophet David, "and the high He knoweth afar off."¹ That is, He looks on the humble and lowly, but turns His eyes away from the proud. Humility is the measure by which He distributes His graces and favors: "And do ye all insinuate humility one to another," says St. Peter in his First Epistle, "for God resisteth the proud, but to the humble He giveth grace."² For it is not the lofty mountains but the lowly valleys that receive the greatest share of the rains that fall from the heavens. "He hath regarded the humility of his handmaid," says the Queen of heaven of herself, she who was the greatest, and who looked on herself as the least of all creatures, and whose humility raised her to the dignity of Mother of God, and exalted her above the whole of creation; "for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed."³ The holy Fathers say that without hu-

Every one must humble himself to receive grace from God.

¹ Excelsus Dominus, et humilla respicit, et alta longe cognoscit.—Ps. cxxxvii. 6.

² Omnes autem invicem humilitatem insinuate; quia Deus superbis resistit, humilibus autem dat gratiam.—I. Pet. v. 5.

³ Respexit humilitatem ancillæ suæ; ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes.—Luke i. 48.

mility not even the Blessed Virgin would have been pleasing to God. But enough of this for the present, my dear brethren; I have spoken of it more at length on a former occasion; still, one can never say too much in praise of humility, for he who is not humble of heart has no claim to the kingdom of heaven, according to the words of Our Lord Himself.

How much more the sinner, in order to obtain pardon!

This one conclusion I draw from it to-day: if God requires, even from His dear friends, that they should humble themselves, in order to retain His friendship and to receive further graces from Him, with how much more reason will He not insist on His enemies humbling themselves, if they wish to regain His grace and favor after having despised them? And, indeed, the very name of penitent sinner means one who humbles himself and is filled with contrition. Who are you, then? I might ask, as the priest asked John the Baptist; who are you, when you come to confession? What is your object? You are a beggar about to implore the greatest of favors from an infinitely great and almighty Lord, who has not the least need of you, and who is at the same time exceedingly wroth with you. You are a traitor guilty of despising the divine Majesty, which you now wish to sue for pardon. You are a debtor who have not a farthing wherewith to pay, and who, having been kept in prison up to the present, are now about to beg humbly to have the debt remitted. You are a poor sinner who have seen the evil of your ways, and acknowledge that you ought by right to be led forth to execution, with a halter round your neck, and who now appear before your angry Judge to implore of Him to be merciful to you, to revoke the sentence of condemnation He has already pronounced against you, and to give you the grace of eternal life. See what a poor mortal you are! In such circumstances I leave yourself to judge with what deep interior and exterior humility you should approach the sacred tribunal.

In the confessional he appears as a criminal before his judge.

Consider the miserable state of the criminal whose case has just been tried. How downcast and humble he stands or kneels before his judge, with his eyes cast down on the ground, and his face covered with the blush of shame, waiting with trembling anxiety for the sentence of his condemnation to be pronounced! How would he act if he had but the least hope of obtaining pardon and release by humbly asking for mercy? O sinner, what are you? When you make your appearance in the confessional, you are an unhappy wretch on whom sentence of eternal death has been already passed; yet, as St. Paul says, you are now be-

fore the throne of mercy, where you can procure the revocation of that sentence, and obtain a full pardon. The priest before whom you kneel, although he is himself a poor mortal, who is as much in need of the grace and help of God as you are, is nevertheless appointed your lawful judge in the place of God. He represents and acts in the person of Jesus Christ, the Judge of the living and the dead; and he it is who says: "I absolve thee from thy sins," when you have disclosed to him, with sorrow of heart, the sins of which you are guilty. If he spoke those words in his own person, one might with justice murmur against him, and ask him the same question the Scribes and Pharisees asked Our Lord, whom they looked on as a mere mortal, when He said to the paralytic man, "Thy sins are forgiven thee."¹ What does He say, asked the Scribes and Pharisees: "Who is this who speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"²

No; when you go to confession, you must not imagine that you have to deal with the priest alone. There is another confessor, or rather invisible Judge, seated beside him, Jesus Christ, whom the eternal Father has made Judge of all creatures. He it is who hears your accusation in order to absolve you from your sins; He raises His hand with the priest, and utters by the lips of the priest the words of absolution; He shares with you the infinite merits of His precious Blood and of the death He suffered for you, to satisfy for and to blot out your sins, and He it is who receives you again into His grace and friendship. Is it not right, then, that you should appear before such a Judge with the greatest modesty, humility, and lowliness, in order to beg His pardon? Although you may be a learned, rich, and great man in the eyes of the world, you are not deserving of any special consideration on that account in the confessional. You must, so to speak, strip yourself of your personality, and lay it aside before entering the sacred tribunal, in which lord and peasant, beggar and king, are on the same footing; for they then appear in no other character but that of poor sinners, doomed to eternal death, who humbly approach their Judge in order to beg for mercy; and therefore it behooves all to behave in a manner befitting such a character, that is, with the greatest inward and outward humility.

Who is Christ; therefore the sinner must be most humble.

Read in the holy Scriptures how the Ninivites did penance: Like those penitents

¹ Remittuntur tibi peccata tua.—Luke v. 20.

² Quis est hic, qui loquitur blasphemias? Quis potest dimittere peccata nisi solus Deus? —Ibid. 21

who re-
ceived
grace from
God.

“They put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least.”¹ The king himself, “rose up out of his throne, and cast away his robe from him, and was clothed in sackcloth, and sat in ashes.”² There was no distinction then between the lady and her maid, the master and his servant, the king and the lowest of his scullions; for they had all alike assumed the character of penitents, that is, of men who were humbling themselves. This self-abjection and humiliation touched the compassionate heart of the good God, so that He recalled the word He had spoken, sheathed the sword He had drawn to avenge Himself, and spared the whole city. “And God saw their works, that they were turned from their evil way; and God had mercy with regard to the evil which He had said that He would do them, and He did it not.”³ It was by a similar humiliation that king Achab averted the destruction that he had been threatened with. “He rent his garments,” says the holy Scripture, “and put hair-cloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and slept in sack-cloth, and walked with his head cast down.”⁴ Hear how God boasted almost of this to the Prophet Elias: “Hast thou not seen Achab humbled before Me? therefore, because he hath humbled himself for My sake, I will not bring the evil in his days,”⁵ and while he lives, he shall not suffer punishment. A public sinner, who stands humbly at the door of the temple, and for shame and sorrow hardly dares to raise his eyes to heaven, goes down to his house justified, while the proud Pharisee, in spite of his good works, is rejected by God in the same temple. For, as Basil of Seleucia says, “I will believe in repentance when it is accompanied by humility.”⁶ In short, it is humility that must give life to repentance, and that, as it were, compels the heart of God to be merciful: “A contrite and humble heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise,”⁷ says the penitent David, with the assurance of being forgiven, as if he wished to say, I know, O Lord, that I do not deserve Thy mercy on account of my sins, and that all my good works are not worth being taken into consideration by

¹ Vestiti sunt saccis a majore usque ad minorem.—Jonas iii. 5.

² Surrexit de solio suo, et abiecit vestimentum suum a se, et indutus est sacco, et sedit in cinere.—Ibid. 6.

³ Et vidit Deus opera eorum, quia conversi sunt de via sua mala, et misertus est Deus super malitiam, quam locutus fuerat ut faceret eis, et non fecit.—Ibid. 10.

⁴ Scidit vestimenta sua, et operuit cilicio carnem suam, jejunavitque et dormivit in sacco, et ambulavit demisso capite.—III. Kings xxi. 27.

⁵ Nonne vidisti humilliatum Achab coram me? Quia igitur humillatus est mei causa, non inducam malum in diebus ejus.—Ibid. 29.

⁶ Poenitentia tunc creditur, quando cum humillitate conjuncta est.

⁷ Cor contritum et humilliatum, Deus, non despiciet.—Ps. 1. 19.

Thee; yet there is one thing that gives me courage, and leads me to hope that Thou wilt receive me into Thy favor, and that is, that Thou canst not despise a humbled heart.

Therefore, O sinner, no matter how great you are before the world, you must be humble when you appear in the confessional; humble interiorly in your heart, in which you acknowledge that you are a criminal worthy of hell fire and undeserving of pardon, which, however, you now hope to receive from the mercy of God; humble in speech and in the confession of your sins, so that you may declare them with a holy fear, and, as far as possible, with modest and respectful words; humble in your outward behavior, with downcast eyes, on bended knees, and with folded hands, to show that you are in presence of the Judge of the living and the dead, who will pronounce sentence on you; humble in the attitude of your body, so that all who see you may know that you are approaching as a poor sinner, in the hope of moving the God whom you have offended to mercy and forgiveness. For then I believe in penance, "when it is accompanied with humility."

In what this humility must consist.

Christians, do we always bring that inward and outward humility to the sacred tribunal? Do they bring it, who come to confession dressed in the height of the fashion, and in a vain, not to say scandalous style, and who, when they have with difficulty, owing to their extravagant dress, entered the confessional, actually give occasion of sin to others, while they are accusing themselves of their own sins? If a person who knows nothing of our holy sacraments were to see this and ask, what are those people doing in there? and I were to tell him that they are poor sinners, who are presenting themselves before God's tribunal in the hope of escaping an eternal fire, which they acknowledge they have deserved, and of obtaining pardon, if they ask for it with contrite and humbled heart, what would he think? What, he would say, are those people sinners? Are they beggars? They do not look like it, certainly. I should rather think that this was a public dancing place, or a stage on which they appear to let themselves be admired, and to attract the attention of others. And he would have reason to arrive at such a conclusion. That is the opinion of St. Ambrose, as we read in his treatise on penance. "There," he complains, "you may see women with pearls and precious stones in their ears," with bared neck and shoulders, tricked out with gold and silver, with their hair curled, etc., "who should be deploring their unhappy fate, in having

It is wanting to those who come to confession extravagantly dressed.

lost the precious pearl of divine grace,"¹ who ought to weep at having lost the wedding-garment of their souls, and at being stripped of all merits and supernatural virtues.

Who, while waiting for their turn, look around, talk, and laugh.

And if he were to ask further, who are they who, while awaiting their turn to enter the confessional, are looking around, speaking to those who come in and go out, and laughing, and talking with each other? They too, I would say to him, are poor sinners who are waiting until they can appear before their Judge, in order to accuse themselves, and to ask humbly for forgiveness. Eh, he would say, but that is a strange way for them to act! It seems that they do not care much for their angry Judge, and it matters little to them whether they are forgiven or not. And so it is in reality. All these people show by their indecent behavior that they have not a clear idea of the malice of their sins, of the unhappy state of their souls, and of the danger of eternal death in which they are; at all events, they do not show any of that humility that befits a repenting sinner.

They do not realize the malice of their sins. Shown by a smile.

Imagine, my dear brethren, that you see a man coming along the street, with a heavy burden on his head; he is quite cheerful and gay, he turns his head round in every direction, and looks at the houses on either side as he passes. What would you think of him? What would you imagine he was carrying? Perhaps a load of lead or iron? But if that were the case, he would not take it so easily; he would be bent under his burden, and sweat under the weight of it. You would necessarily come to the conclusion that his burden consists of feathers, or some very light substance, or that it is nothing but a bag inflated with air, that he is carrying; or, else, you would say that man is very strong, and does not feel the weight of his load. Sinner, when you come to confession, and have even one mortal sin on your soul, do you know what you have to bear? A burden that is of itself capable of dragging you down to the depths of hell; a burden under which David groaned and sighed: "My iniquities are gone over my head; and as a heavy burden are become heavy upon me. I am become miserable, and am bowed down even to the end; I walked sorrowful all the day long. I am afflicted and humbled exceedingly; I roared with the groaning of my heart."² A burden that the heavens could not tolerate in the rebel angels, who

¹ *Videre est foeminas margaritis onerare aures . . . quæ seipsas flere debebant quod margaritam, quæ de coelo est, perdidissent.*—St. Ambr., 1. 2 de poenit.

² *Iniquitates meæ supergressæ sunt caput meum, et sicut onus grave gravatæ sunt super me. Miser factus sum et curvatus sum usque in finem; tota die contristatus ingrediebar. Afflictus sum et humiliatus sum nimis; rugiebam a gemitu cordis mei.*—Ps. xxxvii. 5, 7, 8.

had sinned against their Creator by a single thought. A burden that engulfed Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea. A burden that has sunk thousands of souls into hell. And do you, who have to bear that heavy burden, laugh and sing under the weight of it? Do you look about you, and show every sign of pride in your manner, when you come to lay it aside in confession? It is evident that you do not feel the weight of it; that you look on it as a matter of trivial importance to have offended God, for if you knew what it is to have made God your enemy, what an endless good you have lost, and what a terrible punishment you have incurred, you would almost die of grief and sorrow, and, if possible, you would hide under the earth for very shame, or, at least, you would approach the sacred tribunal far more humbly, and cast yourself at the feet of your heavenly Judge, like a poor criminal, who is about to be led forth to execution, after having sentence passed on him.

Ah, holy souls, who come to confession with nothing but human weaknesses and imperfections to confess, how modest and humble you are under your burden, light though it is. St. Aloysius, of our Society, had taken, when he was a child, a little powder out of the pocket of a soldier, and on another occasion he heard and repeated some indecent words, the meaning of which he did not understand. When he was telling those supposed transgressions of his in confession he threw himself on the ground before the priest, as if he were the greatest sinner in the world, and his sorrow was so great that he fainted. Pepin, the prime minister of Dagobert, king of France, and a man of holy and blameless life, always went barefooted to confession, in order to show the world that he looked on himself as a poor sinner who was about to implore mercy from his Judge. And we, who have often such a load of grievous sins to carry, come to confession with as much unconcern, and with such vanity in our dress and manner, as if we were going to a comedy, or to a party of pleasure. Ah, we do not know what we are, true humility is wanting to our repentance, and it is greatly to be feared that it is therefore no true repentance at all.

What shall I say of those penitents who tell their manifold and grievous sins as coolly and indifferently as if they were telling the latest news, without the least sign of shame, and who, when their confessor tries to persuade them of the malice of their sins, in order to excite them to repentance, or, with the best intentions towards them, reminds them of their duties, act-

They are
put to
shame by
holy souls.

Other penitents, too, are wanting in humility.

ually dispute and argue with him, as if they were not accusing themselves, but were rather judges having full power to decide in their own cause; who complain of the penance enjoined on them, when it is not according to their fancy, and demand an easier one; and who, when they have been reminded of their duty, and the priest must remind them of it to fulfil his obligation, grumble against him and say that he does not know how to treat respectable people, or that he has acted towards them as if they were ignorant boors, etc. But how do you expect your confessor to treat you? As a great lord, or a noble lady? No, for you do not appear in that character in the confessional; if you did so, you would make a great mistake. You are simply a poor sinner deserving of hell, and you come before your Judge in order to implore His forgiveness, and to obtain His grace and mercy; that is what you are, and not a whit more, and you must show in your words and manners that you acknowledge yourself as such. One should confess his sins with humility, and consequently with candor, as we shall see in the

Second Part.

They are not candid who try to put the blame of their sins on others.

Candor in confession consists in acknowledging one's faults and their malice clearly and plainly, without trying to excuse, palliate, lessen, or conceal them, so that the priest can easily understand them, and nothing will be hidden from him. It is a very common fault for people, who otherwise wish to declare all their sins, to endeavor to tell them in such a way as to lessen the shameful and deformity of them, so that they themselves may not feel so much shame in acknowledging themselves guilty; and to that end they make every effort to throw the blame of their sins off their own shoulders. Thus they put forth as an excuse the weakness of their nature, the sudden surprise of passion, the violence of temptation, which they were unable to overcome under the circumstances, the allurements of an occasion into which they came without intending it, the grievousness of the insult offered them, the high position of the person to please whom they did something unlawful. They put forward pretexts of the kind with no other intention but that of lessening the wickedness and the shameful of their impurity, drunkenness, vindictiveness, injustice, or anger, so that the confessor may have pity on them, and they may have no reason to feel shame in telling him their sins.

Like king Saul.

King Saul made a confession of that kind when he once

failed to do as he was commanded by God. He acknowledged his sin to the Prophet Samuel: "I have sinned, because I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words;" but he immediately added the excuse, "Fearing the people and obeying their voice."¹ His meaning was: I have certainly done wrong, but my fault is deserving of pardon, as it was caused by fear; I was afraid of a rebellion amongst the people, and had to give way to them. If Saul had confessed his fault with sorrow of heart, and without trying to excuse it, why should not his penitent confession, "I have sinned," have found grace with God, as well as a similar confession that David made? But Saul was not candid; he tried to make himself appear more innocent than he really was, and therefore his repentance and confession were rejected by the Lord. "Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord," continued Samuel, "the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel."² In this sacramental tribunal, my dear brethren, one must not act the part of his own advocate, but honestly confess his sins, and attribute all the malice of them to himself, as David did, when he saw the angel destroying his people: "It is I that have sinned; I have done wickedly;"³ it is to me alone that the blame of that sin is to be attributed. In the same way every penitent should say, it is I who have sinned. I could and should have resisted that treacherous companion, that assault of passion, that strong temptation, that diabolical inspiration. The whole malice of the sin lies in my own will; "through my fault, through my most grievous fault;" I acknowledge that I am a sinner, and as such I now wish to do penance.

There are others who put forward still lamer excuses. Say that a person of the opposite sex has allowed some liberties to be taken with her; ah, she says, so and so was the case, but I had no pleasure in it! What? Is that the way to confess your sins candidly? How is it possible that it happened against your will, and that you had no pleasure in it, since you permitted it, or were silent, or did not try to prevent it, or, if you offered a pretended resistance, were glad at heart that it was unsuccessful? There is no meaning in what you say. If a thief takes away a piece of cloth in your presence from a shop of which you

Those who say that the sin was committed against their will.

¹ Peccavi, quia prævaricatus sum sermonem Domini, et verba tua, timens populum, et obediens voci eorum.—I. Kings xv. 24.

² Quia projecisti sermonem Domini, et projecit te Dominus, ne sis rex super Israel.—Ibid. 26.

³ Ego sum qui peccavi; ego inique egi.—II. Kings xxiv. 17.

have the charge, and you say nothing about it, or after a few words allow the thief to depart with his booty, what would your employer say to that? Would he be satisfied with your excuse: sir, the cloth was stolen, but I had no pleasure in it; it was taken against my will; I told the thief not to take it, but he did not heed me, and I could not prevent him, as he was stronger than I? "But," your master would cry out in just anger, "is that the way you do my will, unfaithful servant that you are? Could you not at least have cried out at the top of your voice that there were thieves in the house? You have not done so, and therefore you are to be blamed for the theft and must make good the loss." In the same way, if one is tempted to anything unlawful, he or she must resist to the last drop of blood, if necessary, and call on the neighbors for help, or suffer death even, rather than do anything against the law of God. St. Bernard, being once attacked by an unchaste woman, and having no other means of defence, began to shout at the top of his voice, "thieves! thieves!" St. Thomas, being placed in similar circumstances, took a firebrand from the hearth and drove away with it the person who was tempting him. The holy youth Nicaetas, who was tied hand and foot, and had no other way to defend his purity, bit off his tongue and spat it with his blood in the face of the shameless woman who tried to make him fall into sin. There are means enough at hand to resist the most violent temptations, if one only wishes to make use of them. If you have not done so, as your conscience testifies against you, you cannot say with truth that the thing happened against your will, so that your confession is a bad one, if you try to excuse your sin by that false pretext.

Who try to
hide their
sins in all
kinds of
ways.

There are many others who go more cleverly to work, apparently, though with more malice, to palliate the wickedness of their sins; they say part of them in a clear voice, while they mutter the rest between their teeth, so that the confessor cannot well understand what they are saying; or else they use equivocating expressions, that leave the priest unable to form a positive judgment of their case; and then they flatter themselves that they have told their sins properly, and that it is not their fault if the confessor has not understood what they said, although they acted with the express intention of leading him into error about their sins. For instance, to explain the matter by a simile, a person says, I have stolen. What did you steal, asks the priest. I have stolen a purse. And was it of much value?

No, it was an old leathern purse, that was not worth anything. Oh! thinks the confessor, then it was a small theft. And the penitent goes away. But wait a bit; was there anything in the purse? Yes, there were ten ducats in it. What did you do with them? I took them, too! Oh! that is another thing altogether. Mark, my dear brethren, how, instead of saying that he stole the money, he says merely that he took the purse.

There are many who ~~confess their sins~~ in the same way. A vain and worldly woman accuses herself as follows: I have sometimes given way to vanity and curiosity. What do you mean by that? You are acknowledging the theft of the purse, but you say nothing about the money; you are trying to hide dangerous looks and wanton gestures under the name of vanity and curiosity. Those impure thoughts and desires which you occasion in yourself and others by your unwarranted freedom in company, are they merely sins of curiosity? The jealousy and secret rage of your husband, who notices your conduct, is that, too, mere curiosity? And what do you call vanity? The profanation of the house of God, in which you appear dressed in a scandalous style, that might easily excite others to sin, is that vanity? The desire and secret longing for an unlawful affection on the part of those who see you thus tricked out, the bad example you thus give, are these and all the sins that follow from them to be classed also as mere curiosity and vanity? No; you are not candid in confession. I have sought sensual pleasure, says another; I have laughed and amused myself in certain company, and have spoken of idle, vain, and useless things. And is that all? That is the purse; now, where is the money? What do you mean by sensual pleasure? You can seek that in eating, drinking, sleeping, and so on. If one looks at it closely, he will find it to have been carnal pleasure, and that is quite another sort of thing. And what kind of jokes and amusement had you in that company? What was your useless conversation about? Were you talking against holy purity, or against Christian charity? You must make a clean breast of the whole matter, or else your confession is not a good one. I have spoken ill of my neighbor, say others; I have been angry; I have spent my time in idleness, etc. Yes, but there is something else behind it, which you must out with at once. Did you not speak ill of your neighbor through hatred and vindictiveness? did you lessen his good name? was what you said true or false? did you speak in presence of one, or of several? You were

There are many who do that.

angry. Now that is the purse; where is the money? What did you do through anger? What was the consequence of your idleness? Did you neglect your household duties or the care of your children? All these things have to be declared in confession, if the confession is to be a good one, and valid in the sight of God.

All these be-
cray and
condemn
themselves.

Ah, with reason does the Prophet complain, that "iniquity hath lied to itself."¹ We wish to confess our sins, but in such a way as not to be understood. Christians, what is the use of that? What do we gain by it? Whom do we deceive? God? the priest? or ourselves? They who try to hide their wickedness in that way will fare like the wife of king Jeroboam, of whom we read in the Third Book of Kings. She had disguised herself so as not to be recognized by the Prophet Achias, whom she wished to consult; but the Prophet, enlightened by God, saw through the disguise, and said to her as soon as she opened the door: "Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam; why dost thou feign thyself to be another?"² I know who thou art; "but I am sent to thee with heavy tidings."³ Your son will die; you and your husband will perish miserably, and not one of your whole race will be left: "I will sweep away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as dung is swept away, till all be clean. Them that shall die of Jeroboam in the city, the dogs shall eat; and them that shall die in the field, the birds of the air shall devour."⁴ Sinner, when you wish to confess your sins you go to the servant of God. If your confession is not candid; if you try to disguise yourself so as to appear otherwise than you are in conscience; if you seek excuses to palliate your sins, or endeavor to lessen the guilt of them by equivocating expressions, or do not declare them fully, what will your confession profit you? The priest, who cannot see your heart, will sometimes, if he does not know how to find out the truth, give you absolution; but the almighty God, whom the priest represents, will call out to your conscience: "why dost thou feign thyself to be another?" Why do you pretend to be what you are not? But I know you thoroughly, and therefore I now announce eternal death to you; instead of saying, "I absolve thee," I say "I condemn

¹ *Mentita est iniquitas sibi.*—Ps. xxvi. 12.

² *Ingredere, uxor Jeroboam; quare aliam te esse simulas?*—III. Kings xiv. 6.

³ *Ego autem missus sum ad te durus nuncius.*—*Ibid.*

⁴ *Mundabo reliquias domus Jeroboam, sicut mundari solet flnus usque ad purum. Qui mortui fuerint de Jeroboam in civitate, comedent eos canes; qui autem mortui fuerint in agro, vorabunt eos aves cœli.*—*Ibid.* 10, 11.

thee." Ah, unhappy sinner, your God condemns you! What good will it be to you, then, if a mere mortal, whom you can easily deceive, pronounces the words of absolution over you? If God condemns you, who can absolve you? Do you, then, wish to make of the confessional, which is a throne of grace that Jesus Christ has set up in order to cleanse your soul from the filth of sin, a stern judgment-seat, in which, by your hypocritical confession, you provoke against yourself a sentence of eternal damnation?

Oh, no, my God, far be that from me! No matter what I do to hide the malice of my sins, Thou knowest what I am, and what I have done. Therefore I will make my confession as if, which is in reality the case, I were before Thy very eyes. I will acknowledge my sins with all interior and exterior humility, as is becoming; I will acknowledge them as a poor criminal who is deserving of eternal death, and who implores mercy. I will confess them honestly and candidly, with all their circumstances, as far as I know I am guilty of them; and then I can confidently expect Thy grace and the pardon of my sins, although I am undeserving of them, so that hereafter I may find written in Thy great account book the words which the priest in Thy place pronounces over me, "I absolve thee from thy sins;" they are all blotted out; enter into the joy of thy Lord amongst the number of true penitents. Amen.

Conclusion and resolution to confess our sins humbly and candidly.

THIRTY-SECOND SERMON.

ON CONCEALING SINS IN CONFESSION THROUGH SHAME.

Subject.

How foolish to conceal a sin in confession through shame; because thereby one makes himself still more ashamed, 1. in this life; and 2. in the next.—*Preached on the twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Tenuit manum ejus, et surrexit puella.—Matt. ix. 25.
"He took her by the hand, and the maid arose."

Introduction.

So easy it is for the almighty God to restore the dead to life, that He need only touch the hand of the dead person, and immediately life returns. "He took her by the hand, and the maid arose." It is just as easy, my dear brethren, for Him to restore life to the soul that is dead in sin, and to bring back to it the grace it has lost; all that is necessary is for the priest, in the place of God, to raise his hand and pronounce the words of absolution, and at once the sinner, who was dead before, lives in the Lord, provided he puts no obstacle to the effects of the sacrament. But how often does it not happen that the priest raises his hand and gives absolution, while the sinner remains as he was, spiritually dead, because he was wanting in due examination of conscience, or in true sorrow, or in a firm purpose of amendment, or in the candid confession of all his sins. It is my intention to speak again to-day of this latter class of penitents, namely of those who do not candidly declare their sins in confession, inasmuch as they deliberately conceal a grievous sin, or do not confess it fully, through fear or shame. Deplorable, indeed, is the blindness of those souls; for what greater folly than theirs could be imagined? This I shall now prove at length, in order to deter all from committing such a grievous sin, as to conceal a sin in confession, and to encourage those who perhaps have such a sin already on their consciences to declare it candidly and so get rid of it.

Plan of Discourse.

There is nothing more foolish than to allow oneself to be prevented by shame from declaring all one's sins in confession. Why? Because thereby one makes himself still more ashamed in this life. The first and longer part. And in the next life, too. The second part. Sinners, let us honestly confess all our sins; such shall be the conclusion.

Help us thereto by Thy grace, O Almighty God, which we beg of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

It is not a disgraceful, but a praiseworthy thing, to declare one's sins in confession.

Not to lose time, tell me, O sinner, why you are ashamed to confess your sins, and to acknowledge them all candidly? One ought to be ashamed, not of an honorable, but of a disgraceful act. But you say, that is just where the difficulty lies; for it is certainly a disgraceful thing that brings a blush into a man's face, and makes him tremble with anguish. Now, in what does this shame consist? Is it in your confessing your sins? Then

it is a shame to tell the truth when one is obliged to tell it; and the God of all holiness and justice has commanded you, under pain of eternal damnation, to do a disgraceful thing, for it is He who obliges you to declare all your mortal sins in confession. And therefore one can receive supernatural grace, increase his merit, and gain heaven, by doing a disgraceful and, consequently, an unworthy thing. And, moreover, it is disgraceful to seek a remedy in the precious Blood of Jesus to heal the mortal wounds of your soul; disgraceful to cover and take away your own deformity and misery; disgraceful to free yourself from the slavery of the devil, and to become a friend of God; disgraceful to give joy to the angels in heaven and honor and glory to God. Did David, and Magdalene, and Paul, the great apostle of the gentiles, and Augustine, disgrace themselves by confessing their sins? Are they not honored by every one, precisely on account of that confession, which some of them actually wrote and published to the world? Therefore it is not disgraceful but honorable to confess one's sins. Truly, says St. John Chrysostom, "it is not a dishonorable thing, but rather an act of justice and virtue to acknowledge your sins." ¹ It is an act of justice by which you restore to God and your soul what you have stolen from them; and an act of virtue, because it implies humility and the overcoming of yourself; and so it is a holy confusion which brings you the greatest honor. Such is the testimony that God Himself gives of it by the wise Ecclesiasticus: "There is a shame that bringeth glory and grace." ²

In what, then, does the disgrace consist of which you are so much ashamed in confession? In my having committed such a horrible sin, you say. So, then, you acknowledge that shame comes from sin? And you are quite right, too. But there is no shame in declaring the sin in confession. Sin is the only thing that has nothing honorable about it; it alone has brought the greatest disgrace on the soul, and has made it like the hideous demons, hateful to God and an abomination to the angels and to all creatures. If all men were to vilify and despise you on account of it, could you with justice complain? What right have you to an honorable name, after having acted so disgracefully towards your God? You deserve nothing but eternal disgrace amongst the demons in hell. You have reason enough to be ashamed of committing sin; and you should have felt that shame

It is only in committing sin that shame consists.

¹ Non est confusio accusare tua peccata, sed est iustitia et virtus.

² Est confusio adducens gloriam et gratiam.—Eccjus. iv. 25.

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before now. When you made up your mind to commit that grievous sin, which you now conceal from your confessor, where was your fear, where your shame, that now prevents you from getting rid of that sin? You did not hesitate to defile your soul, even in the presence of others; perhaps you have even boasted of your crime, and shown complacency at it; and now you are ashamed to free yourself from it? It is, says St. John Chrysostom, a trick of the devil to deprive of shame him who is about to commit sin, and to give it back to him when he is about to confess and to do penance. And the restitution is more cruel than the theft. It is as if I were to snatch out of the soldier's hand the sword with which he has to defend himself against his enemy, and to restore it to him when he is about to take away his own life. "O miserable mortal!" says St. John Chrysostom, "when you were becoming a sinner, you were not ashamed; but now, when you can become just and holy, you are ashamed."¹ What lamentable blindness and folly!

He who conceals his sins only adds to his shame.

You have just reason to be ashamed of remaining any longer in the miserable and disgraceful state of sin; but when you conceal your guilt in confession, you prefer to be disgraced before God and your own conscience, rather than to face an imaginary shame, which is in reality honorable, just, and praiseworthy, and which will restore you your honor in the sight of God. But what do I say about your being disgraced before God? For, in fact, you dishonor and disgrace yourself far more than before by your shameful reticence in confession, by which you commit another most horrible and sacrilegious crime, profaning the holy sacrament of penance and making the absolution you receive invalid, as you yourself must acknowledge. See now how great are your folly and stupidity, for, through fear of an imaginary evil, you rush headlong into a real misfortune. By wishing to avoid a holy shame, you bring greater disgrace on yourself, at the very time when you are trying to get rid of your shame by a sacrilegious confession.

For he must confess it, some time or other if he wishes to avoid eternal damnation.

Nor is that all; for you are bringing greater shame on yourself for the future time, which is still more foolish of you. Tell me, what is it that you are now afraid of in confession? What is the great difficulty that unnerves you? Is it not the obligation of confessing that sin, which lies so heavily on your heart, and the very name of which is enough to make you shudder?

¹ O te miserum! cum effectus es peccator, non erubescetas; quando justus efficeris, te primum pudet.

You are afraid to mention that sin, and if you could, you would conceal it even from your own conscience. Will you keep it always hidden in your bosom? Will you never ease your mind of it? Are you determined never to confess it? If so, then woe to you, unhappy man, for you are lost forever! Eternal damnation is your fate, nor can I address you in any milder language. For, as St. Augustine says; “you will be damned on account of your silence, when you might have been saved by confessing your sin.”¹ You do not imagine, I suppose, that the sin you conceal will be taken away by an invalid absolution? For you must know that neither that nor any other one is forgiven, since one mortal sin cannot be forgiven without the other, and none can be forgiven unless it is candidly declared in confession when one remembers it and has the opportunity of receiving the sacrament. He who is suffering from an abscess must get rid of the matter it contains, or he will die. Do you think that the Almighty will publish a new Gospel to please you, or that He will open a special door to let you into heaven? But you know that such expectations would be fruitless, and that there is no alternative for you but confession, or, in case you have not the opportunity of confession, perfect contrition, or else hell for all eternity. You may lead a most holy life in other respects, but if you keep that one sin locked up in your conscience, and are determined never to confess it candidly, you will be lost forever. It is not a matter in which you can expect a dispensation.

We find this truth foreshadowed in the holy Scripture, especially in two men, one of whom was raised from death to life, while the other was condemned to death. The first is Lazarus; the second, that unhappy guest who appeared without a wedding-garment. The former was already mouldering away in his grave; the latter was seated at the festive board, enjoying himself. The former was bound, and Christ ordered him to be loosed; the latter was at liberty, and the king commanded him to be bound hand and foot. The former was buried, and Christ called to him to come forth from his tomb; the latter was still alive when the king commanded his servants to bury him. The former was decaying in darkness, and Christ called him forth to the light: “Lazarus come forth.”² The latter was enjoying the full light of day, and the king commanded him to be thrust

Foreshad-
owed in
Holy Scrip-
ture.

¹ Tacitus damnaberis, qui poteris liberari confessus.

² Lazare, veni foras.—John xi. 43.

forth into darkness: "Cast him into the exterior darkness."¹ Both, my dear brethren, are figures of the sinner; the former of the true penitent, who is raised by Jesus Christ from spiritual death to life; the latter of the impenitent sinner, who dies while in the state of sin. Let us first consider the example of Lazarus; and here I must wonder that Our Lord called to him to come forth out of the grave, and to show himself publicly, although he was bound hand and foot with winding-bands, and then commanded His disciples to loose him. How, I must ask, could he come out of the grave, before being loosed? Should not his bands have first been untied, so that he might be able to move? But no; Our Lord wished Lazarus to come forth out of the grave tied as he was, that the Apostles might afterwards loose him. What was the reason of that? The following is the beautiful explanation of it given by St. Gregory: "Lazarus was told to come forth, as if to show that the same words might be used to all who are dead in the state of sin. Why do you hide your guilt within your conscience? Come forth, you are hidden within yourself, by not declaring your sin. Let the dead man then come forth; that is, let the sinner confess his guilt, and the Apostles loose him as he comes forth; for the pastors of the Church are bound to free from due punishment him who is not ashamed to confess what he has done."² Lazarus had good reason to be ashamed to come forth out of his grave as he was, clad in his grave-clothes and beginning to corrupt; but, nevertheless, he had to appear, if he wished to regain life and freedom. In the same way the sinner is ashamed to disclose to the priest the abominations of his life; but he must do so, if he wishes to recover the grace he has lost, and with it the life of his soul; "let the dead man, then, come forth, that is, let the sinner confess his guilt."

This it was in which the unhappy guest was wanting, and therefore he was cast out of the banquet-hall into prison. The king asked him: "How camest thou in hither, not having on a wedding-garment?"³ And what answer did the man make him? None at all. "But he was silent."⁴ Shame prevented him from

¹ *Mittite eum in tenebras exteriores.*—Matt. xxii. 13.

² *Lazaro ergo dicitur: veni foras; ac si aperte cuilibet mortuo in culpa diceretur; cur reatum tuum intra conscientiam abscondis? foras jam per confessionem egrudere, qui apud te interius per negationem lates. Veniat itaque foras mortuus, id est, culpam confiteatur peccator, venientem ergo foras solvant discipuli, ut pastores Ecclesiæ ei penam debeant amovere, quam meruit, qui non erubuit confiteri quod fecit.*—St. Greg. hom. 26 in Evang.

³ *Quomodo hue intrasti, non habens vestem nuptialem.*—Matt. xxii. 12.

⁴ *At ille obrutuit.*—Ibid.

answering. He might have alleged his poverty, saying that he had not money wherewith to buy costly clothing; but he was ashamed and did not like to make known his poverty. He could have said that he was not aware that the banquet to which he was invited was such a solemn one, or, else, that he had not time to have proper clothing made; but he was silent, and was ashamed to make known his ignorance and carelessness. At the very feast he might have acknowledged his fault and have implored the king's pardon; but no, he was silent. And therefore, as he refused to confess, he was condemned: "Then the king said to the waiters: bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the exterior darkness."¹ As Galfridus remarks on this passage, the king ordered him to be bound, not when he entered the banquet-hall, nor when he appeared before the guests unsuitably clad, but when he was addressed by the king; "then, namely, when he kept silent after having been admonished, and when, having been asked, he refused to answer."² The holy Fathers tell us that the king represents Jesus Christ, the same merciful Saviour who opens heaven to robbers and murderers, to the unchaste and adulterers, to thieves and drunkards, to blasphemers and the sacrilegious, when they repent; but who refuses to pardon those sinners who conceal and do not properly declare their sins in confession.

There is a well-known instance recorded by St. Antoninus of a widow who in her youth had committed a sin against holy purity, which she always concealed in confession through shame; but since it troubled her conscience very much, she tried to expiate it by fasting and chastising herself in various ways, often scourging herself until the blood flowed; nay, in order to atone all the better for her sin, she entered a very strict order, in which, owing to the good example she gave, she was soon elected to the dignity of abbess. Still, she could never overcome herself sufficiently to confess the sin she had so long concealed. At last she died, to the great sorrow of her Sisters, who revered her as a saint, and who expected to see her sanctity proved by miracles. And, in fact, they did see a miracle, but not such a one as they expected; for the deceased abbess appeared to them, surrounded by flames and crying out with a loud voice: "I am your former abbess, and am now in hell, because I wilfully concealed a mortal sin in confession; cast my body out on the dung-hill, as it is not worthy of

Shown by
examples

¹ Tunc dixit rex ministris: ligatis manibus et pedibus ejus, mittite eum in tenebras exteriores.—Matt. xxii. 13.

² Tunc videlicet, postquam admonitus siluit, interrogatus obmutuit, et noluit confiteri.

Christian burial, since the soul that occupied it is accursed by God."

A nearly similar instance is related by our Father Francis Rodriguez of the daughter of Hubert, regent of England, which occurred at a time when the Catholic faith was still flourishing in that country. She was so beautiful that she excited the admiration of every one, and was asked in marriage by many great princes; but through love of holy virginity, which she had vowed to Jesus Christ, she refused all their offers, and, having been allotted a separate dwelling by her father, spent her time with some other pious maidens, in solitude. She founded churches and convents, waited on the sick in the hospitals, and practised many mortifications. Having led a holy life for some time, she died. The night after, a noble lady, who had been the princess's preceptress, wished to know how high she was in heaven, and while engaged in prayer, was surprised to see the door suddenly opened, and a female form surrounded by demons enter the room. "Fear not," said the apparition, "I am the daughter of Hubert, and am now in hell." The lady, more dead than alive, cried out: "My God, is it possible? Who can hope for salvation, if such a holy person loses her soul?" "Hear me," said the unfortunate princess; "not God, but I myself, am to blame for the loss of my soul. You know that a certain page used to read for me, when I was too tired to read myself; on one occasion, when we were alone, I allowed myself to be overcome by an impure passion for him, and sinned with him. I accused myself of it in confession, but the confessor imprudently said to me: 'but, your highness, how could you do such a thing? I can hardly believe it; it must have been imagination.' I then got ashamed, and said that I had merely dreamed it; and thus I made a bad confession, and although God warned me even in my last illness, I could never summon up courage to confess my sin. I died impenitent and am now in hell." You see, my dear brethren, how no amount of good works will help the sinner, if he wilfully conceals even one mortal sin in confession.

If he intends confessing it hereafter, he will have more sins and more grievous ones to confess

Now, sinner, to continue the argument we have commenced, is it your intention never to confess that sin? Alas, if it is, you will fare like those two unfortunates; there is not the least doubt of it! But I trust you will not allow matters to go so far, and that, some time or other, you will tell that sin properly in confession. Very good; but will you then feel less ashamed than now? Will that sin appear less horrible to your confessor, than

it now would? If you consider the matter aright, you must acknowledge that you will then have far more reason to be ashamed ^{along with it.} than you now have; for, in addition to confessing the sin you have so long concealed, you must also tell every one of the grievous sins you committed on account of it. The sin you conceal is like a seed dropped in your heart, as God says by the Prophet Osee: "You have ploughed wickedness;"¹ or, as the Septuagint has it, "you have concealed wickedness."² And what will be the consequence thereof? From one seed that is planted a hundred others frequently grow; and so, too, when one has concealed one sin, a whole harvest of wickedness is the result, as the same Prophet says: "You have reaped iniquity."³ To say nothing of the fact that, when one is in the state of sin, he cannot long refrain from other sins, on account of the loss of God's special graces, and the darkness of his understanding; you have, at all events, committed another mortal sin, by making a bad confession; you have gone to holy Communion afterwards, and thus you have again increased your guilt; next month you go to confession and holy Communion again, but say nothing of the sin you have concealed, and, of course, you only add to your sins. Now, when that has been going on for the third, fourth, tenth, twentieth time, and for perhaps two, three, or ten years, what a fearful harvest of sin you thus reap, besides what you commit against the other commandments of God! At last you make up your mind to unbosom yourself, to overcome your shame, and to confess the sin you have so long kept to yourself; and you say: so and so many years ago I concealed that sin in confession, or I did not confess it properly. But that is not yet enough; you must say also how often during that time you went to confession and received holy Communion or any other sacrament; and, moreover, you must repeat, with their number and necessary circumstances, all the sins you committed and confessed during that time. Why so? you ask; have I not confessed them already? No matter; they must all be again declared, because not one of them has been forgiven; nay, it would have been better for you not to have gone to confession at all.

Now try to take a reasonable view of the matter; if one sin can thus tie your tongue, what will not so many sins that follow from it be able to do? If you now persuade yourself that you have a mountain of difficulty to contend with, what will it be afterwards, ^{And therefore will have more reason for shame.}

¹ *Arastis impietatem*—Osee x. 13.

² *Reticulstis impietatem*.—Ibid.

³ *Iniquitatem messuistis*.—Ibid.

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when the mountain will be much higher? If you are ashamed to tell one sin now, how great will not your shame be when you have a whole catalogue of sins to reveal? Now you can tell the sin in less time than it takes to say the "Our Father;" afterwards it will take you an hour or more to make your confession. Now you can finish your case completely, so that you will never have to say a word about it again; afterwards, in your invalid confessions, you must make known your shame, and repeat them all when you make up your mind to tell the sin you have concealed, so that you will have to suffer more shame, to suffer it longer, and to suffer it more frequently. Is it not folly to choose a long and painful illness instead of a passing indisposition? I will say nothing of the gnawing of conscience which torments you day and night, and continually reproaches you with your secret guilt (a bad tooth is always aching until it is pulled out); nothing of the exceeding great injury done your soul, for, during the whole time you are in the state of sin, not all your good works are meritorious of heaven; nor of the terrible risk you run of dying at any moment, and being hurled into hell.

He acts foolishly in not telling the sin at once.

O foolish mortal, how easily you could avoid all this evil now! If a thorn gets into your foot, you pull it out at once, although you hurt yourself in doing so; for if you allow it to remain in the flesh, you will have to cut it out, and thereby cause you great pain. How long will you keep that thorn, that concealed sin, in your conscience? Is it not better for you to take it out at once by a good confession, and at the cost of a little shame to yourself, than to allow it to rankle for a long time, so that, if you wish afterwards to get rid of it, you will have far more to suffer? Ah, how you will deplore your folly hereafter!

Shown by a simile from Scripture.

In the First Book of Exodus we read, that king Pharaoh commanded that all the male children of the Israelites should be drowned as soon as they were born, in order to destroy the nation utterly. But when Moses was born his mother concealed him for three months, for he was so beautiful that she was determined to do all she could to save his life: "Seeing him a goodly child, she hid him for three months."¹ But when she saw that it was impossible to hide him any longer, she made a basket, and, putting him into it, placed it in the Nile, thus entrusting his life to the care of Providence. Imagine, my dear brethren, the grief of the parents. How great must have been the sorrow they experienced! And why? Because they were

¹ *Videns eum elegantem, abscondit tribus mensibus.*—Exod. ii. 2.

forced to expose the child in the river? Not so much on that account, says Philo, as because they had not done it before; for it certainly would have pained them less to have got rid of the child immediately after his birth. As it was, they kept him for three months, and during that time could admire his beauty, so that the pain of parting with him was immensely increased. "We should have exposed our child," says Philo, speaking in the person of the parents, "immediately after his birth; but we kept him alive for three months, to our greater sorrow."¹

Christian soul, you have conceived an abominable sin in your heart, and have brought it forth by your works. "He hath been in labor with injustice,"² says David of the sinner. God has commanded you, under pain of eternal damnation, to cast that miserable offspring of yours into the waters of penance and to drown it there; but what do you do? You conceal and hide it for three months, and perhaps for several years, through shame. And what better are you for that? You know that you must tell your sin some time or other, or else you will be lost forever. Do you not see that you are only increasing your shame and anguish by putting off the confession of it? For the longer you conceal it, the more difficult will it be for you to tell it. You should have confessed the sin at once, after having committed it, and thus freed your conscience from the burden of it. "We should have exposed our child immediately after his birth." Ah, certainly, would that I had stifled that wretched offspring of mine as soon as it made its appearance! Fool that I am, to have borne it in my bosom for such a long time! And now, to my greater shame, I must declare it! See, O sinner, what a foolish thing it is for you to conceal, or not to confess properly, your sin; for, in order to avoid a just, holy, and honorable, nay, purely imaginary shame, you expose yourself to far worse shame in the present life, and, if you persist in your determination to conceal that sin, to endless shame and disgrace in the next life: as we shall see briefly in the

And will
one day be
wail his
folly.

Second Part.

I have said "a purely imaginary shame," for it is one that exists merely in the imagination, and not in reality, whether we consider the person who confesses, the sin that he has to confess, or the person to whom he confesses it. In the first place, who

The shame
in confess-
ing one's
sins is only
imaginary
when one

¹ Debueramus recens natum exponere: per tres menses alimus nobis majorem tristitiam.—Phil. de vita Moys.

² Peperit Iniquitatem.—Ps. vii. 15.

considers
himself and
what he has
to confess.

accuses you? You yourself, and no other, as I have said when speaking of the sacrament of penance as an easy means of recovering the grace of God. Again, what have you to confess? A sin that you have committed. That is truly a disgraceful thing; but are you the only one in the world who has sinned? If sin were something unusual, people might be surprised at your wickedness; but, alas, the world is full of guilt like yours. Where is the man who can say that he has never sinned? St. John would at once convict him of a lie. We are all sinners without exception, and perhaps you are not by far the greatest. There are many saints now in heaven who before their conversion committed far worse sins than you. You have on your conscience a sin of impurity, for that is generally the only class of sin that makes us dumb in the confessional; but you have as your companions St. Mary Magdalene, St. Augustine, and countless others. Now, if suffering is lessened by being shared with many, nay, if it is even a consolation to have companions in suffering, then it must also lessen your shame in confessing your sin to know that the majority of men must acknowledge themselves just as guilty as you. Nor do I say this in order to show that we should make light of sin (for it will not lessen the malice of your sin, nor free you from eternal damnation to have companions in wickedness), but to show that, when you have committed a sin, you should candidly confess it.

And him to
whom he
has to con-
fess.

Finally, to whom must you declare your sin? Is it not to a man like yourself, as I have already explained? If God had commanded you to confess your guilt publicly before the world, or at least before the congregation assembled in church, as was the custom amongst the early Christians, there is no doubt but that you would have to obey, and should moreover consider it a great favor to be enabled to escape eternal damnation by suffering a little shame in this life. But as it is the good God is satisfied if you confess your sins in secret, and only once, to one man, who is a sinner like yourself; and you can select any approved priest you wish, even one who does not know you; nor are you obliged to tell him your name; you can go to him in the evening and cover your face, so that he cannot see you; nor is there the least danger that he will ever breathe a syllable of what he hears from you. Yes, you say, I know that, and am well aware that my confessor must keep the secret of the confessional; but what will he think of me when he hears what I have done? What opinion will he form of me? If he is

acquainted with me, every time he sees me, he will think: see, there is the person who has done so-and-so. What foolish fancies those are! What has he to think of you in the confessional? He will think that it is a good thing for you to repent of such a sin; and if he happens by chance to recollect what you have told him, he will remember the humility and candor with which you accused yourself, and the repentance and sorrow you felt; and therefore he will think to himself that it would be well for all penitents if they made such a good confession. Perhaps your confessor was formerly a greater sinner than you; and if that is the case, he will think, with shame, that he is far more guilty than you, and that his sins were more grievous than yours. If he is a pious, holy man, he will have pity on you, and will rejoice that he has been the means of saving your soul from hell, as I have shown more at length when speaking of the choice of a confessor. Thus you see that you have not the least reason to allow shame or fear to prevent you from confessing your sins, and that what you fancy a difficulty exists only in your own imagination.

But if you will not conquer this imaginary shame, what confusion you will bring upon yourself hereafter by concealing your sins! For you will certainly be put to infinite shame before all men, and not before one merely, at the Last Judgment; not before one sinful mortal, but in presence of all the demons and reprobate of hell; not before one just man, but in presence of all the angels and saints of heaven; not before one man who is full of pity for you, but before all creatures, who shall be embittered against you and seek for vengeance on you; not to be justified and absolved, but to be condemned; and under those circumstances you will have to declare openly the sin you now conceal. And the confusion that will then overwhelm you will be eternal, for it will never fade from the memory of the just, or of the wicked, nor will it ever cease to torment your own conscience. "Behold," threatens the Lord by the Prophet Nahum, "I come against thee, saith the Lord of hosts . . . and I will show thy nakedness to the nations, and thy shame to kingdoms . . . and will disgrace thee and will make an example of thee." Ah, think what a terrible disgrace that would be! You now enter the confessional, in which one man is sitting with the intention of helping you, as if you were going into a torture-chamber;

To avoid it
he puts
himself to
shame be-
fore all men
at the Last
Day.

¹ Ecce, ego ad te, dicit Dominus exercituum, et ostendam gentibus nuditatem tuam, et regnis ignominiam tuam; et contumelias te afflictam, et ponam te in exemplum.—Nahum iii. 5. 6.

what will you not suffer if you have to disclose all your crimes before the same confessor from whom you wish to conceal them now, and before heaven and earth as well?

How great
that shame
will be.
Shown by a
smile.

A certain prince once missed his watch, which he had placed on his table. He asked what had become of it; but no one could tell him. At last he ordered all the rooms to be searched, and the watch was heard striking in the pocket of a page, and thus the thief was betrayed. Imagine the confusion of the culprit, at being thus found out in a theft in presence of the prince and his courtiers! How great must have been his terror when he heard the first stroke of the watch, and how willingly he would have stopped it! Sinner, you have committed a theft and a sacrilege when you feloniously concealed in your own conscience a sin you ought to have declared in confession: Oh, how that watch will strike and betray you, and put you to shame before all creatures! "Our very sins," says St. Gregory, "have voices;"¹ and they will cry out against you, as St. Bernard says: "Thou hast made us; we are Thy work."² Here is the impure thought you would not confess; I am your work, the work of your imagination and consent, and you are the thief. Here is that brutish action you committed by yourself, thinking that no one would know anything about it; I am the work of your hands, and you are the thief. Here is that sin of adultery that you have concealed from your husband or wife, or, what is worse, from your confessor; I am the work of your wantonness, and you are the thief. Here is the impurity you committed in that company, and which you did not confess; here is the sin that you so craftily tried to palliate in the confession, or to tell in such a way that the priest did not understand you. All these sins will cry out against you, we are your work, you are the thief. Father, mother, wife, husband, hear what your child, or wife, or husband has done; and hear it, too, all men and angels! Oh, how you will then, for very shame, call upon the mountains and hills to cover you, but in vain!

Exhortation
to all to con-
fess their
sins candid-
ly.

Christians, if any of you have ever concealed a sin in confession, "What fruit, therefore, had you then in those things, of which you are now ashamed?"³ Such is the question I ask you, in the words of St. Paul, by way of conclusion; but I make a slight change in it, and say: what advantage do you derive from those sins that you were ashamed to confess? If you think of

¹ Etiam peccata suas voces habent.

² Tu nos fecisti; opera tua sumus.

³ Quem ergo fructum habuistis tunc in illis, in quibus nunc erubescitis?—Rom. vi. 21.

confessing them at some future time, then you cannot but see that your shame will be all the greater and more poignant. If you do not think of confessing them at all, you are lost forever, and your shame will never be blotted out. Consider the matter, then, according to common sense; see how foolishly you have acted, and make up your mind to follow the advice of the wise Ecclesiasticus: "Be not ashamed to confess thy sins,"¹ and to confess them all honestly and candidly. And that the devil may not increase your fear and shame while you are in the confessional, do like David when he went against the Philistines in his shepherd's dress. He first of all overcame and slew the giant Goliath, and when the Philistines saw their champion conquered, they took to flight. Do you, also, first cut off the head of Goliath; confess first of all the sin you are most ashamed of, and then you will have little difficulty in confessing the others. If you cannot summon up courage enough to tell it to your ordinary confessor, who has a good opinion of you, then there are confessors enough; choose any one you please; for in such circumstances it is better to change, for once, than to make a bad confession. If you have a sin on your conscience for the last ten, twenty, fifty years, be not ashamed on that account; the priest will receive you with the greatest kindness, mildness, and charity; at least, he must do so, if he is an experienced and pious confessor; and he will rejoice at having the opportunity of freeing your soul from its miserable state, and winning it back to God. Do you, perhaps, think that it is impossible for you to remember all the sins you have committed in so many years? Then take courage; the priest, if he has even ever so little experience, will help you, and you will be able to make your confession without difficulty. You should be afraid of the all-seeing eye of God, that nothing can escape, and encouraged by the peace of conscience which you will infallibly enjoy, if you only bravely make up your mind to unbosom yourself fully.

I know that you will have to overcome yourself to do this, and therefore you must first fly for refuge to Jesus Christ, Our Saviour, with the humble prayer that He may deign to strengthen your heart by the precious Blood He has shed for you, and by the powerful help of His grace, so that you may conquer your fear and shame. Diodorus Siculus says that there is in Morocco a water of such extraordinary virtue that a criminal who drinks it, no matter how hardened he is, is compelled to confess his

Prayer to
God to con-
quer shame
in the con-
fessional.

¹ Non confundaris confiteri peccata tua. —Ecclesi. iv. 31.

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crime openly; "the water," he says, "is of the color of vermillion, and has a sweet odor, and is endowed with the power of making him who drinks it confess his secret faults."¹ Whether this is true, my dear brethren, and, if so, how water can have that power, I will not now stop to inquire. But there is no doubt that from the wounds of Jesus a far more precious water flows, that enables us to open our mouths in the tribunal of penance in order to confess our sins. Therefore, O most bounteous Saviour, we beg of Thee humbly, by the infinite merits of Thy precious Blood, to open the mouth of that young man, who has so long kept his guilt concealed in his heart! Open the mouth of that young girl, whose silence in the confessional has turned all her confessions and Communion into sacrileges! Open the mouth of that man, who, through having concealed a sin in his youth, has now grown old in wickedness! Grant, O Lord, that this very day they may all have their tongues loosed, and that each of them may make this firm resolution and say with St. Augustine, Thy penitent servant: O my God, I have sinned grievously and shamefully, nor can I deny it; I am sensible of the shame I shall feel at having to declare my sins, but Thou, O Lord, wishest that I should bear that shame as an atonement for my sins; it is just that I should fulfil Thy holy will! Yes, my God, I have deserved to be put to shame before the demons of hell; and therefore I will cast myself at the feet of the priest, as I should have done long since, and to him who sits there in Thy place I will candidly declare all my transgressions: "do Thou graciously receive the sacrifice of my confession from the hands of my tongue,"² so that I may be freed at last from my sins, and may escape shame in this life, and endless shame in the next. Amen.

¹ Aqua ejus colorem similem minio, et odorem suavem refert, virtute mirabili, et quæ pota cogat occulta errata fateri.—Diodor. Sicul., l. iii., c. 5.

² Accipe sacrificium confessionum mearum de manu linguæ meæ.

ON MAKING A GENERAL CONFES- SION.

THIRTY-THIRD SERMON.

ON THE ADVANTAGE OF A GENERAL CONFSSION AS FAR AS ONE'S PAST LIFE IS CONCERNED.

Subject.

A general confession cleanses the soul from all sin, as far as one's past life is concerned.—*Preached on the seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Diliges Dominum Deum tuum ex toto corde tuo.—Matt. xxii. 37.
“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart.”

Introduction.

God, then, wishes us to love Him, but with our whole hearts; for He will not be satisfied with half of our hearts. But we cannot love God in that way, unless we banish sin from our hearts by true repentance and a thorough amendment of life. By true repentance, I say; for how many there are whose penance is only a sham, either through want of true diligence in examining their consciences, or because they have not a real supernatural sorrow for their sins and a firm purpose of amendment, or because they do not confess their sins candidly, defects that we have already duly considered. But, my dear brethren, if any one fears, or has good reason to fear, that his confession has been defective in any of those ways, then there is no better, more useful, or more necessary means for him to adopt than to make a general confession, either of his whole life, in case he has never made one before, or at least of the time that has elapsed since his last general confession. For by that means he will be most certain of having got rid of all his sins, and of

being ready in future to love God with all his heart. This I shall prove to-day, and next Sunday also.

Plan of Discourse.

A general confession cleanses the soul from all sin, as far as one's past life is concerned. Such is the whole subject of this sermon.

Give us Thy grace to this end, O Lord, but especially to those who are in need of making such a confession; we ask it of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

In a general confession all the points necessary for true repentance are more fully observed.

What is required on the part of a penitent in order to cleanse his soul from the stain of sin is, as we have seen, and as even little children learning their catechism could tell us, that he should diligently examine his conscience, have a supernatural sorrow for his sin, a firm purpose not to commit a single mortal sin again, and, finally, he must make a humble and candid confession of all his grievous sins. If he is wanting in any one of these points, or does not observe them as he should, the sacrament of penance will not help him to forgiveness, and he still remains in the state of sin. But the better and more perfectly those points are observed, the more will the soul be cleansed, and the greater the graces received in the sacrament. And, my dear brethren, those points are never better, more fully, and more earnestly observed than in a general confession, which one makes of his whole life, or, otherwise, of the sins he has committed during the time that has elapsed since his last general confession.

The conscience is examined more carefully.

In the first place, with regard to the examination of conscience, it is made with far more care and diligence than when one is preparing for his ordinary confessions. For then the sinner, enlightened by the divine inspirations, comes to the firm determination of following the advice of St. Paul, and putting off the old man altogether and putting on the new, laying aside for that purpose all worldly occupations, and shutting himself up for a time with his own conscience. Then he is able to go through the years of his childhood, from the time when he first came to the use of reason, and to consider how he has spent his youth and manhood, so as to be able to give an account of his mode of life, his daily habits and customs, and the vices to which he was most addicted. Thus, since he is in earnest about settling all his accounts with God, he will certainly not forget anything wilfully, and will find out many a sin that

would have escaped him if he were preparing for his ordinary confessions. You know, my dear brethren, what happens in a hunt. If the huntsman goes out alone, he skirts the forest, and if anything chances to run in his way, he shoots it; the greater part of the game, however, is hidden from him. But if there is a large hunting party, there are men sent into the forest to beat out the game, so that nothing can remain hidden. And so it is with most men when they go to confession. If they go a few times a year, or even once a month, in search of game, that is, to find out the sins they have committed in that time, oh, how many sins often remain hidden in the crevices of their consciences, either through carelessness, forgetfulness, or self-love! For one does not attend to the malice of those sins, or he tries to excuse them, or else he does not think of them. On the other hand, when one is preparing for a general confession of his whole life, or of a considerable portion of it, he examines most closely everything that has even the appearance of a sin, in order not to leave out anything that could afterwards make him uneasy. And he is helped in this by a special grace of God, who is wont to assist, by an extraordinary light, the man of good will, who is in earnest about being converted to Him with his whole heart. If you enter a room that has been newly swept out you would hardly think that a speck of dust could be found in it; but if a ray of the sun finds its way in, you will see clouds of dust that were before invisible. The light of grace has the same effect in the soul of one who has made up his mind to lead a new life, and who, therefore, after having implored the assistance of the Holy Ghost, sets to work to examine his past years.

In the second place, after such a careful examen of conscience, his sorrow for sin is far greater than in his usual confessions. Nor can it well be otherwise, for his sins appear to him like a huge mountain placed before his eyes, so that he in truth might sigh forth with Esdras: "My God, I am confounded and ashamed to lift up my face to Thee; for our iniquities are multiplied over our head, and our sins are grown up even unto heaven."¹ When I look back on my life from the time when I first came to the use of reason, I find hardly anything but sin, odious ingratitude towards my God, and shameful transgressions of His law. There is no end to the crimes that I have committed during those years, in thoughts and desires, in words and conver-

One's sins
are brought
to mind in
greater
number.

¹ Deus meus, confundor et erubescio levare faciem meam ad te; quoniam iniquitates nostræ multiplicatæ sunt super caput nostrum, et delicta nostra creverunt usque ad cælum.—
I. Esdr. ix. 6.

sations, and in outward acts, with eyes, ears, tongue, hands, against my God, my neighbor, and myself. Thus he arrives at a clear knowledge of his misery, his poverty, and the woful misuse he has made of his time. And this is the meaning of the words of Ecclesiasticus: "As when one sifteth with a sieve, the dust will remain: so will the perplexity of a man in his thoughts;"¹ that is to say, when a man considers himself carefully, he sees nothing but his misery. If you look at one who is sifting wheat, in a short time you will not be able to see the good grain, because it has fallen out, and nothing is visible but the chaff. Very often a man gives way to self-complacency, and thinks himself to be good and pious, because he performs certain good works every day, and is not so wicked as many a great sinner in the world; and so it is difficult to bring him to have a really humble opinion of himself, and a real compunction of heart. But, poor mortal that you are, how can you have such an opinion of yourself? Set to work and shake the sieve of your conscience; examine your whole life, and you will soon lose sight of your good works. And what will you find left? "The perplexity of a man in his thoughts;" nothing but filth, and misery, and ingratitude, and countless sins.

From which arises a far greater sorrow and confusion at the thought of one's sins.

From the knowledge you thus gain by the examination of your whole life, says St. John Chrysostom, there will arise in you a salutary confusion and a bitter sorrow of heart. You will be filled with shame at the sight of your sins, and with wonder at the infinite mercy of God, who has borne with you so patiently for such a long time, in spite of your manifold offences. O my God, you will think, is it possible that Thou hast allowed me to remain on earth all this time? In my whole life I can hardly find one good action done with a pure intention for Thy sake, in which there is not some mixture of vain self-complacency, or human respect, or self-love. All the other acts of my life are so many faults, so many steps taken away from my last end, so many debts that Thou hast written against me in Thy account-book, and which Thou wilt one day call on me to pay. I must now acknowledge that my eyes and ears, tongue and hands, and whole body, along with my imagination, memory, understanding, heart, and will, and everything that is in me, have been so many instruments that I have misused to offend Thee, my God, who art deserving of all love. Alas, what is to become of me?

¹ Sicut in percussura cribri remanebit pulvis: sic aporia hominis in cogitatione illius.—
Eccles. xxvii. 5.

“If thou, O Lord, wilt mark iniquities: Lord who shall stand?”¹ O Lord, if Thou wilt remember all my sins and miseries, how shall I appear before Thee? If one sin is enough to deprive me of heaven and its eternal joys, and to condemn me to the everlasting torments of hell, what sort of a hell have I deserved by the countless sins that now stare me in the face? If Thou hast hurled into the depths of hell, from the heights of heaven, millions of the noblest and most beautiful creatures, for a single momentary sinful thought; if, for one sin of disobedience, Thou hast turned my first parents out of paradise, and hast, moreover, made the whole world a valley of tears, and afflicted its inhabitants with so many miseries; if there are many souls now in hell who have offended Thee by but one mortal sin in their whole lives, what sort of punishment must I expect, unless I truly repent; or what praise can I give Thy infinite goodness and mercy, inasmuch as Thou hast not cast me off long since, as I deserved, and art willing to pardon me, after I have so often and so grievously offended Thee? What can follow from such considerations as these, but sincere sorrow of heart, a thorough detestation and hatred of all sin, and an earnest, zealous love for such a good God? There is no doubt, says St. John Chrysostom, that this deep sorrow and heart-felt love are the fruit of a general confession, which places all our sins before our eyes.

That is the meaning of the parable in the Gospel of St. Matthew. “The kingdom of heaven is likened to a king, who would take an account of his servants. And when he had begun to take the account, one was brought to him, that owed him ten thousand talents.”² That is, as commentators say, a sum equivalent to six millions of our gold florins; but when the servant humbly begged the debt to be remitted, the king graciously forgave it. “And the lord of that servant, being moved with pity, let him go, and forgave him the debt.”³ But, asks St. Chrysostom, if the king had the intention of remitting the debt, why did he first ask the servant to give an account to him? In order, he says, that the servant might know the enormous amount of his debt, and, since it was forgiven him, might all the more thoroughly detest his former faults, and serve his master with all

As appears from the Gospel parable.

¹ Si iniquitates observaveris, Domine: Domine, quis sustinebit?—Ps. cxxxix. 3.

² Assimilatum est regnum cœlorum homini regi, qui voluit rationem ponere cum servis suis. Et cum cepisset rationem ponere, oblatu est ei unus, qui debebat ei decem milia talenta.—Matt. xviii. 23, 24.

³ Misertus autem dominus servi illius, dimisit eum, et debitum dimisit ei.—Ibid. 27.

the more diligence and fidelity. This king is Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Judge; the debt of ten thousand talents is the amount of sin we have committed against the ten commandments. Now, O sinner, Christ demands an account from you every time you go to confession, although He is already resolved to pardon you if you appear before Him with true sorrow of heart and a firm purpose of amendment. But your ordinary confession is only an account of some weeks or months, in which the whole amount of your debts is not brought before you, so that you are not so strongly moved to sorrow for your sins. Therefore you should sometimes enter into a general statement of accounts with the almighty God, and bring before your mind all the sins you committed, from your childhood to the present moment, in thought, word, and deed, so that the consideration of the immense amount of your debt may excite in you a greater admiration of the divine patience in bearing with you, and, by giving you a clearer knowledge of your malice and ingratitude, may move you to a more heartfelt sorrow for sin.

The purpose of amendment is firmer.

In this way, too, you will have a firmer purpose of amendment than you have in your ordinary confessions. For when you call to mind the fearful amount of debt you have contracted by sin, you must necessarily be filled with a wholesome dread, and you will say to yourself, alas, what a terrible amount of evil I have done during my life! Have I not yet committed sins enough? Truly, it is high time for me to cease offending God. And now, that my iniquities are so numerous, perhaps the next mortal sin I commit may be my last, as it may fill up the allotted number of my transgressions, according to the hidden decrees of God. Perhaps the same God, who has borne with me so long, and who is now ready to forgive me my debts, may, if I should be so ungrateful as to offend Him again, forget His patience and mercy, make me the object of His implacable hatred, and, as I have already deserved thousands of times, according to the testimony of my own conscience, allow me to die in the state of final impenitence, and be lost forever. Therefore I am now resolved to give to God the remainder of the uncertain time of my life, without defrauding Him of a single moment of it.

One confesses his sins more exactly. Shown by a simile.

Finally, in a general confession one is much more careful than usual in declaring his sins exactly, so as to confess most minutely everything that his conscience reproaches him with. Even venial faults and slight transgressions, that are not ordinarily made the subject of confession, one would not then wilfully con-

veal, whereas usually even grosser sins may be made little of, or an effort may be made to hide or excuse them by confessing them in such a way as to mislead the confessor regarding their guilt. In ordinary confessions the conscience is examined only superficially; in general confessions it is, so to speak, thoroughly swept out. And there is a great difference, my dear brethren, between these two. When the maid is sweeping the room, she removes with her broom all the dirt and dust she can see, but still a great deal remains hidden under the chairs and tables. But if she takes the trouble of removing the furniture, and washing the floor with her own hands, not a particle of dirt or dust can escape her, and the room is thoroughly cleaned. St. Anselm makes use of another simile. "When the water," he says, "is allowed to run out of a pond, the fishes die."¹ If you wish to take all the fish out of the pond, what do you do? If you throw out the net and drag it through from one end to the other, you will certainly take a great number of fishes, but many of them will still remain hidden in the mud at the bottom. But if you let all the water run off, not even the smallest fish will escape you, on account of the want of the element necessary to its life. Oh, how many sins lie hidden in a conscience that is in a troubled and disorderly state! Certainly, we confess our sins, but many still remain concealed in the depths which are not brought to light as they should be; we fish only with the net, or catch a few here and there with a hook. If you wish to cleanse your conscience thoroughly, let the water run off, make a general confession of your whole life, and then you will certainly find out and destroy even the smallest sins. You see now, my dear brethren, how the examen of conscience, the sorrow for sin, the purpose of amendment, the candid declaration of our sins, and everything that is required for the purifying of the soul in the holy sacrament of penance, is best and most perfectly performed in a general confession.

Alas! how many confessions are invalid through some great defect in one of those necessary dispositions! For people are careless in their examen of conscience, even when they have committed mortal sin; or through culpable ignorance they are in doubt about the malice of certain grievous transgressions, and do not confess them; or they content themselves with reading an act of contrition out of their prayer-books, without having a real supernatural sorrow for sin; or else their purpose of amendment is not what it should be, since they still remain attached to their

Many ordinary confessions are invalid on account of a defect in some of these points.

¹ Pisces, decurrente aqua, vivarii moriuntur.

old vices, or do not make the necessary restitution, or remain in the proximate occasion of sin, or do not lay aside their hatred against their neighbor, or give scandal and occasion of sin to others, or do not fulfil the duties of their state as they ought; or else they seek out an unlearned, inexperienced, unscrupulous confessor, to whom they do not honestly confess all their sins, nay, from whom they frequently, through human respect, conceal some grievous sin that they have committed. Besides, of what nature are often the confessions of young people, who frequently commit grievous sin in thought, word, and deed, and yet have not a clear idea of what is meant by supernatural sorrow, a firm purpose of amendment, and the candid declaration of their sins; and who often go to confession merely because they are sent by their parents or teachers? And thus they continue making bad confessions for five, ten, or twenty years, and bring down to their old age on their heavily-laden consciences the first sin they committed, along with the sins that followed it.

Shown by
an example.

Father Paul Segneri relates that a man who had been dead many years, and whose soul was still in purgatory, appeared once to his son and complained bitterly that nothing had yet been done to relieve or help him. What, my dear father, asked the son in astonishment; it is now thirty years since you died, and not a single day has elapsed since then on which I did not hear Mass and pray fervently for the repose of your soul; moreover, I have given you all my holy Communions, as far as I could, and all the indulgences I gained, as well; how, then, is it possible that you did not experience any relief? True, said the father, you have done all that; but it has not helped me one bit, because you were not in the state of grace during the time, but were an enemy of God in mortal sin. During those thirty years you have been to confession and holy Communion over three hundred times; but your confessions were always invalid, because you never prepared for them properly. You never had a firm purpose of amendment. Having said those words, the poor soul vanished, after having made such a deep impression on the son that he determined to make a general confession of his whole life.

Hence a
general
confession
is necessary
to many,
and very

My dear brethren, let us not wait till a messenger comes from the other world to warn us of the state of our souls. If we have been guilty of some grievous error, either wilfully, or through culpable ignorance, or through any other cause which has made our confessions invalid, or if we have good reason to doubt of

their validity, then a general confession is not only very useful for us, as I said in the beginning, but it is necessary for our salvation, since the faults of our former confessions cannot be repaired without it. But if we think that we have never committed a grievous mistake in our confessions, then the general confession, although it may not be absolutely necessary for us, can, at least, make us more certain that we have received pardon for all the sins of our lives. Consider the example of the penitent David: "I said," he exclaims, "I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord;"¹ that is, as Raulinus remarks, I will confess all my sins at the same time. But why so, David? Hast thou not already confessed thy sins? In the same psalm thou hast said: "I have acknowledged my sin to Thee."² Hast thou, perhaps, concealed something? No; for thou sayest: "my injustice I have not concealed."³ I have disclosed everything. Art thou, then, scrupulous or anxious? No. And why wilt thou tell all thy sins at once? David was anxious about the sins he had committed in his youth, and on account of his ignorance and want of understanding at that time of his life: "The sins of my youth and my ignorances do not remember."⁴ Since he has now come to the full use of his understanding, he wishes to make a general acknowledgment of his guilt, in order to be freed from this care. Therefore he says that he is determined to confess his injustice to the Lord: that is, to confess all his sins together.

David was such a holy man, my dear brethren, after his conversion, that his conscience could not reproach him with a single sin which he had not candidly confessed to the Lord and had not shed bitter tears of repentance for, day and night; and yet he could not rest on account of the fear of having committed some grievous fault, in his youth, through ignorance and want of consideration, and, in order to ease his mind, he had recourse to a general confession. Ah! how much greater reason have not many of us to adopt the same means! For if we consider the matter rightly, we shall find that we may have reason enough to doubt whether our confessions were always what they should have been, and, therefore, whether our sins were really washed away or not. I say, reason enough, because this sermon is not intended for scrupulous and over-anxious souls; they must wait

useful to nearly all, in order that they may be at peace regarding the past.

Therefore most people have just reason to make such a confession.

¹ Dixi, confitebor adversum me injustitiam meam Domino.—Ps. xxxi. 5.

² Delictum meum cognitum tibi feci.—Ibid. ³ Injustitiam meam non abscondi.—Ibid.

⁴ Delicta juventutis mee et ignorantias meas ne memineris.—Ibid. xxiv. 7.

till next Sunday, and then I will tell them when a general confession is necessary, and when it is useful or advisable. But others, and especially those who have never made a confession of the kind, may well make the same resolution as David: "I have said, I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord," I will honestly declare before God and the priest all the sins of my whole life, from my youth down to the present moment, as far as my conscience represents them to me. If I were to derive no other advantage from such a confession, but that of having a greater sorrow of heart for the sins which I see thus in a vast heap before me; if I were to receive no other consolation but that of being able to say, now I have cleansed my conscience thoroughly, and done all that can reasonably be expected, in order to obtain forgiveness of my sins, that alone should be motive enough for me to prepare at once for a general confession. And such is really the case, my dear brethren.

Vain is the
excuse of
men of the
world, who
say they
have no
time for it.

Let no one try to excuse himself by saying that he has no time for that, and that he has other things to attend to; that, if he were a Religious and had nothing else to look after, he might have time and inclination thus to examine his whole life, and to make a general confession, but that men of the world cannot do such things. But why do you say that you have other business to attend to? Is there any business in the world so important as that of your immortal soul, whose eternal happiness perhaps depends on your making a good general confession? Answer me now the questions that children are asked in the catechism, why are you in this world? what is the end of your being? is it to keep your house, or your temporal business or occupation going? But these things are, according to the decrees of Providence, only means which you can direct by a good intention to the one, only, important business, for which you were created, and of which Christ said to Martha in the Gospel: "Martha, Martha, thou art careful, and art troubled about many things. But one thing is necessary."¹ But one thing is necessary, namely, to serve God, to love Him above all things, and thereby to save your soul and make sure of eternal happiness. Think often of the warning of Our Lord: "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?"² What better will he be, if by his care and diligence he gains the whole world and

¹ Martha, Martha, sollicita es, et turbaris erga plurima. Porro unum est necessarium.—Luke x. 41, 42.

² Quid prodest homini si mundum universum lucretur, animæ vero suæ detrimentum patitur!—Matt. xvi. 26.

all its wealth but suffers even the least loss as far as his soul is concerned?

The very excuse you allege, that you are burdened with temporal cares, makes a general confession much more useful, nay, even necessary to you. For if business cares occupy your time so much that you cannot give an exact account of your daily actions, as they are in the sight of God, it is only right that you should set apart a certain time during the year in which to regulate your accounts with God by a general confession. If you belonged to a religious Order, you would have time enough every day to attend to your soul; you would examine your conscience daily, and repent of your faults, and at least every week you would go to confession and holy Communion; you would look on it as an almost impossible prodigy to offend God by a grievous sin, and yet, in spite of all those helps to salvation, you would make a general confession, every year, of the time that has elapsed since your last general confession, in order to make surer of cleansing your soul from all stain. Now, you acknowledge that in your state of life you have not such opportunities of attending to your spiritual interests; your thoughts, ideas, cares, and troubles are all directed to temporal things, while you seldom think of God or heaven. Perhaps you never examine your conscience at night before going to rest, as pious Christians, who fear God and are anxious to save their souls, always do. In all places, at home and abroad, since you have to do with all kinds of people, you are exposed to many occasions and dangers of sin in thought, word, and deed, and you can hardly be expected to come off victor in all those encounters. With a mind full of distractions, you go to confession every three months, or even every month (and indeed it is a good thing if you go so often; but even then God knows what kind of confessions you make!), and perhaps you have not yet made a general confession. Now, is it not evident that, if you are concerned about the salvation of your soul, the very circumstance you bring forward as an excuse should be an additional motive for you to prepare for a general confession?

They have all the more reason for making a general confession.

I have no time for it. Ah, God help you! No time for the one thing to which you should devote your whole life! You can spend a whole year in the service of the world, but you cannot spare half a day to examine your conscience and cleanse your soul from the stain of sin? Four times a year you have your house, its furniture, and even your kitchen utensils cleaned from top to

For they have time enough for other and unnecessary things.

bottom; but you have no time to give your conscience a thorough purifying? You have time enough to pay and to receive unnecessary visits; time enough to talk, when you had better keep silent; time enough to waste in decking out your perishable body with all sorts of finery, for which you will have to render a strict account at the bar of divine justice; time enough to spend in amusements and parties, in gambling and in other diversions that will likely supply you with matter for your next confession; but you have no time to arrange your accounts with God, your future Judge? no time to place your soul in safety and quiet? no time to begin a better life? in a word, no time to secure for yourself an eternity of happiness after this short life? Away with that excuse of yours! It could not have been a true Christian spirit that prompted it.

It will not
upset their
mind or
make them
scrupulous,
as they
pretend.

Yes, say others, that is all true; but if I were to make a general confession, it would upset me completely, disturb my conscience, and make me scrupulous. Eh? Why, there is no better means of bringing peace and quiet to your conscience, and protecting it against scruples, than a good general confession of your whole life, as we shall see on another occasion. You are afraid, perhaps, to disturb the filth of your conscience, lest it should commence to stink in your nostrils too strongly? But no matter, set to work boldly, and you will get rid of it once for all. I am not clever enough for it, say others; I do not know enough; it would bother me immensely; in fact, I have quite enough to do to remember my sins for my monthly confession; what would it be, then, if I were to try to recollect all the sins I have committed during my whole life? This is another vain excuse. If you only try it, you will get on well enough; the God of goodness and mercy will help you with His light and grace, as we have seen already, if you are only in earnest about being converted to Him, and beg of Him humbly to assist you.

Exhortation
to make a
general
confession
and short
instruction
as to how to
set about it.

Divide your life into periods; from your seventh to your twelfth year; from your twelfth year to the time when you entered on a permanent state of life, a period during which, generally speaking, most sins are committed, on account of the vehemence of passion and the inconsiderateness of youth; and finally, from that time to the present. Go through the ten commandments, and see what you have done against them in the different periods; your confessor, if he is an experienced man, will help you in this, if you come to him at a time when he has no other penitents to attend to (for it is generally better not to make such

a confession when there are many people waiting). The sins that you cannot remember after reasonable diligence in the examen of your conscience you are not bound to tell; nor are you expected to be so exact in declaring the number of your sins as in your ordinary confessions, unless you have to make good some fault committed in declaring them. Try it only, in God's name, and you will find that it is not such a very difficult matter, after all. You will thank him who advised you to take that step, when you find what peace it will bring your conscience; and, as far as your past life is concerned, you will be certain that all your accounts with God are in good order, and that your sins are as completely forgiven as Frederic of Arragon forgave the crimes of his subjects. These latter, having rebelled against their sovereign, begged to be forgiven, and the king, to show how completely he pardoned them, caused to be painted a book surrounded with flames of fire, under which was written the motto, "let the past be forgotten."¹ Thus, being completely cleansed from your sins, you will be enabled to begin a new life and to say, with the Apostle: "And I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me,"² whom alone I am resolved to love with all my heart for the remainder of my life. Amen.

THIRTY-FOURTH SERMON.

ON THE ADVANTAGE OF A GENERAL CONFESSION AS FAR
AS THE NEXT LIFE IS CONCERNED.

Subject.

1. The best means of placing the soul in safety and security for the next life is a general confession. 2. To whom a confession of the kind is to be recommended.—*Preached on the eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Confide, fili, remittuntur tibi peccata tua.—Matt. ix. 2.
"Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee."

¹ *Recedant vetera.*

² *Vivo autem, jam non ego: vivit vero in me Christus.*—Gal. ii. 20.

Introduction.

What a good and generous Redeemer we have! The only object the paralytic man had in appearing before Our Lord was to recover the health of his body; and not only did he receive that, but something infinitely more valuable, which he did not even dream of asking, namely, the forgiveness of his sins and the sanctification of his soul. "Be of good heart, son," were the words he heard from Our Lord, "thy sins are forgiven thee." O sinners, who are grievously ill in your souls, come quickly and appeal to such a good and merciful God; make known to Him, in the holy sacrament of penance, the maladies you are suffering from, and beg of Him with contrite hearts to help you, and you will at once be restored to health. Last Sunday I showed that a general confession of one's whole life, or at least of the time that has elapsed since the last general confession, is the best means of cleansing one's soul from sin, as far as the past is concerned. As a further encouragement to us to have recourse to this means, I now say,

Plan of Discourse.

The best means of placing the soul in safety and security for the next life is a general confession; this I shall prove in the first part. Should all, then, without exception, make a general confession of their whole lives? I shall answer that question in the second part.

O Lord Jesus, grant us Thy necessary light and grace, through the intercession of Mary, Thy Mother, and of the holy guardian angels, that, after having made a good confession of all our sins, we may merit to hear, in repose and security of conscience, the consoling words: "Be of good heart, son; thy sins are forgiven thee."

The best repose in this life consists in a good conscience.

The true repose and safety of the soul in this life consists in a good conscience, which cannot reproach one with any sin that he has not repented of, and which, as far as is possible on this earth, assures him that he is in the favor and grace of God, and that there is no debt entered against him in the great account-book, so that he can console himself with the assurance that he is a beloved friend and child of God, and a lawful heir to the kingdom of heaven. Oh, certainly, that is a consolation that far surpasses every earthly joy and pleasure, no matter how great the latter may be. But if there is a well-founded doubt concerning even one grievous sin, as to whether it has been for-

given or not, this repose and safety are disturbed; the worm commences to gnaw; the soul cannot rejoice and be glad in the Lord. Therefore we often hear good and pious Christians,—for, as a general rule, they who are accustomed to a vicious life become careless in those things,—we often hear them complain, ah, I wish I were certain that I have had a proper supernatural sorrow for all my past sins; that I have declared them all candidly in confession; that they are really forgiven, and that I am in the state of sanctifying grace! And who can assure you of that? Do you expect an angel to come down from heaven for the purpose?

Yet you have in your own conscience an angel that can give you a moral assurance to that effect, if you make, after reasonable diligence in preparation, a general confession of your whole life. If there is anything that can give the desired repose to the soul in this particular, it is a confession of the kind. The official who gives an account of his stewardship to his superior every quarter, and has the latter's sign manual to testify that his accounts are in good order, can be quite certain that no complaint can be made against him. Yet it may happen that, when the accounts of several years are examined together, grievous errors, that previously escaped notice, will be detected, so that, for the official to be fully at rest, he must have a document from his superior to prove that for several years no mistake has occurred in his accounts; when he has that, he can be perfectly certain that neither himself nor his heirs will have any further trouble about the matter. It is the same with the human soul, which is placed as a steward over certain goods by the Almighty. "Give an account of Thy stewardship;" says God to us whenever we go to confession. Our ordinary confessions are special renderings of accounts that we make to God every three months, or month, or fortnight, or week, according as we go to confession frequently or not; and if we have always a true sorrow for sin and a firm purpose of amendment, they are signed by God as valid, and we can be easy in conscience. But since it may often happen that one has good reason for thinking that perhaps he has committed some notable error in one or other of those confessions, in order to allay his doubts and bring repose to his conscience once for all, the best thing he can do is to examine all his former accounts, that is, to make a general examination of his conscience, and a confession,

It is best procured by a general confession. Shown by a simile.

¹ Redde rationem villicationis tue.—Luke xvi. 2.

either of the sins of his whole life, or of those he has committed since his last general confession.

For thereby one is, as it were, assured that his sins are all forgiven forever.

In a confession of this kind one receives a document written with the Blood of Jesus Christ, to prove that his accounts for the past years are now in good order, and he can have a reasonable confidence and assurance that all the debts he contracted with God are paid, and that God will make no further claim on him as far as his past sins are concerned. And even if he forgets some grievous sins in that confession, he is still assured, since he has used all reasonable diligence, that he has done all that is required on his part to repent properly, and, therefore, that he will never again, during his whole life, be bound to confess those sins, or even to think of them. But if a doubt should occur to him as to whether he has confessed this or that sin, he has always good reason for believing that he has confessed everything properly, so that he is not bound to examine his conscience on the matter any more. In a word, he may be quite at rest, and can rejoice in the Lord with his whole heart, and say to himself: now I have nothing more to fear with regard to my past sins; all I have to do now is to be careful not to fall again into sin, and to serve with more zeal than ever the good and merciful God, who has blotted out all my sins at once.

From this assurance arises the greatest joy one can have on earth.

What consolation and joy it is for a soul that is really desirous of salvation to have an assurance of this kind, and to be freed from all anxiety regarding the past! Eating, drinking, dancing, and all ye other amusements of the vain children of the world, I laugh at you, if I only have that sweet repose and security of conscience; for I would not barter it for all the delights of earth! William, duke of Aquitaine, was of the same opinion. He went once into retreat and made a general confession of his whole wicked life to St. Bernard; and after he had done so, he said that, although he had refused himself no pleasure that he could possibly procure, he never had any satisfaction equal to that which he derived from that general confession. Nor can it be otherwise. I wish that all who have once thoroughly cleansed their consciences by a general confession, and I am sure there must be many such here present, could let us know what they felt on the occasion; I have not the least doubt that they would assure us that they were inundated by a feeling of unusual repose and heavenly consolation. Let him who does not believe this put it to the proof; otherwise he will be pro-

nouncing on a matter of which he knows nothing, like a blind man pretending to judge of color.

Yes, some may perhaps think; but how long will that peace of mind last? God help us! before we have time to look round, we fall into mortal sin again, and are just as bad as before; so, what is the good of a general confession? Do you, then, really think it is of no use? Suppose that after your general confession you were to return, like the dog, to your vomit, and to fall again into sin (for repentance does not make such a change in our poor nature as to prevent us from sinning again), does that render useless all you have done? Would you not care about cleaning out your kettle, because you know that it will soon become rusty again? Will you not sweep out your room, because you know that in a day it will be filled with dust? You have, at all events, the consolation of knowing that for the remainder of your life, nay, for all eternity, your conscience is purified from the sins of all those past years, and from all anxiety and reasonable doubt concerning them. Is not that consolation enough? And, besides, it is much easier for you to confess from year to year the sins you may commit in future. Do you still think the general confession of no use?

A joy that is not disturbed by future sin.

But you say that you have scarcely time to look round, when you fall again into sin. Yes, that can easily be the case after ordinary confessions, in which you have not, perhaps, true sorrow and a firm purpose of amendment; but there is not so much danger of it when one, out of a pure desire of being converted to God with his whole heart, makes a general confession, and thereby thoroughly cleanses his conscience. When a room is properly cleaned out, one cannot bear to see the least speck of dust in it, and is careful about allowing even a piece of paper to fall on the floor. Nay, in some houses there are slippers placed at the door, so that those who enter may put them on, in order to avoid soiling the floor with their muddy shoes. But if a long time has elapsed since the room was cleaned out, one is not nearly so careful about soiling the floor; it does not matter much, he thinks; it will be all swept out when the room is cleaned. So it is too with the soul and the conscience of man. He who is already in the state of sin is not, generally speaking, very scrupulous about committing fresh sins; the next confession, he thinks, will clear them all away. But when the conscience is once thoroughly purified, which is done with the greatest certainty by a general confession, one is most careful not to sully it

A general confession is also the best means of avoiding sin in future.

again by a mortal sin. For he who has once tasted the sweets of a peaceful conscience thinks too much of them to part with them lightly, so that the least appearance of sin is able to frighten one who formerly did not hesitate to go into the proximate occasion of sin. Besides, there are special graces and helps that God, who will not allow Himself to be outdone in generosity by a creature, gives to him who has been converted with his whole heart, in order to keep him in the state of grace. Those who have had experience of it could testify to the truth of this, and many of them could say, with truth, that for years after their first general confession they did not commit one mortal sin; and many others, that during their whole lives they never fell back into grievous sin; while all of them can ascribe to the general confession the beginning of the holy lives they afterwards led. Hence almost for all future time a general confession places the soul in a state of repose and security.

How terrible the remembrance of our sins at the hour of death!

And what a great consolation is derived from it in the hour of death, when the soul is about to depart on its long journey into eternity; in that terrible moment, when the command is given to us: "Take order with thy house, for thou shalt die and not live."¹ What can a poor mortal think in that moment, if his accounts with God are not in good order? Who has not heard of the terrible temptations and assaults with which the Evil One attacks even the most holy souls in the hour of death? That pious monk of whom St. John Climacus writes could tell us about them: the day before his death he lay for some time as if in an ecstasy, during which he kept answering an invisible interrogator. "Yes," he would say, "I have done that, but I have confessed and repented of it;" "no," he would exclaim, in answer to another question, "I did not do that;" or else, "I have been guilty of it, but I have done penance;" or, "I hope that through the mercy of God I will be forgiven." Ah Christians, if such things happen to holy servants of God, who have led lives of penance and mortification, how will it be with those who with the utmost indifference commit one sin after another, and pay little attention to the great business of their soul's salvation? "Alas," sighs St. Bernard, "how many things will then occur to us, which we either did not look on as sins, or thought so little of, that we did not even give ourselves the trouble of repenting of and confessing them."² How many grievous sins will then

¹ *Dispone domui tuæ, quia morieris tu, et non vives.*—Isa. xxxviii. 1.

² *Heu, quanta tunc in mentem venient, quæ nunc veill nulla esse putantes, inconfessa atque impurgata relinquimus.*—S. Bern., *serm. de Virg.*

occur to us, that we now look on as doubtful? How many sins that we have caused others to commit by giving scandal, by impure conversation, by immodesty in dress, by exposing indecent pictures and statues in our houses, or by giving bad example, that we do not even think of now? How many invalid or doubtful confessions, in childhood, youth, or manhood, through culpable ignorance, shame, or want of true sorrow and purpose of amendment, which will then torture the departing soul? And how happy they will be who, like the dying monk, can answer boldly, yes, I did that, but I repented of it, and I trust in the mercy of God?

Such, my dear brethren, is the consolation and security enjoyed by him who has got rid of all his sins by a good general confession. He can meet without dread the attacks of the devil, who will try to inspire him with fear or anxiety regarding his past confessions and sins; and he can say to himself, whatever I have done during the last twenty, thirty, or forty years of my life to offend God, along with the errors I committed in my confessions and the doubts that occurred to me, I have settled once for all by a general confession, so that I need not examine myself any more on those things, nor even think of them. Whatever I have done against the commandments since then, I have repented of and confessed in the same way from one year to another. My accounts with God are in good order, and are signed in approval by the precious Blood of Jesus Christ. All my sins are washed away, with the sole exception of those I have committed since my last confession. Avaunt, Satan; you can find nothing in me to make me afraid of my Judge, for I have been already reconciled to Him! What an exceeding joy and consolation for a soul about to depart from this world to be so well prepared to meet its Judge.

Then it will be a source of the greatest comfort to have made a general confession.

Father Ambrose Cataneus, in his "Treatise on a Happy Death," relates the following instance of a nobleman who did not lead a very Christian or pious life. One day the thought struck him that he could not long continue in his vicious habits without coming to a miserable end, and he made up his mind to go on a retreat for a few days, in order to examine his conscience and to prepare for a general confession of his whole life. He carried his design happily into execution, and was thereupon filled with such heavenly consolation that he could never think of the confession he had made without shedding tears of joy. As he was lying in his last illness, and felt that death was approaching, he

Shown by an example

said aloud to those who were standing round: "I should have been lost forever, if the good God had not given me the grace to make a general confession; whenever I think of it now, it seems to me that I have in my hands a document which ensures to me the possession of eternal happiness." He himself was the only one who was able, in his last moments, to console his sorrowing wife and children, and to exhort them to avoid sin and to serve God zealously. A quarter of an hour before he died, he caused the good resolutions he had written out after his general confession to be read to him; and at every word he gave evident signs of the great consolation and joy he felt. In that happy state he gave up his soul into the hands of his Maker, and, as we cannot doubt, entered into a blissful eternity.

To have that comfort in life and death we should make a general confession.

I look on it as certain, my dear brethren, that we all wish and desire an end like that; nor do I doubt for a moment that, when the last hour comes for us, we shall be glad to have got rid of all stain of sin completely by a good general confession; or, at least, if we have not made one up to that time, we shall certainly wish to make one then. And why do we not do so at once, since we have now a favorable opportunity? Good reason had that criminal, of whom Father Christopher Vega writes, to speak as he did; the day before his execution he sent for a priest of our Society, and said to him, "Father, do you know what we have both to do now? All the sins I have ever committed must be cleared off my conscience this very day." "And why so?" asked the priest, who was well inclined to encourage him in his holy resolution. "To-morrow," answered the other, "I have to take a leap from this world into another, and in order to be sure of doing it well I must go back and take a run to it." His meaning was that he had to examine his whole life, and by a good confession cleanse his soul from all the sins he had committed. And he did well, because he was about to die. Still better was the answer given by a gentleman who, while still in good health, wished to make a general confession. The priest asked him why he had come to that determination. "Why do you ask me," was the answer? "Must I not die some time or other? Is not death always hurrying after me? How do I know when, where, and how it will overtake me? In my last illness I will have enough to do with my sickness and sufferings, with my children, domestics, and the friends who will visit me; so that I now wish to take time by the forelock, and to do with the greatest care that on which my eternal salvation depends, and which I shall probab-

ly not be able to attend to in my last moments." Let us all, my dear brethren, follow the example of this prudent and good Christian. Now, that we are sound in mind and body, let us do what we shall certainly wish to have done on our death-bed, and cleanse our souls from all the sins of our lives by a good general confession; and then, whether death comes soon or late, suddenly or after a long illness, we can meet it whenever or wherever it comes, bravely and with the assurance of eternal salvation; for it will never find us unprepared. Thus we shall be at peace during life, and consoled and comforted at the hour of death. But are we to understand that a general confession is to be recommended to all Christians without exception? This question I shall answer in the

Second Part.

In the first place, with regard to those who have never made a general confession, it is, ordinarily speaking, to be recommended to them. For some it is absolutely necessary; and for nearly all the others, it is of the greatest advantage to their souls. It is necessary for those who, as we have seen already, have either concealed a mortal sin wilfully in confession, through fear and shame, or who know that their past confessions were invalid through want of a true supernatural sorrow and purpose of amendment, or because they did not confess their sins candidly, or, at least, have good reason for doubts on the subject. Moreover, he who has for years led a dissolute, sinful life, or has been careless in the divine service, and now feels an inspiration from God to begin a new and a better mode of life, will find that a general confession is not only useful, but even necessary. But for the others, although they may not be anxious about their past confessions, it is very advantageous, both to make sure of having corrected any fault they may have committed in their past confessions, and to set their consciences more at rest, and give more stability to their good resolutions.

A general confession is necessary, or at least very useful, ordinarily speaking, for those who have not yet made one.

In the second place, the question is, whether they who have already made with reasonable diligence a general confession of their whole lives would do well to repeat that confession. And my answer is, no; for, generally speaking, that would not be good for most people, while for some it would be positively injurious, for others very dangerous, and for none necessary.

It is a different thing with those who have made one already.

There are some anxious, melancholy, and scrupulous souls who are never at ease, no matter how often they go to confession.

Not good for scrupulous

persons to repeat their confessions.

They are always dejected and filled with bitterness of heart; they never can satisfy their uneasy consciences, and there is always a doubt, although an unreasonable one, to torment them, an ever-recurring "perhaps" to trouble their peace of mind. Perhaps, they say, I have not confessed that properly; perhaps I have never had true sorrow and firm purpose of amendment; perhaps my confessor did not understand all I said to him; perhaps I was not validly absolved, etc. And the more they examine themselves, the more bewildered do they become. For such people a repetition of their general confession would be not only useless, but even highly injurious; it would be for them, not a medicine to give them relief, but rather a rack to torture them; and, instead of restoring them to health, it only aggravates their disease. They are like people who have sore eyes; the more they rub them, the worse they become. They have, in fact, just as little chance of finding peace by repeating their confessions, as one has of cleaning muddy water by keeping it constantly stirred up; it must be allowed to remain still for a time, so that it can have time to settle.

They must obey their confessor blindly.

When those people have once told in confession all the sins they have on their consciences, they must not think of them any more. They should take to heart, and look on as said specially to themselves, those words of the Wise Man: "Think of the Lord in goodness and seek Him in simplicity of heart; for He is found by them that tempt Him not; and He showeth Himself to them that have faith in Him."¹ As little children allow themselves to be ruled by their mothers, so they, too, must follow blindly the advice of their confessor. If he tells them that they are not to make a general confession, although they have never made one, they must obey; if he tells them even not to examine their conscience before confession, they must humbly obey him. And, in fact, if they who suffer from this spiritual malady do not submit humbly and obediently, without a word of complaint, to their ordinary confessor, they will never recover their spiritual health. Scruples arise from ignorance or from a melancholy disposition, or, as often happens, from the secret pride and obstinacy of those who are unwilling to submit their judgment to people who know more than they do; or else, they may arise from an inscrutable decree of God's Providence, who wishes to make us humble and to withdraw us from the vanities of the world. But

¹ Sentite de Domino in bonitate, et in simplicitate cordis quærite illum: quoniam inventuræ hinc, qui non tentant illum. apparet autem eis, qui fidem habent in illum.—Wisd. 1. 1, 2.

from whatever cause scruples arise, the souls that are affected with them cannot be helped unless they surrender their own judgment completely and with the greatest humility to that of their confessor, and obey him as little children do their parents.

I do not reckon amongst the scrupulous those who lead an idle, useless life, and easily fall into mortal sin, or are the occasion of others falling into it; nor those who do not try to fulfil the duties and obligations to which they are bound under pain of grievous sin; although, when such persons come to confession, they are scrupulous about many things that are not sinful at all, while they neglect or pay little attention to real sins, that they must avoid if they wish to amend their lives. What folly for a man who is sunk in vice to have a scruple about stepping on a cross of straw, or omitting his usual prayers or works of devotion, and so on! Scruples of that kind, my dear brethren, are like those of the high-priests, Scribes, and Pharisees, who were afraid to enter the judgment-hall of Pilate, or to receive back from Judas the thirty pieces of silver, while they had not the least hesitation about suborning false witnesses, and glutting their hatred by condemning the innocent Son of God to a disgraceful death. Nor do I reckon as scrupulous those who associate freely with persons of the opposite sex, and dance and amuse themselves, while they allow full liberty to eyes, ears, hands, and all their senses, and, when they come to confession, are scrupulous as to whether they have consented to impure thoughts or actions. Eh? Scruples of that kind are very well founded, indeed! They are like the scruple of the peasant who said to his confessor: Father, there is something else that I have a scruple about. And what is it? I have stolen a horse. Oh, that is a fine, substantial scruple; I am not surprised that it should make you anxious! People of that kind have a very good reason for making a general confession, in order to amend their lives and to regain their peace of mind.

Further, there are many who have lived in impurity for a long time, and have committed many sins through that horrible vice; for these the frequent repetition of such sins in a general confession would be not only useless and unnecessary, but even very dangerous. As St. John Climacus says: it would be like trying to extinguish a fire by throwing oil on it, or to drive away a hungry dog by giving him a piece of meat, which would only attract him all the more. Father Louis de Ponte com-

Not every one whose conscience is uneasy is scrupulous.

It is not advisable for those who have committed many sins of impurity to repeat their confessions.

pare it to stirring up a noisome sink, the only effect of which is to create a foul odor. In the same way, the only effect of recalling sins of impurity is to give occasion to other unchaste thoughts and desires. Therefore, once such sins have been got rid of by a good general confession, they must be forgotten completely, and be buried in oblivion; nor should they ever be mentioned in confession again, unless in a general way; for instance, I am sorry for all the sins of my past life that I committed against holy purity; not a word more should be said about them. Other sins may be mentioned freely, if one wishes to do so (although that is not necessary, once a general confession of them has been made), and especially when one has to go to another confessor, that the latter may know the state of his penitent's conscience.

Exhortation
to all who
have not yet
done so to
make a gen-
eral confes-
sion.

By way of conclusion, my advice to you, who have not yet made a general confession, is, to make one at once, and keep up the practice of making one every year, or, better and easier still, every half year, of all the sins that you have committed since your last general confession; and if you do that, you will be able to console yourselves at the end with the assurance that you have squared all your accounts with the almighty God. But, some will say, what is the use of going to so much trouble? I am not uneasy about my past confessions; I did what I could to make them well. So much the better for you that you have no apparent need of a general confession; still, you will find it of the greatest advantage in cleansing your conscience more thoroughly and giving you more peace of mind. Was it necessary for the pious king Ezechias to examine, as he did, his whole life? No, says Cornelius a Lapide; he did it out of devotion, and for the sake of greater security, thereby giving us an example, which we would do well to imitate. "I will recount to Thee all my years in the bitterness of my soul,"¹ says Ezechias, after he had been restored to health and strength. Take notice, says St. Bernard, that he does not say merely that he will think of his sins, but that he will recount them; that is, he is not satisfied with bewailing them once; but in the bitterness of his soul he will deplore all his sins one by one, and he will examine not merely the sins of one year, but also those of his whole life; "I will recount to Thee all my years." Ask St. John Chrysostom why St. Paul, the great Apostle of the gentiles, published his sins in the Epistle he wrote to his disciple Timothy: "Who

¹ *Recogetabo tibi omnes annos meos in amaritudine anime mee.—Isa. xxxviii. 15.*

before was a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and contumelious.”¹ Was it necessary for him to make such a public confession? or did he still stand in need of pardon? But all his sins were forgiven in baptism, as he acknowledges in the same verse of the same Epistle: “But I obtained the mercy of God.”² The reason of his doing so, says St. Chrysostom, was that he knew well the advantage to be derived from the sorrowful recollection and repeated confession of his sins. If St. Paul, who had the assurance of being forgiven, says St. Augustine, acted in that way, what should not the ordinary Christian do, who has not such an assurance? Ask St. Augustine himself why he published the confession of his sins, so that every one might read it. Was he obliged to do it? No, he says himself. “It is solely out of love for Thee, O Lord,” he exclaims, “that I publish the iniquities of my life.”³ Let us, my dear brethren, imitate his example, in so far, at least, that we declare our sins secretly to one priest.

There is no doubt that the crafty tempter will try to put all kinds of difficulties in our way, to hinder us from making a general confession, because long experience has taught him that many souls are rescued from him by that means; but let us only begin bravely, and seriously undertake this work, that is so necessary for our souls. The day or two, so should each one think to himself, that I now subtract from my ordinary worldly occupations, will be the means of gaining great treasures for me, and of bringing me the greatest repose and security for my whole life, past as well as future. I shall come to know myself thoroughly, and shall be spurred on to serve God more zealously by the consideration of His extreme patience and long-suffering. I shall make the hour of my death one of consolation and joy for myself, by doing now what I shall then wish to have done. With the same weapons that the devil will then use to tempt me and try to drive me to despair, holding before me the terrors of the judgment, I shall now combat all my sins by accusing myself of them before the priest who is sitting in the sacred tribunal in the place of my future Judge. Yes, my Lord and my God, so shall it be, and that as soon as possible, since I do not know when death will arrive. “I will recount to Thee all my years in the bitterness of my soul,” and will candidly declare in confession all my sins, as far as I can remember them! Do

And not to allow themselves to be prevented from it by any deceit of the devil

¹ Qui prius blasphemus fui, et persecutor, et contumeliosus.—I. Tim. 1. 13.

² Sed misericordiam Dei consecutus sum.—Ibid.

³ Amore amoris tui facio istud, recolens vias meas nequissimas.

Thou only give me the necessary light and grace thereto! Mary, Mother of mercy and Refuge of sinners, help me by thy powerful intercession in this business, that is so advantageous for my soul! Holy guardian angel, allow me not to neglect it, leave me no peace nor rest until I have accomplished it well, that I may live in peace and die with the assurance of eternal happiness. Amen.

ON SATISFACTION AND DOING PENANCE AFTER CONFESSION.

THIRTY-FIFTH SERMON.

ON THE PENITENTIAL WORKS THAT THE SINNER OWES TO GOD AND TO HIMSELF.

Subject.

He who has sinned must do works of penance; this is required, 1. by what he owes to God; 2. by what he owes to himself.—*Preached on the first Sunday of Advent.*

Text.

Non in commensationibus et ebrietatibus, non in cubilibus et impudiciis, . . . sed induamini Dominum Jesum Christum.
—Rom. xiii. 13, 14.

“Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities: . . . but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Introduction.

Our holy Mother, the Catholic Church, gives us a beautiful and salutary lesson in the words of to-day's Epistle, wherewith she instructs all her children how to prepare for the advent of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and future Judge. And what does she say? “It is now the hour for us to rise from sleep.” Sinners, it is full time for you to awaken out of the deep sleep of sin by true penance. “Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light.” But when we have so far done penance that we are freed from the slavery of sin, and have regained the grace of God, what must we do then? “Let us walk honestly as in the day: not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities: but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ,” that is, live according to the example of Him who spent His life in constant humiliations, poverty,

watchings, fasting, and suffering; and, as the Apostle says immediately after, “make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscence;” you must chastise your flesh and mortify it by constant penance. And this is what I intend speaking of, my dear brethren, during this season of Advent, namely, that a true Christian must lead a penitential life, mortifying and crucifying himself. Why? We have sinned, and may sin again. We are living under a mortified and crucified God. An easy, luxurious life does not lead to heaven. Therefore we must do penance. The conclusion is evident. I shall consider the first reason to-day, and I say,

Plan of Discourse.

He who has sinned must do penance; this is required by what he owes to God, whom he has offended: the first part. It is required by what he who has offended owes to himself: the second part.

O dear Saviour, who didst suffer for our sins, we implore Thee, by the merits of Thy Mother Mary and the intercession of our holy guardian angels, in the words of the Church, “that Thou wouldst vouchsafe to bring us to true penance, we beseech Thee to hear us.”¹ Amen.

It is a heretical error to condemn works of penance.

It is a grievous error of heretics, who wish to avoid mortification, to condemn as unnecessary severities, derogatory to the honor of Jesus Christ, all works of penance and satisfaction, whether they are imposed in confession, or undertaken voluntarily. For, as Luther and his followers say, Christ has already fully atoned for all our sins, by offering to His eternal Father the inexhaustible treasure of His precious Blood, that He has shed for us, so that we shall not be required to suffer the least punishment; and to mortify and chastise ourselves for our sins is nothing else but to lessen and decry as invalid the merits of Jesus Christ. True penance consists only in the amendment of one’s life; there is no need of sorrow or contrition for the sins we have committed, in order to obtain pardon of them from God; nor is there any necessity of mortification, fasting, or other bodily austerities, as long as we keep from sin; nay, provided we have but a firm faith that Christ, the Son of God, has suffered and died to atone for our sins, it is quite enough. What a grand idea that is, to escape anything that might give pain to the body!

Condemned by the

But this error has been long since condemned by the Catholic Church, especially in the Council of Trent. All the Fathers and

¹ Ut ad veram poenitentiam nos perducere digneris, te rogamus, audi nos.

Doctors of the Church are opposed to this error, since they all exhort us, by voice and pen, to do penance. What is a sinner? asks Tertullian already in the first century of Christianity. He is one, he answers, who lives on earth in order to do penance, that is, to suffer, to deny himself, to mortify his senses and his sensuality, to chastise and crucify his flesh. St. Augustine says that there are three kinds of tribunals, in which God judges in different ways: in the first He shows nothing but mercy and goodness; and that is the sacrament of baptism, in which He so generously forgives all sins, no matter how great they may be in number or malice, that He receives the sinner fully into His grace and friendship, and, at the same time, remits all punishment due to sin, so that not the least obligation of atonement remains. In the second tribunal He will show nothing but His justice; and that will be at the end of the world, on the Last Day, in the general judgment, when there will be no longer place for mercy, and the sinner will be judged and condemned according to the strict measure of justice. In the third He shows justice, and mercy, too; and that is the holy sacrament of penance, in which the divine mercy, in consideration of the infinite merits and satisfaction of Jesus Christ, forgives the guilt of sin completely and forever, but in such a way that the divine justice reserves to itself certain rights that must be accorded it: God receives the sinner into His grace and friendship and lays aside the hatred and aversion He had conceived against him; but there still remains some temporal punishment due to sin, which has to be suffered.

Church and
the holy
Fathers.

And this is but right. If I offend a man like myself, and injure him in his honor and good name, or in his temporal concerns, to what am I bound? I acknowledge and confess humbly that I have done wrong, and I am sorry for it; I beg the man's pardon and promise that I will never offend him again; that is all right enough, but it is not sufficient. I am fully reconciled to him; moreover, he is determined, according to the Christian law, not to bear hatred or anger towards me for what I have done; that is a good and desirable thing for me, but it is not enough yet. The injury I have done his honor or his property must be repaired, even although I should myself suffer a grievous injury in doing so. It is the same with earthly tribunals; if the sovereign graciously pardons a malefactor condemned to death, he does not allow him to get off without suffering some punishment; for he is either sentenced to hard labor for a number of

The justice
and neces-
sity of pen-
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smiles.

years, or else he is publicly scourged, or branded by the executioner, according to the nature and gravity of his crime. Sinner, do you know what you have done by consenting to grievous sin? You have with the greatest insolence attacked the infinite majesty of God, and offended and insulted Him; you have injured His honor and glory, which is the only good that He can receive from creatures, for you have despised Him, and, in His very presence, have trampled His commandments under foot. The sentence that was already pronounced on you was eternal damnation; but your life was spared, when you humbly confessed your sins and received sacramental absolution, so that you ought to be eternally grateful for the benefit bestowed on you. But gratitude is not enough; you must make reparation for the injured honor of God; you must satisfy the divine justice for the punishment that still remains due to your sins, either by bearing patiently the crosses and trials that God sends you, or by voluntary penances and mortifications in this life, or else you will have to suffer long and indescribable pains in purgatory. "There is no doubt," says St. Eucherius, "that God blots out sin when one repents of it; but He does not leave it unpunished; for, either man must punish himself for sin, or God will have to punish him."¹ Such also is the opinion of St. Gregory and St. Bernard.

Already in
Paradise
Adam saw
the justice
of this.

If we go back to the earliest times, we shall find men of the highest position acknowledging their obligation of doing penance after having committed sin. I will say nothing of the hair-shirts, which it is expressly stated that two kings, David and Joram, used; nor of the severe fasts, for which penitents are so often praised in Holy Scripture. When the world was still in its very cradle, so to speak, and there were only two sinners who had violated the divine law, they clearly saw the necessity of doing penance. Adam and Eve, our first parents, had hardly opened their eyes to see what they had been guilty of, when they tried to cover their nakedness, and to that end made for themselves a covering out of leaves, and, indeed, of the leaves of the fig-tree: "They sewed together fig-leaves, and made themselves aprons."² But, I ask, were there not in that paradise of delight other leaves, which would have served them better as covering? Why did they choose fig-leaves, which are hard and rough, and are more apt to torment the body than to clothe

¹ Procul dubio Deus delet peccatum; sed sine ultione non deserit: aut enim ipse homo in se punit, aut Deus percutit.—St. Eucher. in 11. Kings viii.

² Conserunt folia ficus, et fecerunt sibi perizomata.—Gen. iii. 7.

it? "It was precisely," answers St. Irenæus, "because they were rough, that our first parents chose them, in order thereby to show that he who has sinned, and has lost the grace of God, must wear a garment of penance, no matter how it is fashioned." "Adam," says the holy Father, "showed his penitential spirit by clothing himself with fig-leaves, although there were many other leaves which would have been much more comfortable to wear; and he would have always worn this penitential garment, if God, in His mercy," who was satisfied with the future miseries that were in store for our first parents and their posterity, "had not made for them garments of skins, instead of the fig-leaves."¹

David had sinned grievously, and repented of his sin so thoroughly and with so much contrition, that the Prophet Nathan, in the name of the Lord, assured him of forgiveness. Be comforted, David, he said to him, "The Lord also hath taken away thy sin, thou shalt not die."² Certainly, that was joyful news to him. But what followed? "Nevertheless, 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."³ And all shall be fulfilled that I have foretold thee. "The sword shall never depart from thy house, because thou hast despised Me."⁴ Famine, war, persecution, and other plagues shall come upon thee. Such was, so to speak, the penance enjoined on him by the Prophet, after he had acknowledged his sin. But David was not satisfied with that. Hear what he says himself of the penitential works, the weeping, watching, fasting, and bodily austerities that he voluntarily undertook, and persevered in during his whole life. "I am ready for scourges," he sighs, "and my sorrow is continually before me."⁵ And why so? "For I will declare my iniquity, and I will think for my sin,"⁶ for that sin by which I have offended Thee, O my God. The tears that he shed at night, during his constant watchings, were enough to water his bed. "Every night I will

And later
on David.

¹ Ostendit Adam suam penitentiam, foliis ficulneis semetipsum contegens, existentibus et aliis foliis multis, quæ minus corpus ejus vexare potuissent; et hoc semper habuisset indumentum, nisi Dominus, qui est misericors, tunicas pelliceas præ foliis ficulneis induisset eos.—S. Iren. contra hæ. Valent.

² Dominus quoque abstulit peccatum tuum: non morieris.—II. Kings xii. 13.

³ Verumtamen quoniam blasphemare fecisti inimicos Domini, propter verbum hoc, filius qui natus est tibi, morte morietur.—Ibid. 14.

⁴ Non recedet gladius de domo tua in sempiternum, eo quod despexeris me.—Ibid. 10.

⁵ Ego in flagella paratus sum, et dolor meus in conspectu meo semper.—Ps. xxxvii. 18.

⁶ Quoniam iniquitatem meam annuntiabo, et cogitabo pro peccato meo.—Ibid. 19.

wash my bed: I will water my couch with my tears.”¹ His fasting was so severe that ashes were his food, and tears of contrition his drink. “I did eat ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping.”²

The penance imposed in confession does not satisfy for the injury offered to God.

Sinful Christian, you know that you, too, have offended the great God; you know that you have often and grievously during your life transgressed His commandments; where is your penance for those sins? I have confessed them, you say. And is that enough? What satisfaction have you offered the divine justice for the injury done to it? I have performed the penance enjoined on me by the priest. Eh? And what sort of a penance was it? I have said a few decades of the Rosary, or some of the penitential psalms, or I have heard a Mass, or given a trifling alms to the poor, or have abstained from meat for one evening. Nothing more than that? But I am not bound to do any more. Truly, that is a fine way to pay what you owe to the almighty God! A magnificent satisfaction for ten, twenty, a hundred, or more mortal sins, or even for only one! A fine way to show your appreciation of the benefit by which God has freed you from the pains of hell! Where are the voluntary mortifications and penances that should justly follow the performance of the slight penance enjoined on you? I know nothing about them; my confessor said nothing of them to me. And do you think that a sufficient reason for doing nothing more? The penance that, for good reasons and according to the merciful disposition of the Catholic Church, is now enjoined in such slight measure in the sacrament of penance, is a different thing from that which the sinner should voluntarily take on himself, in order to atone for the insult he has offered to God.

What severe penances the saints inflicted on themselves.

O ye saints and great friends of God, is it really so easy to satisfy for sin? If so, then you have either deceived us by prescribing to us in your writings a far different manner of doing penance, or you have deceived yourselves and have done far too much, by mortifying yourselves most severely for slight faults, thinking you were bound to do so; or God must have been far more severe towards you than He is with us, and the satisfaction required for your sins must have far exceeded what He demands for ours. What would you think and say, my dear brethren, if I could give you a vivid representation of the contrite hearts and bodies worn out by hunger, thirst, watching, and all kinds

¹ Lavabo per singulas noctes lectum meum; lacrymis meis stratum meum rigabo.—Ps. vi. 7.

² Cinerem tanquam panem manducabam, et potum meum cum fletu miscebam.—Ps. ci. 10.

of austerities, of true penitents, in all ages of the Church? If I could describe to you the hair-shirts, the girdles with iron spikes, the disciplines with sharp knives and spurs, with which they often tortured their emaciated flesh, even to the shedding of blood? What would you say, if I could show you in the desert so many holy hermits, such as Paul, Antony, Hilarion, Pachomius, and others, who, for some faults committed through weakness, condemned themselves during their whole lives to unceasing and severe penance; who lived in holes and caves, among reptiles and wild beasts, hidden away from the light of day, their only food being roots and vegetables, thus following the exhortation of St. Paul, and bearing the mortification of Jesus Christ constantly in their bodies, in order to satisfy for their sins? What would you think if I could show you a Pope Marcellinus, who, on account of one sin that he had committed, abdicated the papal dignity, and ordered that his body should not be buried after his death, as he was not worthy of being on earth? Or a Victorinus, who, to punish himself for a sin of impurity, thrust his hand like a wedge into a cleft tree, and kept it there for a long time, to his exceeding great torture? Or a Maurice, who, because a child whom he was sent for to baptize happened to die before the sacrament was administered, on account of the length of time he took to say Mass, laid down the mitre, and served as a gardener for seven years? Or a Jacobonus, who had himself walled up in the tomb of the person with whom he had sinned carnally, and there consumed his life away in tears of repentance, with the corpse of his former accomplice rotting beside him? Or a Guarinus, who, after having committed a similar sin, crawled on his hands and knees, like a wild beast, to Rome, and, having confessed his sin to the Pope, returned to his solitude in the same manner, where he continued his strange mode of life until his body was entirely covered with hair, so that he was captured by some hunters as a monster, on which occasion a little infant miraculously cried out that God had forgiven his sin? Or a St. Francis Xavier, who tied ropes furnished with bristles so tightly around his feet and ankles, that they ate into the flesh and caused him intolerable pain; and this he did in punishment of some sins of vanity that he had formerly committed by dancing when in the world? What would you think if I could represent to you the customs of the early Christians, according to which penitents, without regard to sex or condition, had to prostrate themselves at the church door, allowing themselves to be trodden under foot by those who

came in or went out, and imploring their prayers with tearful voice? What, you would say, what was the meaning of that? It meant what it should mean, namely, that one must punish himself, or be punished, when he has offended God. It meant that he who has acted unlawfully must deny himself lawful pleasures. It meant that one must chastise himself for having sought sinful enjoyment, and thereby merited hell.

When we think of what they did, we must be ashamed of ourselves.

And we, who have committed similar, and perhaps more grievous sins, imagine that we can atone for them so easily, and without causing ourselves the least pain? A few pence given in charity must make up for twenty acts of injustice and theft; abstinence from meat on Friday and Saturday, for many sins of drunkenness and intemperance; a genuflection, for a hundred acts of impurity; a rosary, or some decades of it, or a few *Paters* and *Aves*, for numerous sins, so that we are not obliged to further atonement for them! We have been to confession, and have fulfilled the penance enjoined by the confessor, and thereby the justice of God is completely satisfied; we enjoy our sleep, we laugh and amuse ourselves, we eat and drink, and do what we please, just as if we had not committed any sin whatever. Fasting, bodily austerities, and hair-shirts are left to people who live in convents and monasteries; such mortifications are good enough for great sinners like them, but not for us, who live in the world; we have no need of them. A fine penance that! A fine way to restore the honor we have stolen from God. As if God had less claim on the children of the world on account of their sins, than on His own beloved servants. No, says St. Cyprian, speaking of all without exception, “the penance should not be less than the crime for which it is inflicted.”¹ Every mortal sin deserves eternal punishment, and it is only just that a life-long penance should follow it. Perhaps some will think to themselves, I do not deny that I have deserved severe punishment, and I freely acknowledge that I am bound to make satisfaction to God for the insult I have offered Him; but I can manage that in another way, namely, by exciting myself to a deep sorrow when I think of my past sins, by often making an act of contrition, by gaining the indulgences granted by the Church, and by other meritorious good works. If I have recourse to means of that kind, I need not afflict my body. Besides, as long as sufficient atonement is made, it comes to the same thing in the end. How well you plead in favor of your body! In order to free it from all trouble,

¹ *Pœnitentia crimine minor non sit.*

you put the whole obligation of satisfaction on the soul alone, which has to suffer in order that the body may continue to enjoy its usual comforts. And this is the very idea I wish to combat, when I say that the body, too, must have its share in doing penance, and in satisfying for sin, as is required even by the duty you owe to yourself, as we shall see briefly in the

Second Part.

What do you think, lawyers and judges? Yet I do not want you, after all, to express an opinion on this matter; for any one who has a little common sense can do so, although he has never studied law; what would you think of a case of this kind? Two robbers and murderers have been caught in the act and brought before the judge; a master and his servant, who have been companions in wickedness. After they both have been tried, the sentence is pronounced on them to this effect, that the master is to be broken on the wheel, while the servant is to be allowed to go scotfree. I ask even you, children, what you would think of that. Have not both committed the same crime? Why, then, should the master be punished, and the servant acquitted? And if, moreover, half the booty was given to the servant, and nevertheless he was allowed to go unpunished, would that be just? Nay, more, if the servant gets by far the greater part of the plunder, while the master has to be content with some miserable thing, is it right that the latter should bear all the punishment? Further still, if the master is misled by his servant, and tempted and solicited by him in the most importunate manner to commit a robbery, and if the servant actually shows his master the means of committing the crime, and threatens him with the most dreadful consequences in case he does not consent, so that the master, contrary to his own better knowledge and inclination, is forced to become the accomplice of his servant's guilt; if all these circumstances are brought out in the trial, and, in spite of them, the master alone is condemned to the wheel or the gallows, while the servant gets off free with his booty, who would not cry out against the injustice of such a sentence? Both are equally guilty, and both should suffer the same punishment. If the guilt of the one exceeds that of the other, so should his punishment also. And if any favor is to be shown to either, then the master should be let off free, while the wicked servant has to suffer what is due to him, since he alone is to be blamed for the crime, and, besides, he has carried off the

Not only the soul, but the body, too, must do penance. Shown by a simile.

booty. Such would be the opinion of every sensible man in the matter.

For the
body has its
share in the
sin.

Now to our subject, my dear brethren. Whenever a mortal sin is committed, then the honor and glory due to the divine Majesty, as we have seen already, is stolen away, and, moreover, a murder is committed, for, according to St. Paul, by mortal sin Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is again crucified. And who is guilty of this murder and theft? The human soul; for without its consent no sin can be committed. But it is not alone in wickedness; generally speaking, it has a companion; for the body with its outward senses must help in accomplishing the sinful action, inasmuch as the soul, while it is joined with the body, cannot even conceive a thought, unless it receives by the imagination, through the senses, the form with which to invest it. Now, if the sin is to be accomplished in outward act, it is the body that has to do it. So that both body and soul are caught in the very act of sin by the almighty God, brought before His judgment-seat, and there declared worthy of punishment. Which of the two must submit to the punishment? You maintain that the soul alone has to do penance and bewail its sins with bitter tears of sorrow. But what about the body? Is it to go free altogether, and enjoy its usual comforts? Is that just? If the body has its share in the guilt, why should the soul alone be condemned to suffer?

The body is
deserving of
more severe
punishment, on
account of
its vile origin.

But perhaps it can boast of more noble descent than the soul, and of a more excellent nature; for sometimes in worldly tribunals a criminal is acquitted, or his punishment is lessened, on account of nobility or birth? Yet, do we not know that the body is most miserable in its origin? that it is made of dust and ashes, and that, without the soul, it is nothing but a sink of corruption and the food of worms? a fate that will eventually befall it, according to the words of God Himself: "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return"¹ On this head alone should favor be shown to the soul, for it is an immortal and beautiful spirit, created to the image and likeness of God, that it may see and know its Maker; so that it is the lawful lord and master of the body, who must serve it as its obedient subject.

And generally
it has
the most advantage
from sin.

Now, which of the two has the greater share of the plunder, when sin is committed? Which has the greater pleasure in the sinful act? The master, or the servant? The body or the soul? I grant that the latter has the satisfaction arising from inward

¹ Pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris.—Gen. iii. 19.

pride and vain honor. As to envy and jealousy, no pleasure comes from it to either, although it generally arises from a fear that the happiness of others will detract somewhat from our bodily well-being. All other vices, no matter what they are called, are directed to procuring for the body some sensual gratification, or warding off from it something unpleasant and disagreeable, that it may enjoy itself, eat, drink, and sleep well, be well clad and comfortably housed, and have nothing to suffer, that eyes, ears, tongue, hands, taste, smell, and touch may have the delights they long for. For that reason people commit all kinds of sins of impurity; they even stain their souls by unchaste thoughts and desires; they hesitate at no acts of injustice and deceit; they wallow in gluttony and drunkenness, and sin by extravagance in dress, and by carelessness and sloth in the divine service; while, if anything happens to interfere with the pleasure and convenience of the body, they give way to anger and hatred, to enmity and vindictiveness, to cursing and swearing. In a word, it is, generally speaking, for the sake of the body and its senses that God is abandoned and despised, that the precious soul is ruined, and the joys of heaven forfeited, while the soul has the very least share of the advantage, and the greatest of the injury and malice resulting therefrom. Now, when sin has been committed, divine justice demands that some temporal punishment should be suffered, in order to satisfy it; and this burden is placed on the soul alone. What justice or right is there in that?

Finally, if the instigator of a robbery or murder has not the least claim to mercy, and deserves the severest punishment, how can the body be spared, when there is question of satisfying for sin? For it alone not only shows the soul how to sin, and gives it occasion thereto, but continually coaxes and impels it, forces it, so to say, to consent to its desires. Would so many sins be committed against holy purity, if the eyes did not act as traitors, and lead the mind to unchaste desires by wanton glances? Would so many sins be committed against the love of our neighbor, if the ears were not open to uncharitable discourse, if the tongue knew how to restrain itself from defaming others? Would so many sins be committed against temperance, if the mouth and palate were satisfied with the necessary food and drink? But what need is there of further proof? "From whence are wars and contentions among you?" asks the Apostle St. James: "Are they not hence? from your concupiscences, which

It is almost the only instigator and occasion of sin.

war in your members?"¹ How St. Paul complains of this when he writes to the Romans: "For the good which I will, I do not; but the evil which I will not, that I do. . . . For I am delighted with the law of God, according to the inward man: but I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin, that is, in my members."²

As we know
from ex-
perience.

We have, alas, sad experience of this in ourselves. Although reason has received from God such authority over the body that the latter cannot open an eye, or move hand or foot, without the consent of the will, yet the flesh refuses obedience, and obstinately declines to hearken to the command of the reasoning will. Holy hermits, go and conceal yourselves in the caverns and dens of wild beasts; you take your bodies with you wherever you go, and they will give you enough to do, so that you will frequently hardly be able to resist their importunity! St. Jerome used to beat his breast with a stone; St. Bernard threw himself into a frozen pond, and St. Benedict rolled about in thorns, in order to subdue the flesh; even St. Paul, that vessel of election, after having uttered those bitter complaints, sighs forth: "Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"³

Therefore
the body
must do
penance, or
be punished
by God.

And yet, when the poor soul has been wearied out in the struggle, and consents to sin, and the question arises as to who must atone for the injury offered to God, sentence is at once pronounced against the soul, which, by its contrition and sorrow, has to make up for everything, while the reckless instigator of all the evil, the body, is allowed to rest and enjoy itself, and seek its comfort without the least restraint. Reason, where art thou? Is that right? No; the body should do penance also. And woe to us, if we allow it to go unpunished; for, if the soul is satisfied with that, and it is used to concede too much to the body in this life, yet the just God will not permit the body to be without its share of suffering. He has still in His power a countless number of diseases, which He can send to afflict the sinful flesh; He has an unlimited number of misfortunes at hand, which He can inflict, as forerunners of judgment, at any moment, avenging

¹ Unde bella, et lites in vobis? nonne hinc? ex concupiscentiis vestris, quæ militant in membris vestris?—James iv. 1.

² Non enim quod volo bonum, hoc facio: sed quod nolo malum, hoc ago. . . . Condelector enim legi Dei secundum interiorem hominem; video autem aliam legem in membris meis, repugnantem legi mentis meæ, et captivantem me in lege peccati, quæ est in membris meis!—Rom. vii. 19, 22, 23.

³ Infelix ego homo, quis me liberabit de corpore mortis hujus?—Ibid. 24.

Himself by plaguing the body with poverty and hunger; nor is He without innumerable crosses and trials, with which to contradict at pleasure the desires of the flesh; while death is always ready to do His bidding, and to take away husband, wife, child, or dear friend, thus depriving life of all its joys and consolation; and, finally, there is the fire of the next life, in which He can exact full satisfaction.

Therefore, sinner, let us take the safest part, and anticipate the divine punishments by voluntary mortifications. "What you have done," says St. Augustine, "cannot remain unpunished;"¹ and wherein a man has sinned, he shall also be chastised; so that "you must either punish yourself, or God will punish you."² And if you leave it to Him, woe betide you; for it will be meted out to you with the utmost severity. "If you wish to avoid the divine chastisements; then chastise yourself."³ There is no doubt that prudence teaches us to choose the lesser of two evils. A single slight mortification of the eyes, abstinence from some food or drink that we are fond of, standing or kneeling for an hour, or something of the kind that we voluntarily undertake, is of more value in the sight of God, as far as the satisfying for our sins is concerned, than severe punishments, that we must suffer against our will. We can now choose, and select what penance we please; if we wait for God's avenging arm, we know not what may befall us, and may be compelled to suffer what will cause us the greatest pain with the least merit. What penitential works we can make choice of, and how we are to perform them, we shall see, my dear brethren, on another occasion; they will not be so severe as some may, perhaps, imagine. For the present, I conclude with the words of St. John Chrysostom and of St. Paul. "That we may not be punished," says the former, "let us chastise ourselves with tears of contrition, with fasting, and other bodily mortifications."⁴ "For, as you have yielded your members," writes the Apostle to the Romans, "to serve uncleanness and iniquity unto iniquity, so now yield your members to serve justice unto sanctification."⁵ As you have abused the members of your body to offend God, so now make the same members serve as instruments to render due satisfaction to the divine

Conclusion
and exhortation to do
penance.

¹ Illud quod fecisti, impunitum esse non potest.

² Aut punis, aut puni.

³ Vis non puniat, puni tu.

⁴ Ne penas demens, unusquisque seipsum affligat lacrymis, jejuniis, etc.

⁵ Sicut enim exhibuistis membra vestra servire immunditie, et iniquitati, ad iniquitatem; ita nunc exhibete membra vestra servire justitie, in sanctificationem.—Rom. vi. 19.

justice. Think and say with me: yes, O my God, I will do penance; it is only just and right that I should; I owe it to Thee and to myself! I will satisfy Thy justice, which I have so often and so monstrously offended by my sins; and I will satisfy it by this body of mine, which I have so often and so wantonly abused to sin against Thee. Do not dare, O flesh, to oppose this resolution of mine! The penance will last but a short time, and eternal joys will be the result. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same Sermon for the first Sunday in Lent.

Text.

Cum jejunasset quadraginta diebus et quadraginta noctibus, postea esuriit.—Matt. iv. 2.

“When He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards He was hungry.”

Introduction.

That I can readily believe. It must certainly make one hungry to fast forty days and nights at a stretch, without tasting anything. Christians, which of us could do that? Ah, what a great difficulty we sometimes make of fasting a few days, and that not a complete fast, but merely eating one meal a day! No; there are many who could not even do that much. And, therefore, people look on the Lent with horror, as if it were a dreadful kind of spectre, and think that they must make merry for nearly forty days beforehand, in order to prepare for it. Poor mortals that we are! And yet we are not so badly off, for we are allowed to eat meat now, and that takes a heavy load off the hearts of many! I wish them joy! But they must not forget that all confessors and others who have the charge of souls are told to exhort them to make up for this dispensation by other works of penance. And that is but right and just. Therefore I, too, in order to satisfy my obligation, will commence at once with a similar exhortation, and will show that every good Christian is bound at all times, and much more in this penitential season, to lead a life of penance and to mortify himself. And why so? We have sinned, etc.—*Continues as before.*

THIRTY-SIXTH SERMON.

ON DOING PENANCE IN PROSPERITY AND IN ADVERSITY.

Subject.

1. What kind of penitential works they who live in prosperity can and must perform. 2. What kind is to be performed by those who suffer adversity.—*Preached on the third Sunday of Advent.*

Text.

Tu quis es?—John i. 19.
“Who art thou?”

Introduction.

Truly, a most useful question. “Who art thou?” If every one asked himself that question daily, and answered it according to his conscience, what wholesome and salutary effects it would have! Who art thou? Are you a sinner who have offended your God? How many of us, my dear brethren, could say with truth, like St. John the Baptist, that we are not sinners? Would not the greater number of us have to confess humbly that we have often and (as is the case with many) grievously sinned? Now, if you are a sinner, do you know what you have to do? You must do penance; not merely the penance which consists in repenting of and declaring your sins in confession, but you must endeavor, in the spirit of contrition, to make some atonement to God for the injuries offered Him, and to chastise the wantonness of your flesh, which was the instigator and occasion of your sins, as I showed in the last sermon. But, you ask, how are we to manage that so as not to do too little, nor too much? Before answering that question, I must ask each one of you: “Who art thou?” Are you a prosperous man, who can live in comfort, or are you poor and in adversity, so that you have many crosses and trials to contend with? I shall answer both in this sermon.

Plan of Discourse.

What kind of penitential works they who live in prosperity can and must perform; this I shall explain in the first and longer part. What kind of penitential works they who suffer adversity can and must perform, I shall show in the second part.

That both may perform what they can and should do in this respect, we beg of Thy grace, O Lord, through the intercession of Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

If severe
bodily austerities
were re-
quired of us:

There are some people who, when they hear of chastising the flesh, immediately picture to their imaginations all kinds of fearful penances, such as the saints practised, who treated themselves with the greatest apparent hatred and cruelty. Their ears tingle with the sound of the disciplines armed with heavy knots or sharp spurs; they seem to hear the rattling of the iron chains, and to feel the blows of the cruel scourges with which those innocent servants of God chastised themselves until the blood flowed from them in streams. Others close their eyes, lest they should see the hair-shirts, furnished with sharp iron points, or the iron girdles, which the saints used to wear the whole day long. Others, again, cannot conceal their disgust at fasting on bread and water, and depriving their bodies of all nourishment, as they think they would be obliged to do. Or they tremble at the idea of having to sleep on the bare boards, with a stone for a pillow, or of having to wear shoes with the soles cut off, so as to cover the upper part of the foot, and yet expose them to all the hardship of walking barefoot in processions and pilgrimages; or they shudder at the thought of being obliged to make several enuflections one after the other, until they are worn out with fatigue; and so on for other corporal austerities.

We should
have just
reason for
performing
them.

But, my dear brethren, if such things were really expected of us, what could we urge against them? Would the divine justice be exacting too much satisfaction for the grievous injuries we have offered it? Would the punishment be too severe for the wanton flesh, which has revolted against reason, and so often merited hell-fire, for the sake of indulging in its forbidden pleasures? Would it be too much to do in order to escape the tedious torments of purgatory? Or too great a price to pay for the indescribable, eternal joys of heaven, which, according to the testimony of Our Lord, suffers violence, and is borne away only by the violent, who deny and crucify themselves? Would it be too much to do for a God who was crowned with thorns? For a God whose whole body was torn with scourges? whose hands and feet were pierced with nails? who suffered all the torments of hunger and thirst, and whose only refreshment was vinegar and gall? who died a public and shameful death on the cross, and all that in order to atone for the sins of others, an atonement which He freely and voluntarily

took on Himself to offer? Does not the holy Apostle, St. Paul, exhort us to follow Our Lord's example? "Always bearing about in our body the mortification of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies. For we who live, are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake."¹

I know well that the fastidious flesh will turn away in disgust from all these penitential exercises, and will relegate them to the deserts, for the use of pious hermits, whose lives people are inclined to admire, but not to imitate. It will try to excuse itself by appealing to its weakness and delicacy, which render it unable to undertake such austerities; or to the fear of injuring its health, and thus shortening its life, which we are bound, by the law of God, to preserve for His service. Alas, how greatly we are to be pitied, and how readily we find pretexts to spare our bodies! I do not mean to say that all, without exception, should practise austerities of the kind I have mentioned; but, on the other hand, the pretext alleged on the score of weakness and delicacy does not avail every one.

Many put forward, to no purpose, as an excuse, their bodily weakness.

Do we think so much of our weakness and delicacy when there is question of satisfying our impure passions, or of otherwise enjoying ourselves? Oh, no; we are strong enough for that! we are not afraid of wind or weather on such occasions, nor do we hesitate to spend whole nights dancing and amusing ourselves, so that we can hardly drag one foot after the other the next day, and yet we do not fear any injury to our health. What efforts, far more trying to the bodily health than mortifications endured for the purpose of satisfying for sin, what efforts, I say, are not made to please others, to satisfy the claims of vanity, and to follow the customs of the world! Here I have before my mind the numbers of people who drink to excess, even against their will, and thus sow the seeds of many a disease, solely for the sake of the company in which they are. They never think of their health then. I consider the number of women and girls, who pretend to be most delicate, and therefore will not hear a word of mortification, who actually torture themselves (would that they did as much for God's sake), in order to follow the fashion, with tight lacing and narrow shoes, so that every step must be a torment to them, their teeth chattering meanwhile from the cold, on account of the low-necked dresses

For they can mortify themselves enough for the sake of the world and the flesh.

¹ Semper mortificationem Jesu in corpore nostro circumferentes, ut et vita Jesu manifestetur in corporibus nostris. Semper enim nos, qui vivimus, in mortem tradimur propter Jesum.—II. Cor. iv. 10, 11.

they wear in the depth of winter. If they only gave themselves that much trouble for the sake of satisfying for their sins and going to heaven ! But they do it solely to please men; and they are not the least afraid of injuring their health thereby, or of overtaking their strength. And yet these very people say that they cannot abstain a little now and then from food and drink, in order to satisfy for their sins; nor can they bear to wear a penitential girdle, or to suffer the least inconvenience or cold, to atone for their sins, although they bear far more for the sake of following the fashions; nor does their health allow them to rise a little earlier in the morning, I will not say to deprive themselves of sleep during the night, in order to praise God. Oh, no; they are too delicate for that, and their health would suffer too much from it. Such is the way of the world. We have health and strength enough for vice and vanity, but we are too delicate to practise penance and mortification; as if what Jesus Christ Himself says of the rough way of the Cross were but a fable.

Yet the same mortifications are not required from every one.

Yet, in order not to frighten all idea of penance out of your heads (for there are not many of you who would listen to, or believe me, if I were to insist on the necessity of great austerities; in this matter every one is not so docile as that simple-minded peasant, who meant well, indeed, towards his God, and who said to me once after confession: "Father, I have not a discipline like those the Lenten preachers use, so that I have to beat myself now and then with the chain that I tie up my cow with; will that do?" "Excellently," I answered; "but take care not to break your ribs." Ludicrous as the incident was, the simplicity of the man and his desire to do penance forced me to shed tears), I repeat that I have mentioned those great austerities, not to exhort or advise all, without exception, to practise them. No; for even the holiest and greatest penitents have not always made use of them, nor have they employed them all at once. In this, as in other matters, reason and common sense must have their say, in order to avoid doing too much as well as too little. Different people require different penances; one must mortify himself in the time of temptation, another, when he enjoys interior peace; and the penance that can be employed now and then with great profit would lose all its value, if employed constantly.

How one can easily mortify the

There are easier ways of doing penance and mortifying and restraining the outward senses as well as the inward inclinations, which no one can reasonably find fault with, or excuse himself

from practising. They are not very difficult, nor do they cause the body much suffering; and yet they are of the greatest use in atoning for sin and gaining merit, especially when they are practised habitually from a good motive. A penance of this kind would be, for instance, to hold one's eyes fixed on the ground for a certain time, and not to look at some pleasing object. There is a person whom I would willingly look at; my eyes open of themselves to see him; but at once I turn them away, or close them, saying to myself, for Thy sake, O God, I will refrain from looking at what would give me pleasure. The holy youth Aloysius, of our Society, was for three whole years a page in the service of Mary of Austria, queen of Spain, who was looked on as a miracle of beauty, and he had to be in her presence daily; but he never as much as knew her by sight, and when he was asked how she looked, he had to answer candidly that he could not tell, as he had never seen her. I happen to hear a noise in the street; my first inclination is to run to the window to see what it is about; but suddenly I restrain myself, and make up my mind not to look out, in order to mortify myself for God's sake. And the same may be said of other things that we willingly look at. St. Francis Borgia, while he was still in the world as duke of Gandia, used frequently to mortify himself in that way; he was passionately fond of hawking, and often, when the hawk was on the point of seizing its prey, he would turn away his eyes, in order to make a sacrifice to God of the pleasure he would have had in looking at what was the most interesting part of the sport.

There is also sensual pleasure in hearing, smelling, and speaking, which one can mortify. I am anxious to hear something, but I restrain myself; or, if something is being told in my presence, I try to divert my attention, so as not to understand the subject of conversation. There is a beautiful flower in the garden; my hand is already stretched out to pluck it, but, for God's sake, I overcome myself, and let it be. I have a fine opportunity to give a sharp answer, but I mortify myself and hold my tongue. I have a great dislike for a certain person, and cannot bear to be in his company; but I do violence to myself, and speak to him in a friendly manner, although very much against my inclination. I go to visit a poor sick man, as the Christian law exhorts me, and, in spite of my natural repugnance, I attend to his wants and make his bed. And so on. Such penitential works as these, my dear brethren, do not cost a drop of blood, nor cause pain to any member of the body; they appear very trifling and insignifi-

sense of sight.

Of hearing, smelling, and speech

cant, and not beyond the strength of a child; yet you may be assured that they are of great importance in the sight of God, and the habit of practising them is a sign of no mean virtue. They attract no notice, and demand no great effort; but they atone for sin better sometimes than daily fasting or a severe discipline.

Taste.

With regard to the sense of taste, if, beyond the ordinary fast days, one cannot, or will not suffer hunger or thirst, there are yet plenty of opportunities of overcoming one's self. For instance, by not tasting an apple or some other delicacy that comes in one's way outside of meal times; by standing up from table, before being fully satisfied; by not using salt or other condiments with articles of food that are insipid without them, as many frequently, though not always, do, not without gaining a great victory over themselves; by either abstaining completely from a certain thing that one is fond of, or at least by allowing the best bits of it to remain untasted; by not eating or drinking at once when one is suffering from hunger or thirst, but waiting a few minutes, as long, for instance, as one takes to say the "Miserere," although one has the food or drink in his hand. Oh, certainly, a mortification of that kind is most acceptable to God!

After the example of David and others.

King David showed great bravery and fearlessness when he attacked the giant Goliath with his shepherd's sling, and cut off his head; but, according to the testimony of the holy Fathers, he gained a still greater victory when he poured the water out on the ground, as we read in the Second Book of Kings. He was leading his army against the Philistines, when the heat of the day and the numerous cares that oppressed him caused him to suffer from violent thirst and exhaustion, so that he cried out: "Oh, that some man would give me drink of the water out of the cistern, that is in Bethlehem by the gate."¹ Three of his bravest soldiers had hardly heard this wish of their king, when they came to the resolution of fulfilling it. There was no way for them to get at the cistern, but to break through the enemies' camp. This they did with the greatest heroism, filled a vessel with the water of the cistern, and brought it to the king. David, who was looking out for them eagerly, at once grasped the vessel, and was about to raise it to his lips, when he suddenly looked up to heaven and, with unexampled heroism, poured the coveted water on the ground without tasting it: "But he would not drink," says the holy Scripture, "but offered it to the Lord."²

¹ O si quis mihi daret potum aque de cisterna, quæ est in Bethlehem juxta portam.—II. Kings xxliii. 15.

² At ille noluit bibere, sed libavit eam Domino.—Ibid. 16.

Thus he sacrificed to God the refreshment that he could have taken without sin, nay, that was almost necessary to him under the circumstances. St. Gregory takes the trouble of investigating the reason which induced David to overcome himself so heroically, and he thinks he has found it when he says, David remembered that he had formerly given way far too much to his sensual appetites, and had conceded too much to them, when he committed the horrid crime of adultery; and, in order to do something to wipe out that disgrace, and to make some atonement for having offended God, he came to the heroic resolution of sacrificing a pleasure and a refreshment that was not only lawful for him, but even necessary, at least in appearance. "Because he remembered that he had acted unlawfully," says the Saint, "he wished to abstain even from lawful enjoyments." Mark these words, my dear brethren; he whose conscience reproaches him with having indulged too much in sensual pleasures during his youth, or later on in life, so that he has sinned like David, or even worse, now, that he understands the matter more clearly, should use the same severity to himself, and abstain frequently from pleasures that are innocent, lawful, and remote from all danger of offending God. For it is but right that he should now practise self-restraint on the narrow path of virtue, and serve God zealously, since he formerly gave a loose rein to his passions on the broad road that leads to destruction. Plutarch writes of Socrates, who was a heathen, that when he was thirsty, and came to a spring of water, he always used to empty the vessel that he had filled in order to quench his thirst, before drinking, so as to exercise some restraint on his inclination, because the light of reason alone was sufficient to show him that a man must be master of his desires. How much more reason, then, has not a Christian to practise a similar mortification of his senses, in order to make some reparation for the insult he has offered the great God by sin?

Finally, with regard to the chastisement of the body, if the severe penances of the saints inspire us with horror and fear, why should we not make up our minds to stand for an hour to hear the word of God in a sermon, although it seems to us rather an uncomfortable position? And more especially should we do so, if we come late, and cannot find a seat. I know very well that there are ladies and gentlemen who think that an excessive

How easy it is to chastise the body.

¹ Quia se illicita perpetrasset meminerat, voluit etiam a licitis abstinere.

inconvenience, and who, to avoid it, remain away from a sermon that would perhaps be of more use to them than hearing Mass or going to holy Communion; but when there is question of going to the theatre, or seeing a great man enter the town in public procession, they can stand for hours without complaining. Why should we not, now and then, look out for an uneven piece of wood, or a stone, and kneel on it for a while, in order to pray to God while practising that slight mortification? And in the evening, before going to bed, could we not pray for a short time with outstretched arms, when there is no one to see us, or prostrate ourselves on the ground, kissing it in sign of humility and of our sincere acknowledgment that, since we have offended God, we are not worthy to be on the earth? Could we not occasionally curtail our sleep in the morning by half an hour or so, in order to be present at the public devotions, or to hear a sermon? And again, there are many who, through fear of such a mortification, lose many a grace that would be the greatest advantage to their souls. Every day we have opportunities of mortifications of that kind. For instance, in the morning, when we awake, instead of delaying to get up, and turning round from one side to the other, persuading ourselves that we do not want to sleep, but only to lie still for a time, we should rise at once, and thus begin the day with an act of mortification, sacrificing for God's sake that pleasure of a few moments. Believe me, my dear brethren, it requires frequently a great amount of self-denial to deprive one's self of even a few moments' rest in that way; the pleasure it takes away from the body is very small, but the gain to the soul is great. Try it, and you will see. Another opportunity of daily mortification is offered us by the change of the weather; it is either too harsh and windy, or too cold and rainy, or too hot and sweltering. Oh, there are only too many who are so delicate that they neglect church and sermon, because it is too cold, or the sun is too hot; they must think they are made of butter, and that the cold in winter will turn them into ice, while the heat in summer will melt them! Is it too much to bear patiently with an inconvenience of that kind, which no one can avoid, and to offer it to God in atonement for our sins? Again, flies and other insects sometimes trouble us; if you wish to do penance, wait as long as it would take to say the Our Father, before driving them away; you need not be afraid that they will sting you to death. Only try it. In a word, mortification and self-denial consist in doing

what one dislikes, and abstaining from what one is fond of. He who loves God truly will find many an occasion of atoning for his sins in these and countless similar manners.

All that I have said on this subject amounts to this: he who has sinned must do penance, and not treat his flesh too delicately, but often deprive it of even lawful pleasures and enjoyments, since he has indulged in forbidden pleasures, contrary to the will of God. Curious eyes and ears, talkative and defamatory tongue, unchaste and unjust hands, wanton and dissolute flesh, what else are ye but arms with which wickedness makes war on the Most High? St. Paul warns us against that abuse of them: "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of iniquity unto sin." What is more just than to use them in the contrary sense, and to turn them against those who have offended God? "Present yourself to God," continues the Apostle, "as those that are alive from the dead; and your members as instruments of justice unto God,"¹ which is done by those who make war on themselves. If you still find it too difficult to practise constant mortification of the senses in the manner described, then do like the debtor who is not able to pay at once all he owes; every day he subtracts something from his unnecessary household expenses; to-day a shilling, to-morrow another, and so on, until he has the necessary sum together. In the same way you should select for each day one or other of the mortifications I have described: to-day you can mortify your eyes, to-morrow your mouth, and the day after some other sensual desire. Say, with the servant in the Gospel who was unable to pay the ten thousand talents he owed his master: "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all;"² little by little the whole debt shall be paid off. Thus the body must learn that there is a God in heaven, whom it has grievously offended; that there is in it a soul that has to command it, and that the comforts and refreshments that are conceded to it in this life do not belong to it by right, but are merely given to it now and then, out of pure generosity. Penance is necessary for all, even for those repentant sinners who have trials to contend with, as we shall see briefly in the

Exhortation to have recourse to those mortifications, in order to make reparation to God for having insulted Him.

¹ Sed neque exhibeatis membra vestra arma iniquitatis peccato. — Rom. vi. 13.

² Exhibete vos Deo, tanquam ex mortuis viventes: et membra vestra arma justitiæ Deo.—
Ibid.

³ Patientiam habete in me, et omnia reddam tibi.—Matt. xviii. 26.

Second Part.

Most people complain of the trials they have to bear.

Ah, I seem to hear some sighing forth now, and do you expect us also to do penance? God help us! we have penance enough! We are so poor that we must beg our bread from door to door; is not that sufficient? We suffer in secret the pangs of hunger and thirst with our children, and for shame dare not beg; is not that penance enough? I, says another, have been for a number of years in bed with a grievous illness, and cannot even get up to go to church; is not that penance enough? I am never free from head-ache, which prevents me from sleeping at night; the whole winter I have a severe cough; I am subject to all kinds of pains and aches; do I not suffer enough for my sins? From morning till night, says the laborer, I must be at work, in order to earn my bread by the sweat of my brow; is not that penance enough? We poor peasants have to bear the heat and burden of the day, and the piercing cold of winter, while our food is of the poorest description; is not that penance enough for us? Are not the constant cares and troubles of the married state sufficient punishment for the sins that we married people commit? Is it not hard enough to have a house full of little children, who must be looked after night and day? to have to do with obstinate and disobedient, or sickly and delicate children? to have to live with a passionate, ill-tempered, drunken husband, who beats me if I say a word to him, or with a discontented, peevish, idle, or extravagant wife? Is it not penance enough to have to bear with a brother or sister, who worries me the whole day long, and who is full of faults? Is it not penance enough to have to run up and down from morning till night, and yet not succeed in pleasing my master or mistress? Is it not hard enough to be deprived of father and mother, and to have to submit to persecution and ill-treatment as a poor orphan? Wherever we turn, we find crosses and trials; are they not penance enough? Must we chastise our bodies in the bargain? Must we. . . . Enough, enough; I quite believe you; and I know that if I began to dispute with you, I should get the worst of it.

These trials can serve as penances, if they are borne willingly and meritoriously.

No, dear Christians, it is not my intention to inflict new torments on you by way of penance; for there is no doubt that all you have to suffer is a punishment of sin, such as was decreed against us by the Almighty God in the sentence He pronounced on Adam and Eve when they disobeyed His command in Paradise: "I will multiply thy sorrows. . . in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children. . . cursed is the earth in thy work; with

labor and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life. . . in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.”¹ Therefore I freely acknowledge that you have often enough to suffer. But there is one thing you must not forget; there is a great difference between suffering and suffering. To have to endure labor and trouble, care and vexation, and to suffer hunger and thirst, crosses and misery, is not always to do penance. Otherwise even horses and beasts of burden would do penance, for they often have to work hard, and to bear hunger and thirst and cruel treatment. Cain was sent into banishment and misery, and yet he did not do penance. The impenitent thief hung on the cross, and died as well as Christ; but he did not do penance. To suffer without the proper motive is not to atone for sin, while to suffer with impatience and murmuring, instead of being an atonement for sin, is rather collecting new material for penance, and adding to our punishment. For suffering to be available as an atonement for our sins, we must suffer willingly and with a proper motive.

And what is the meaning, you ask, of suffering willingly? Must we, then, inflict some other torment on ourselves, after all, in addition to the trials we have to bear already? for it is not of our own choice that we have to endure those trials; they came to us without being invited; it is our ill luck that we have them, and if we could we would gladly get rid of them. And I believe you, too; but you must make a virtue of necessity, and by patience, contentment, and a good intention make that voluntary on your part, which at first happened against your will and appeared hard and disagreeable to you. Then those trials will be accepted by God as an atonement for your sins, as the Council of Trent expressly teaches. “So generously does God act towards us,” such are the words of the Council, “that we can satisfy God the Father, through Jesus Christ, for our sins, not only by performing voluntary penances, or the satisfaction imposed on us by the priest in confession, but also by patiently bearing the temporal chastisements inflicted on us by God.”² What it is to suffer patiently I have explained on a former occasion. It is not impatience to experience sorrow and vexation; it is that which makes the cross, and we must experience it. Contentment does

How to bear them willingly and meritoriously.

¹ Multiplicabo ærumnas tuas. . . in dolore paries filios. . . maledicta terra in opere tuo; in laboribus comedes ex ea cunctis diebus vitæ tuæ. . . in sudore vultus tui vesceris pane.—Gen. iii. 16, 17, 19.

² Sed etiam temporalibus flagellis a Deo inflictis, et a nobis patienter toleratis, apud Deum Patrem per Christum Jesum satisfacere valeamus.—Trid. sess. xiv. c. 9.

not reside in the sensitive part of the soul, nor in the outward senses, nor in the imagination or fancy; for it is quite evident that our natural inclinations are opposed to everything disagreeable. Contentment and patience are seated in the reasoning will, with which we accept that which is disagreeable, and are satisfied with being annoyed, troubled, and tormented, because such is the will of God.

Instruction
as to how
one can and
ought to do
penance in
that way.

Do you wish, then, to do voluntary and meritorious penance by those trials, which you have to suffer in any case, and cannot avoid? If so, you must think and say humbly, with the Prophet David, who cried out, when he remembered his sin and the punishment he was threatened with for it, "I am ready for scourges. . . I will declare my iniquity, and I will think for my sin:"¹ that I may atone for it: O Lord, I am ready for Thy fatherly chastisements; I acknowledge that I have deserved what I now suffer, and much more! And with the good thief on the cross, when he was reproving his wicked companion, "we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds."² And again with St. Bernard, who said to his body, when it objected against his severe penances, "why do you murmur, miserable flesh? why do you object?"³ Think of what you have done to offend your God; you have had your pleasure already, now is the time for you to be visited with sickness and afflictions, and it serves you perfectly right. If you, O hands, have to labor hard, it is only right that you should do so, as a punishment for the sins of impurity you have committed. If you, O eyes, now weep, if you, heart, are oppressed with sorrow, it serves you right, for those unchaste glances and thoughts you have indulged in. You, too, O head, must suffer for those proud and vain thoughts. Your long-continued and painful tooth-ache, O mouth, is a just return for your frequent fault-finding and detraction, for your cursing and swearing. If you, O body, have to put up with hunger, thirst, and poverty, it is all you have a right to expect for your former intemperance. Bear the heavy cross that your husband, or wife, or ill-reared children lay on your shoulders; it is a meet reward for the sins you committed in the married state. If the members of your body, that you abused to offend God, are tortured now, it is but what you deserve; for your sins have merited hell. Eternal poverty, hunger,

¹ Ego in flagella paratus sum. . . iniquitatem meam annuntiabo, et cogitabo pro peccato meo.—Ps. xxxvii. 18, 19.

² Nos quidem juste, nam digna factis recipimus.—Luke xxiii. 41.

³ Quid adhuc murmuras, misera caro? quid adhuc recalcitras?

thirst, vexation, pain, and despair should be your lot; but now God is willing to accept in atonement for your sins the crosses you have to bear. Can you complain of that? Have you not rather reason to look on it as a great favor? Oh, if one of the lost souls could escape eternal torments by bearing such trials, he would gladly suffer, not merely what you have to suffer, but also all the torments and trials of all men, to the Day of Judgment, and would, moreover, humbly kiss the chastising hand of God with gratitude. O my good and loving God, what thanks do I not owe Thee, for having enabled me to escape the pains of hell, which I have deserved, by bearing such slight trials for such a short time! Yes, O Lord, may Thy holy name and Thy goodness be forever blessed! I will readily suffer, however, whatever and as long as Thou wilt! That is the way to make voluntary the sufferings that God sends us against our will, and to do penance by means of them, although we do not accept one of them with our own inclination.

With this will and intention, dear Christians, make penances of your daily crosses, and then, as I freely acknowledge once more, you do not need any others. One can easily err through imprudence in inflicting penances on himself; but yours come from the hand of God, and if you receive them as I have said, there is no chance of your making a mistake. Sometimes you will think it hard, nay, even impossible, to bear those trials for a long time; but what better will you be for giving way to impatience and discontent? If you do so, you will have to suffer all the same, and it will be without any advantage for you. Console yourselves with the thought of the joy that is in store for you. When the sick man is in the hands of the doctor, who is burning and cutting him, and giving him bitter medicines, he cries out against the doctor and calls him a cruel murderer; but when he is cured, and his wounds are healed, he kisses with joy the hand, the knife, the iron that inflicted the salutary wound, while the doctor is no longer a murderer, but his dearest friend, to whom, under God, he owes his life. Believe me, my dear brethren, it will be just the same with you, with regard to the penances that you inflict on yourselves of your own accord, or bear with resignation when they come from the hand of God. Like the sick man under the knife, you will sometimes cry out, and complain of them as cruel; but wait till your cure is accomplished, and you will bless God for having sent them for the good of your souls. You will thank the preachers and confessors

Conclusion
and exhortation to do
penance in
that way.

who have advised you to mortify yourselves. Happy eyes, you will say, that have often wept with grief, or have voluntarily overcome yourselves; now you will see the most beautiful of all beings, the sight of whom fills the angels and saints in heaven with happiness! Happy hands, that have labored hard for daily bread; you will now wave the palm-branch of victory! Happy limbs, that have suffered pain and torture in sickness and infirmity; you are now about to enjoy eternal rest with God in heaven! Comforted with this hope, my dear brethren, let us all resolve to bring forth fruits worthy of penance. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same Sermon for the second Sunday of Lent.

Text.

Audientes discipuli ceciderunt in faciem suam, et timuerunt valde.—Matt. xvii. 6.

“The disciples, hearing, fell upon their face, and were very much afraid.”

Introduction.

What had the disciples heard on the mountain to make them so much afraid? A voice that came from the clouds, saying: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye Him,” and follow Him as your Master. But why should that make them afraid? Had they not rather reason to rejoice that their Master’s glory was thus confirmed from heaven, and that He was declared to be the Son of God? Yet, when the disciples heard those words, they fell on their faces with fear. With reason does the Psalmist say of us mortals: “There have they trembled for fear, where there was no fear.”¹ When I was speaking in my last sermon, my dear brethren, of the necessity every Christian is under of doing penance, especially when he has sinned, no doubt many who were listening to me were filled with fear of having some terrible austerities proposed to them. But I say to them, in the words of Christ to His disciples: “Fear not;” it is not so bad as you think. It is not so difficult to do penance, as we might imagine at first, as I shall show in this instruction.—*Plan of Discourse as above.*

¹ *Illic trepidaverunt timore, ubi non erat timor.*—Ps. xlii. 6.

THIRTY-SEVENTH SERMON.

ON THE PENITENTIAL WORKS OF THE INNOCENT AND THE JUST.

Subject.

Even the innocent and the just must do penance, because they may sin at some future time.—*Preached on the fourth Sunday of Advent.*

Text.

Venit in omnem regionem Jordanis prædicans baptismum pœnitentiæ in remissionem peccatorum.—Luke iii. 3.

“And he came into all the country about the Jordan, preaching the baptism of penance for the remission of sins.”

Introduction.

As a penitent, although innocent and never stained with sin, according to the testimony of the Eternal Truth, the great St. John, than whom there never was greater born of woman, goes about publicly preaching the baptism of penance. What kind of a baptism? What kind of a penance? Not the holy sacrament of baptism, that now cleanses our souls from original sin; nor the sacrament of penance, in which, after having confessed our sins with true sorrow, we are absolved from them; for both these sacraments were afterwards instituted by Christ. What was the penance, then? St. John himself explains it when he says to those who came to him to be baptized, as we read in the third chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke; “Ye offspring of vipers, who hath showed you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of penance.”¹ In these words, according to the explanation of St. Augustine, he alluded to the sorrow they should have for sin, as well as to the penitential works they should voluntarily undertake in order to satisfy the divine justice. This penance, my dear brethren, I have already treated of, and have shown that every one who has been a sinner ought to make some atonement of the kind to God. But suppose, now, that one has paid to the last farthing the debt incurred by sin, or that one has never sinned; even in that case, I say,

¹ *Genimina viperarum, quis ostendit vobis fugere a ventura ira? Facite ergo fructus dignos pœnitentiæ.*—Luke iii. 7, 8.

Plan of Discourse.

Such a one must nevertheless do penance. Why? Because he may sin in future. And this is the whole subject of this sermon, which concerns all without exception.

I begin it, trusting in the help of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

The servant who has once injured his master will be treated with more severity in future: lest he do it again.

A servant has done something grievously displeasing to his master; for instance, he has been detected stealing things out of the house; or, else, he has gone about incautiously with a candle, and set fire to the house; but, fortunately, with the help of the neighbors, the fire has been extinguished, and the servant, by forfeiting a part of his salary, has made good the loss occasioned by his carelessness. Is the master satisfied now? Not by any means. It is now that he really begins to be angry with his servant, and to reprove him sharply. But the latter has repented of his fault, and made reparation for it? True; still, he has done the mischief once, and may do it again; so that, to prevent a recurrence of it, he must be sharply reprovèd, that he may become more careful. In any case, so much confidence is not reposed in him as formerly, and his master looks after him more strictly, thinking that he may serve him the same trick again, if he is not closely watched.

A good horse is occasionally spurred, that he may keep up his pace.

A horse may be going at a good pace and according to the wish of his rider, still, the latter now and then lets him feel the bit and the spur. Why? What fault has the poor animal committed? He is going all right. No matter; he must feel that his rider is watchful, so that he may continue holding on the same pace, and not give way to laziness, or fatigue, or make a spring off the road, or stumble and fall, and throw his rider out of the saddle.

These similes signify two classes of just souls.

There are two classes of men, my dear brethren, who are in the friendship, grace, and favor of God. The first consists of those who have sinned grievously, but have done penance, and have become reconciled to God; and they constitute the greater number of the just. For how many grown-up people are there who can dare to use the words that the innocent Job says of himself: "My justification, which I have begun to hold, I will not forsake; for my heart doth not reprehend me in all my life."¹ Who is there who can say, with truth, that his conscience does not reproach him with any sin? Alas, must not the most of us

¹ *Justificationem meam, quam cepi tenere, non deseram: neque enim reprehendit me cor meum in omni vita mea?*—Job xxvii. 6.

humbly acknowledge, with the penitent David, "To Thee only," O Lord, "have I sinned, and have done evil before Thee." The other class, and it is not at all a numerous one, consists of those who have still preserved their baptismal innocence, and have never offended God, at least mortally and deliberately. O happy souls! If envy could find place in heaven, how many of the greatest saints, whose feasts the Catholic Church celebrates every year, would envy you your great happiness!

Those who belong to the first class are like the servant who has robbed his master, or whose carelessness has caused the latter to suffer loss. Consider, O you Christians, who have sinned mortally, how unfaithful you have been to your Lord and your God, when you deliberately robbed Him of His glory by contemning His commandments! Consider what a dangerous conflagration the careless servant, that is, the flesh with its senses and members, has caused; a conflagration that has destroyed all the merits of the soul, and exposed it to the eternal flames of hell. Now you are saved from the danger. By true sorrow and contrition, by the tears of repentance you have shed, you have completely extinguished that fire, that would otherwise have burned forever. I will suppose, moreover, that you have made good all the damage you caused by theft or carelessness, and that you have completely wiped away all the punishment due to your sins, by the perfection of your sorrow, or by works of satisfaction, so that you owe nothing more to the divine justice. I congratulate you with all my heart, if that is the case.

But is that a reason for your giving yourself no further trouble about the matter? How about the master of the house, I mean the soul, who has had such great difficulty in extinguishing the fire, and who has had to heave so many penitent sighs before being fully reconciled to God? How about the insolent servants, who by their wantonness and carelessness have injured their master, and caused that dangerous fire? Must they now be allowed to go unpunished and to do as they please, seeking only their own comfort and convenience? Must the soul look on at them without giving way to a just indignation, without keeping a watchful eye on their actions, and without putting them under any restraint? Oh, you may believe me that there is reason enough for fearing that they will again attempt to do the mischief they have done already; their recklessness has not altogether left them, nor are their evil inclinations completely

He who has sinned mortally is like the servant.

Therefore, even after his conversion, he must be dealt with very strictly, to prevent him from sinning again.

¹ Tibi soli peccavi, et malum coram te feci. — Ps. 1. 6.

subdued. The unclean spirit, as we read in the Gospel of St. Luke, is indeed banished, and the house is cleansed; but he will not leave it at that. "I will return into my house whence I came out;"¹ I will bring still more wicked companions with me, and will attack that man, who has escaped from my slavery, with more violent temptations, and then "the last state of that man becomes worse than the first."² This is the time, my dear brethren, for the strong man armed to keep his court, as we read in the same Gospel; that is, the soul must have all the less confidence in the flesh and its senses, it must be all the more watchful over them, and burden them with all the more severe penances, so as to keep them constantly in check, and not allow them to injure the soul by renewed unfaithfulness and again to kindle in it a hellish fire.

He who is still innocent is like the willing horse.

Those who are still innocent are like the good horse; they have kept up their pace, and, as David says, they have run on in the way of God's commandments without delay, and they have never strayed from that way. I congratulate them still more heartily than the others (ah, would that I could reckon myself among their number!). But, alas, for the weakness and instability of man, how many there are who have begun well on the right way, and have abandoned it in the end most disgracefully! David made an excellent beginning, so that he was a man after God's own heart; but how he ran away afterwards, when he allowed too much liberty to his eyes, which he should have always kept in check. He became a murderer and an adulterer. Solomon, his son, also made a good beginning; he had received a good soul from the Lord, as he himself says: "I was a witty child, and had received a good soul. And whereas I was more good, I came to a body undefiled."³ But how dissolute and wanton he became afterwards, when he gave way to his carnal desires, which he should have restrained. So far did he stray from the right path, that he adored gods of stone, to please his concubines, and offered incense to them. Saul, who preceded these two, also began very well. "Saul, a choice and goodly man," such is the testimony the Holy Scripture gives of him, "and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he."⁴ And yet, how obstinate and rebellious he became,

¹ *Revertar in domum meam, unde exivi.*—Luke xi. 24.

² *Et sunt novissima hominis illius pejora prioribus.*—*Ibid.* 26.

³ *Puer autem eram ingeniosus, et sortitus sum animam bonam. Et cum essem magis bonus, veni ad corpus incoluinatum.*—*Wisd.* viii. 19, 20.

⁴ *Saul electus et bonus, et non erat vir de filiis Israel melior illo.*—*I. Kings* ix. 2.

because he did not restrain his evil inclinations. He was rejected by God on account of disobedience, and killed himself in despair. Reason enough, therefore, have we to take to heart the warning of St. Paul: "He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall."¹

In a word, no matter how innocent we are, we are still capable of committing sin; we bear about with us a body inclined to sin like all other men, so that we must be always on the watch, if we wish to keep on the right road. Although the horse has been good hitherto, he must be made to feel the bit and the spur frequently, so as to prevent him from lagging or stumbling. Even the most innocent bodies are in need of works of penance and mortification, to prevent them from forgetting that their master keeps a watchful eye on them, lest, by unrestrained indulgence in all lawful pleasures, they rebel against authority. But you say, it is not right to beat and punish one who has done no wrong. It would be cruelty to treat an innocent person with severity. Cruelty, indeed! It would seem cruel, but would in reality be the greatest kindness. Our God is not cruel or unjust, but is infinitely good and merciful; and yet He allowed the devil to torment most cruelly the innocent Job; He is a God who always means well to his children, and yet He visits even the holiest of them in this life with various trials and crosses. But these latter know well His paternal goodness, and therefore they meekly kiss the rod, and say, with holy Job: "Blessed be the name of the Lord;" He knows best what is good for us, and if He does not send us those trials to atone for past sins, His intention, then, is to save us from future sins.

And this is the reason that should impel even the most innocent, as well as those who have sinned grievously, to mortify themselves frequently; the former, that they may not begin to sin; the latter, that they may not relapse into it. For as the Council of Trent says, there is nothing that can better preserve one free from sin than voluntary penances and mortifications. "There is no doubt," such are the words of the Council, "that these atoning pains withdraw one from sin, as with bit and bridle, and render penitents more cautious and vigilant."² According to the old saying, even an ass will not stumble twice over the same stone; and so, too, with us, there is nothing we are

So that he must be made to feel the spur now and then, to keep him innocent.

All this is done by works of penance; for they deter from sin.

¹ Qui se existimat stare, videat ne cadat.—I. Cor. x. 12.

² Procul dubio magnopere a peccato revocant, et quasi fræno quodam coercent hæ satisfactoriæ penæ, cautioresque et vigilantiores in futurum penitentes efficiunt.—Trid. sess. 14.

so apt to remember as what has caused us pain, so that, if we acknowledge our obligation of punishing ourselves for our sins, and chastise ourselves by works of penance for the sins we commit, the danger of a relapse will certainly be considerably lessened for us. The remembrance of the pain we have suffered, and for which our fastidious nature has only dislike and disgust, will deter us from doing what is followed by such sharp retribution. And this is the opinion of the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas: "Man does not easily fall back into those sins which have caused him to suffer."¹

Shown by
similes,
with regard
to him who
has sinned.

The criminal who has been branded and publicly scourged, although he has escaped with his life, will not readily return to the town in which that punishment has been inflicted on him. A child, while playing in the street, falls down and dirties its clothes; it runs home, crying, and its mother cleans it. And is that all she does? Then you will see how quickly the spoiled child will go back to the same place, and fall into the mud again. A cleaning alone will not make much impression on it. But when the mother takes the rod in her hand, and punishes the child, the lesson is not so easily forgotten; it will avoid that place in future, as the place which has caused it to get a beating. "If," says St. Augustine, "one could so quickly recover after sin, that the sacramental absolution would suffice to restore the health of the soul completely, then he would make a pastime of sinning unto death."² And this explains why people so often relapse into sin after confession. They declare their sins in confession, and say a few rosaries or *Pater Nosters* for their penance, and think they have done enough to atone for everything. But how can that alone deter them from vice, and make them more careful in future? Why, asks St. Augustine, does God require, in addition to the sacramental absolution and forgiveness of sin, that the penitent should also satisfy for his sins? "Because," he answers, "man must be compelled to suffer, even after his sins have been forgiven, although his sins are the primary cause of his suffering; satisfaction is required for sin, after its guilt has been remitted, lest we should think little of sin if punishment were to cease as soon as its guilt is taken away."³ Thus

¹ Non facile homo ad peccata redit ex quibus pœnam expertus est.—St. Thom., in Sap. plem. q. 15, a. 1.

² Si cito rediret homo ad pristinam valetudinem, ludus illi esset peccando cadere in mortem.

³ Cogitur homo tolerare etiam remissis peccatis, quamvis, ut in eam veniat miseriam, primum fuerit causa peccatum; productior est enim pœna, quam culpa; ne parva putaretur culpa, si cum illa finiretur et pœna.—S. Aug., Tr. 124.

the penitent is deterred from relapsing into sin. Now, to say a rosary or two, or to fast now and then in the evening (I am speaking of what are now considered great penances), to give a few shillings to the poor, is it possible for penances of the kind to deter from sin and to keep a check on the unbridled passions of one who is by nature inclined to evil? Certainly not; it would be ridiculous to imagine it; the body must be made to feel something, if it is to be frightened from falling into sin.

With regard to the penances that the innocent must inflict on themselves, they may argue in the following manner: If I have to chastise my body, and to keep its senses under restraint, so as to prevent myself from falling into sin, what would I have to suffer if I were actually guilty of offending God grievously? Therefore I must be careful now of never consenting to mortal sin. Moreover, when they have learned to exercise such restraint over their senses, as to deny themselves even lawful pleasures, or to bear for the love of God what they could avoid without sin, they will certainly be far more ready to abhor pleasures that cannot be indulged in without committing grievous sin, and to bear willingly even bitter trials that they could not avoid without offending God, so that voluntary penances are of great use in deterring from sin both classes of men.

And to him who is innocent.

Besides, no matter how innocent or pious one may be, he has inherited from our first parents evil inclinations and desires, which never wholly die out in him. No matter how sincerely one repents of his sins, and how thoroughly he has atoned for them, the evil habits and relics of sin still remain to entice him, like a second nature, to commit the same sins, and it requires a long time to eradicate these. The wise Ecclesiasticus, speaking of a child who is not kept under due restraint, says: "His father is dead, and he is as if he were not dead: for he hath left one behind him that is like himself."¹ You may cut a shrub down to the ground, but if you do not pull up the roots it will grow again. The sick man is cured of his fever, and he is glad of it; but is his former strength completely restored? Not by any means; he must be satisfied to feel very weak for a long time still, and to remain in a warm room until he is strong enough to go out into the open air. Besides, there are many kinds of food that he has a good appetite for, but that he dare not touch yet; and if he is guilty of the least excess in eating or

The innocent man has evil inclinations; while the sinner is still more inclined to his former vices.

¹ Mortuus est pater ejus, et quasi non est mortuus: similem enim reliquit sibi post se.—*Eccles. xxx. 4.*

drinking, he will bring on a relapse, and will place himself in a much worse condition than he was in before. Penitent Christian, you have been truly sorry for your sins and have duly confessed them; the good God has forgiven you and admitted you to His grace and friendship; I will even imagine that all the punishment due to your sins has also been remitted. Rejoice, then, with all your heart, and thank God; "the father is dead;" the cause and origin of your guilt and punishment are taken away; but be not, therefore, too confident; "he is as if he were not dead;" he still lives on in his children, which he has left you in the shape of evil desires and inclinations. The tree which has borne such bad fruits has been cut down; but its roots are still in the ground, and it can easily begin to grow again. Your mortal illness has been healed by the Blood of Christ, which has been poured over you in the sacrament of penance; but the strength of the soul is not by any means fully restored yet; the inordinate desire of the former forbidden pleasures is not yet fully extinguished, and may easily bring on a relapse.

As the penitent David well knew.

Hear king David, crying out to God after his sin was repented and pardoned: "Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin."¹ But why, O great king, asks St. John Chrysostom, do you wish to be cleansed more and more from your sins? "What more do you desire?"² God has already assured you, by the Prophet Nathan, that He has taken away your sin and erased it from His great account-book; why, then, do you desire to be cleansed more and more? Ah, answers St. Chrysostom, in the person of David, "I seek my former beauty,"³ that which my soul had before I sinned. It is true, O God, and I thank Thee for it, that Thou hast healed the mortal wound from which I was suffering; but an ugly scar still remains, which I wish to have removed. I still feel the force of old habit and evil inclination; the relics of my former sins still inflame my desires, and try to drag me, as if by violence, into forbidden pleasures; therefore "wash me yet more from my iniquity."

Penitential works are a powerful means of restraining both.

Now, my dear brethren, how are these evil effects of sin to be destroyed? By often renewing our sorrow and contrition? By gaining the indulgences granted by the Church? By constant and earnest prayer, and the practice of good works? Yes, these are all very powerful means of obtaining remission of the punishment still due to sin, and of increasing our merit and glory in

¹ *Amplius lava me ab iniquitate mea, et a peccato meo munda me.*—Ps. l. 4.

² *Quid amplius quaeris?*

³ *Pristinum decorem quaero.*

heaven; but they are not able to destroy at once the relics of sin and the evil habit of cursing, slandering, intemperance, unchaste looks, and impure passion. These things require another remedy, which must be able to tame the wantonness of the flesh, and by a judicious severity to bring it to a healthy condition. The old, bad habit must be opposed by a new and contrary one, and the best and surest way of doing this is to practise mortification and penance, as we again learn from the Council of Trent: "Mortification heals the relics of sin, and the vicious habits which have been acquired by living in sin, and takes them away by acts of the contrary virtues."¹ Thus immortification of the eyes is amended by checking their curiosity and not allowing them to look at agreeable objects, although they may not be unlawful; pride is corrected by voluntary humiliations; gluttony and drunkenness, by fasting and abstinence; slander, backbiting, and detraction, cursing and swearing, by the rather difficult remedy of silence; while the wantonness of the flesh is chastised by the use of different instruments of penance and by bearing patiently the trials sent by God. "Every valley shall be filled," cried out St. John the Baptist, when he was publicly exhorting the people to do penance; "and every mountain and hill shall be brought low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways, plain."² In these words he describes the wonderful effects of true penance. What appears more difficult than to fill up the deep valleys, to level off lofty mountains, and to make crooked ways straight? And yet that is what is done, in a moral sense, by penance and mortification. "The valleys are filled," that is, the soul, that has been robbed by sin of its merits and virtues, and is, as it were, completely emptied, becomes filled up again by penance. "Every mountain and hill shall be brought low;" that is, the pride which dared to lift itself up against the almighty God shall be humbled by penance. "The crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways plain;" that is, inordinate desires and inclinations will be tamed by mortification and self-denial, and the bad habits that have been contracted will be abandoned, in order to live according to the law and teaching of Jesus Christ.

Besides, we know by experience that he who wishes to avoid sin must keep away from all company and occasions that might

They also
cut off the

¹ *Medentur peccatorum reliquias, et vitiosos habitus, male vivendo comparatos, contrariis virtutum actionibus tollunt.*

² *Omnis vallis implebitur, et omnis mons et collis humiliabitur; et erunt prava in directa, et aspera in vias planas.—Luke III. 5.*

occasion of
sin.

lead him into it, and, as I have shown in a former sermon, it is forbidden under pain of grievous sin to go voluntarily into the danger of offending God mortally, while of other occasions the Holy Ghost says, "He that loveth danger shall perish in it."¹ Now, it is the wanton flesh and its outward senses that bring us into the dangerous occasions, when we allow ourselves unrestrained liberty in seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and speaking, while mortification and self-denial cut off the occasion at once. In a word, a man cannot lead a luxurious, comfortable life, seeking always for creature comforts, without falling into sin very soon. The proof of this we shall see on another occasion.

And move
God to be-
stow power-
ful graces
against sin.

Finally, there is nothing so likely to move the already most generous God to bestow His graces liberally on man, and to provide him with special helps to keep him from further sin, than to see him humbling and chastising himself, and keeping a strict watch on himself, with a full knowledge of his own frailty, so that he practises self-denial to such an extent as to refrain from even lawful enjoyments, in order to chastise his flesh and to avoid offending God. Thus man, by being severe to himself, vies, as it were, with God, and compels Him to be more merciful and more generous. Such is the beautiful idea of Tertullian, who says: "worn out by fasting, we assail heaven by envy,"² and compel God to show us His favor and mercy.

Therefore
even the
most inno-
cent have
reason to do
penance.

Now I know, my dear brethren, the reason of a fact that has always appeared strange to me, namely, why even the most innocent and holy souls chastised their bodies so unmercifully. What sin had holy Job committed, who was so perfect that he was praised by God Himself, and whose conscience never reproached him with a single sin in his whole life? And yet he bore with the most astounding patience the trials that God allowed him to be afflicted with, and, moreover, he says with the deepest humility: "I reprehend myself, and do penance in dust and ashes."³ What fault did St. John the Baptist commit, who was sanctified in his mother's womb, and who never, during his whole life, offended God by the least venial sin? Truly, he had nothing to atone for. What, then, was the meaning of the rough camel's-hair garment he wore, and of the fast he observed so strictly, that Christ said of him: "John came, neither eating

¹ Qui amat periculum, in illo peribit.—Ecclesi. iii. 27.

² Jejunis aridi, invidia cœlum tundimus.

³ Ipse me reprehendo, et ago pœnitentiam in favilla et cinere.—Job xlii. 6.

nor drinking?"¹ "You are surprised," says St. Bernard, "at the extraordinary austerities of such a holy and innocent man; but," he continues, "I know what he meant. Although he had never sinned, and, therefore, was not bound to any satisfaction, yet he was well aware that, as a human being, he had still his liberty, and was capable of sin; if he had no sins to atone for, he had them at least to guard against." It is well, O great Saint, that you added those words to your explanation; for, otherwise, I might have said to you, wonder at yourself, O Bernard, for what crime had you committed, that you used to scourge yourself so severely, and observe most rigorous fasts, although at the time you were weak in body, so that you looked more like a walking skeleton than a living man? What crime had the holy youth Aloysius committed, who preserved his baptismal innocence undefiled till his death; nay, who, according to the testimony of Cardinal Bellarmine, was so confirmed in grace, that he could hardly find matter enough for the sacrament of penance in his whole life; who, while he was still in the world, and in royal palaces, used to sleep on hard boards, measure out his chief meal by the ounce, and chastise his body even to blood? What sin had Edmund committed, who, when he was still a little child, used to receive from his mother, when she was dressing him, a hair-girdle, or some other instrument of penance, with an earnest exhortation to use it diligently? (Christian parents, how do you bring up your children? See how this mother trained her dear child from his tenderest years; how do you act towards your children? Oh, the poor things are still young; let them enjoy themselves now! Yes, so you say, and you know therefore what you have to expect!) And those empresses and princesses, whose holy lives are world-famed, what had they done to render it necessary for them to practise such severe penances? Amongst them was Eleonora Theresa, the wife of the great emperor Leopold I., who is well deserving of special mention, for she used to go on pilgrimages with the soles cut off her shoes, or with pebbles and peas in them, while proofs of the severe disciplines she used to inflict on herself were found in the cloths with which she wiped up the blood off the floor of her room, and which were discovered after her death. Ah, innocent souls, I ask again, why such severity towards yourselves? What fault had those bodies committed, that were always obedient to reason, and subject to the divine law? Why must that

¹ Venit Johannes, neque manducans neque bibens.—Matt. xi. 18.

flesh be tortured and chastised, which never indulged in unlawful pleasures? And they would answer me, in the words that St. Bernard used when speaking of St. John the Baptist, although we had not sinned, yet we were but mortal, and were capable of sinning, so that we had to keep our bodies in check, in order to preserve our innocence.

St. Paul especially is an example to sinners in this respect.

“I chastise my body,” says St. Paul, “and bring it into subjection.”¹ He does not say, I chastised my body in the beginning of my conversion, or for some years after, in order to atone for my sins; but, I chastise and scourge it now, that I have the care of so many churches; now, that I have to go about everywhere preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ; now, that I am driven from one town to another; now, that I have to suffer countless persecutions and dangers by land and sea, amidst toil and labor, praying and watching, heat and cold, hunger and thirst, poverty and misery; in all those trials “I chastise my body . . . I so fight, not as one beating the air,”² but I make my body feel the weight of the penances I inflict on it. And why, O great Saint? “Lest, perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a cast-away;”³ lest, after having shown others the way to heaven by my doctrine, I myself should wander away from it, and be lost forever. But, great Apostle, how could you be afraid of that? Your own conscience bore testimony to you that, as you say yourself, you were a child of God and a co-heir of Christ? Why should you dread eternal damnation, after your repeated protestations that “neither death, nor life . . . nor things present, nor things to come . . . nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God?”⁴ How is it that, in spite of all you did for the glory of God and the good of souls, you were afraid of losing your soul, unless you chastised your body?

Conclusion and resolution to chastise our bodies after the example of those saints.

Alas, how will it then be with me and others? With me, who am so careful in looking after my comfort; who cannot endure the least bodily inconvenience, unless for the sake of worldly vanity; nay, who pamper my body so that it becomes for myself as well as for others an occasion of sin? How shall it be with me, who am so ready with all kinds of empty pretexts and excuses, in order to obtain permission to gratify my sensual-

¹ Castigo corpus meum, et in servitutem redigo.—I. Cor. ix. 27.

² Sic pugno, non quasi aerem verberans.—Ibid. 26.

³ Ne forte, cum aliis prædicaverim, ipse reprobus efficiar.—Ibid. 27.

⁴ Neque mors, neque vita . . . neque instantia, neque futura . . . neque creatura alia poterit nos separare a charitate Dei.—Rom. viii. 38, 39.

ity by eating meat during the Lent; who cannot bear any trouble, and act in those trials that I must bear in any case as if I had the torments of hell to suffer? Alas, what will become of me? Now I see how it is that I have so often fallen into sin, in spite of the good resolutions I made in confession. I was unwilling to use violence against myself, and I indulged my body and its outward senses too freely, so that they became too strong for me. But I shall manage better in future. I will keep a more watchful eye on those careless servants; I will make that stubborn horse feel the bit and the spur, so that I may be armed against temptations, keep my soul free from sin, and be surer of gaining the endless joys of heaven. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same Sermon for the third Sunday in Lent.

Text.

Cum fortis armatus custodit atrium suum, in pace sunt ea quæ possidet.—Luke xi. 21.

“When a strong man armed keepeth his court, those things are in peace which he possesseth.”

Introduction.

He who does not wish to be robbed must keep his house well locked up during the night; and therefore there are bars and bolts on doors and windows, as well as vigilant watch dogs to keep guard. He who intends to keep a city or fortress safe from the attacks of the enemy must see that it has a sufficient number of soldiers, and that it is provided with all the munitions of war. Christ Himself, my dear brethren, explains this simile in to-day's Gospel, when He speaks of the man out of whose heart the unclean spirit is driven by penance; and who is hereby warned that he must be well armed and carefully guard his house, so as not to allow the evil spirit to enter again, and make the last state of it worse than the first. Hitherto we have treated of the penance that must be done by those who have sinned grievously, in order to satisfy the divine justice for their sins. But now suppose that all, etc.—*Continues as above.*

THIRTY-EIGHTH SERMON.**ON THE REASONABLENESS OF WORKS OF PENANCE FOR US
WHO ADORE A SUFFERING AND MORTIFIED GOD.****Subject.**

We live under a suffering and mortified God; therefore we must imitate Him in suffering and mortification.—*Preached on the Sunday in the Octave of the Nativity of Our Lord.*

Text.

Positus est hic in ruinam et in resurrectionem multorum in Israel, et in signum cui contradicetur.—Luke ii. 34.

“This Child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted.”

Introduction.

Hardly is the Saviour of the world born, when the contradictions and sufferings that were in store for Him were spoken of: “He is set for a sign which shall be contradicted.” Already, too, do they speak of the sword which was to pierce the virginal heart of Mary at the sight of the terrible scourging, the disgraceful crowning with thorns, the painful crucifixion and death of her beloved Son: “And thy own soul a sword shall pierce.” Even then, my dear brethren, the future torments that awaited the Son of God were prophesied; but He did not wait for them, for His first entrance into the world was the beginning of His sufferings, and from then until the moment of His death He bore His cross without ceasing, as the history of His life shows. Such was the life of penance and mortification led by Him who did not and could not commit the smallest sin. O Christians, what must we, who, generally speaking, treat our flesh so delicately, think of this? We, who must acknowledge that we have often grievously sinned, and thereby deserved the torments of hell; and who on account of our weakness are still capable of committing sin any day or any hour? have we not reason to fear, that, if we cease doing penance, we shall be amongst the number of those unhappy ones of whom the text says, “this Child is set for the fall of many,” for the eternal ruin of those who either do not believe in Him, or do not endeavor to imitate His life? Therefore, if we have not yet heard enough to induce us to lead

penitential lives, I will give you one more incentive to-day, and I say,

Plan of Discourse.

We live under a suffering and mortified God; therefore we must imitate Him in suffering and mortification. This conclusion follows of necessity from the premises, and is the whole subject of this sermon. Therefore in future we shall all be willing to suffer and do penance.

That we may all make this resolution, give us Thy grace, O suffering and mortified Saviour! We ask it of Thee through the intercession of Thy sorrowful Mother Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

When the members of the body are not proportioned to the head, the result is ugliness and deformity. A large head on a small body with short legs make a hideous dwarf, while a small head on a huge, fat body is ridiculous. A body clothed with costly garments, adorned with gold and silver, while the head is unkempt and dirty, with dishevelled locks, would seem a very bug-bear to frighten children with; for ragged clothes would suit such a body far better, as it would then be better in harmony with the head.

The members of the body must be proportioned to the head; otherwise deformity is the result.

What are we mortals on this earth, my dear brethren? We are members one of another," says St. Paul; we constitute the moral body of the Catholic Church under one head. What Head is that? "Know you not," asks St. Paul again, "that your bodies are the members of Christ?" "We may in all things grow up in Him, who is the head, even Christ." But of what kind is this Head? Consider it well, and see, then, how we must be, if, as members, we are to be proportioned to such a Head. If it were a Head crowned with roses, then, indeed, would it be fitting for the members of its body to be clothed in soft garments.

As men we are members of Jesus Christ, who is our Head.

But just give a short glance at the whole life of Jesus Christ Our Saviour, from His birth to His last moment on the cross, and you will find nothing but self-denial, mortification, suffering, crosses, and trials, which He took on Himself voluntarily for us and for our sins. His first appearance in the world is marked by suffering, for He was born in a miserable stable, and was laid

But He embraced a life of penance and mortification.

¹ Sumus invicem membra.—Eph. iv. 25.

² Nescitis quoniam corpora vestra membra sunt Christi?—I. Cor. vi. 15.

³ Crescamus in illo per omnia, qui est caput, Christus.—Eph. iv. 15.

in a manger instead of a bed; He suffered in His circumcision, when, as a little Child only a week old, He shed His blood; He suffered in the flight into Egypt, in which, in addition to the discomforts He had to endure, He was persecuted by His own creatures; He suffered during the thirty years of His hidden life in the poor little cottage of Nazareth, unknown to the world, and giving up His own will in order to live in obedience, and to earn His bread by the sweat of His brow, as a poor carpenter's apprentice; He suffered during the last three years of His life, when, after a fast of forty days and nights, He went from one town to the other, in heat and cold, in rain and wind, and on foot. Many a night He spent in watching, as the Gospel says of Him: "He passed the whole night in the prayer of God." Many a time He slept on the bare ground; many a time, wearied with His journeys, He sat down on a hard stone to rest Himself; while He often begged from others food and drink when He was hungry and thirsty, sought hospitality at the hands of strangers, and even asked them for a drink of water.

Especially
at the end
of it.

He suffered in the last days of His bitter passion. Oh, what need is there to remind you of that? He was truly "a man of sorrows,"² as Isaias describes the future Messiah. What more eloquent proof could we have of that, than the ropes that bound Him as a malefactor; the blows with which He was driven along; the buffets that disfigured His adorable face; the sharp thorns that pierced His sacred head even to the brain; the whips and scourges that tore His whole body; the nails that pierced His hands and feet; the shameful gibbet on which He hung for three hours in His death-agony? There was not a member of His body that had not its own most piercing pain to endure; not one of His exterior senses that was not tortured in the most excruciating manner; His eyes were swollen and blood-shot; His ears were afflicted by the horrible blasphemies and curses that were uttered around Him; His taste was tortured by the gall and vinegar that were given Him to drink, while the sense of feeling was afflicted most grievously in every part of His sacred body. There was none of all the conditions that are required of us for true penance that He did not fulfil, as if He were a penitent sinner. What a bitter examination of conscience He made in the Garden of Gethsemani, when He saw passing before His mind all the past, present, and future sins of

¹ *Erat pernoctans in oratione Dei.*—Luke vi. 12.

² *Virum dolorum.*—Is. liii. 3.

the whole world? What a perfect contrition He had for those sins, when He was sorrowful even to death, and the bloody sweat ran down from Him in drops on the ground? What a humble confession He made, when, laden with the huge burden of our iniquities, He stood before His judge, like a convicted criminal, to hear the sentence that condemned Him to the cross? What severe penance and satisfaction He offered for those sins, when He suffered the atrocious tortures of His shameful death? And all this He endured, although He was perfectly innocent, partly in order to show us how to do penance for our sins, to confess them, and to satisfy for them; and partly in order to show us the right road to heaven, which can be gained only by the violent.

From this, my dear brethren, you can make your own conclusion, as to what kind of members suit a Head like that. What a startling contrast there is, what a hideous deformity, when you compare a voluptuous Christian, who can neither bear temporal trials with patience, nor mortify or overcome himself, with Our Saviour and His life? For you see the Head crowned with sharp thorns, while the feet are resting on a cushion of roses; the Head emaciated with hunger and thirst, and the body sleek and well-conditioned; the Head deformed and swollen with blows, and the body clothed in costly array; Christ in poverty and extreme want, and the Christian in abundance, without denying himself anything; Christ in labor and trials, and the sweat of His brow, while the Christian lives in comfort and affluence; Christ having nothing better than gall and vinegar to quench His thirst, while the Christian always seeks the costliest viands; Christ on the hard wood of the cross, and the Christian in a soft down bed; Christ on the cross, in suffering, and the Christian in delights without the cross; innocence doing penance, and a sinful mortal indulging his sensuality; the life of Christ a continual mortification and cross, the life of the Christian an uninterrupted round of pleasure and enjoyment. Could a greater contrast be found? How can an unmortified man dare to take the crucifix in his hand? How can he look on it without blushing? For even the dumb figure reproves him. Yes, it says to him, you are, indeed, a fine Christian! I, your God, am hanging here on the cross, and you are bent on enjoying yourself. I am doing penance for your sins, and you think it is enough for you merely to declare them in confession, and that you need not take any further trouble about them. I must suffer, and thereby enter into My glory; while you imagine you can walk comfort-

So that an unmortified Christian is a deformed member.

ably into heaven, at your ease. What a shameful, intolerable reproof that is to deserve!

Therefore even the most innocent must do penance, in order to resemble Christ.

But Christians, if we had never sinned in our whole lives, so that we do not deserve the least punishment, and if it were impossible for us to sin in future, so that we are not under the necessity of restraining our senses; nay, if the choice were given us to gain heaven by living in constant pleasure, or by suffering many crosses and trials; if we have any sense of decency left, we should choose the latter, rather than the former, when we consider how the God whom we adore suffered and was crucified for us.

Shown by an example from profane history.

When Hannibal, the great Carthaginian hero, was advancing on Rome with a large army, which he was trying to lead over high mountains, with great trouble, danger, and loss of life, some of his soldiers began to murmur and complain. Seeing this, he mounted a high rock and called out to them, in a loud voice, where is your courage gone all of a sudden? Consider the importance of the expedition in which we are engaged. We are going to conquer Rome, the proud mistress of the world. Remember the rich booty that awaits us, and do not forget that, if the fatigues of the march are great, the joy of victory will be all the greater on that account. Finally, recollect that you are not going before Hannibal, but following him.”¹ I go before you to show you the way; I am the first to climb the rugged mountains. This short exhortation encouraged the soldiers to follow him boldly.

By another from sacred history.

A similar instance is narrated on the infallible authority of the Word of God, in the First Book of the Machabees. Simon Machabæus, the Jewish general, was advancing with twenty thousand men to attack the enemy, who were in countless numbers; between the opposing forces there was a running river,² and the soldiers hesitated about crossing it. What did Simon do? “He saw that the people were afraid to go over the river, so he went over first.”³ Without saying a word to them, he set spurs to his horse, and crossed the river at once. When the people saw that, their fears vanished. “Then the men, seeing him, passed over after him.”⁴ A hundred preachers could not have done so much to restore the courage of those people as that

¹ Tandem mementote, Hannibali vos non præire, sed Hannibalem sequi.

² Fluvius torrens erat inter medium ipsorum.—I. Mach. xvi. 5.

³ Vidit populum trepidantem ad transfretandum torrentem, et transfretavit primus.—Ibid. 6.

⁴ Et viderunt eum viri, et transierunt post eum.—Ibid.

one example of their general; “the men, seeing him, passed over after him.”

If we had been present on the occasion, my dear brethren, and had seen how regiment after regiment followed their leader’s example, and crossed the river with their officers, but that a few of the common soldiers were afraid to wet their feet, and remained behind on the bank, would we not have cried out to them, cowards that you are, are your lives more valuable than those of your general and his brave officers? At least, would not such have been our thoughts? Now, what can many think of themselves? I mean those delicate, voluptuous Christians, who tremble at the bare idea of crosses and sufferings, of fasting and disciplines, of self-denial and mortification of the flesh? Christian courage, where art thou fled to? We have enemies to combat, who attack us on all sides without intermission, namely, the cunning demon, the perverse world, and our own corrupt flesh; and if we give way and yield to them we are lost. It is certainly difficult sometimes to combat them; we have to cross a running river; but remember what depends on our fighting them. It is not a city of Rome, but an eternity of heavenly joys that we have to gain by violence. Is not this enough to make us fight with courage? Hear what St. Paul says: “Looking on Jesus, the author and finisher of faith, who, having joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame. For think diligently upon Him that endured such opposition from sinners against Himself, that you be not wearied, fainting in your minds.”¹ Jesus Christ, our sovereign Lord and General, and our great God, precedes us, crowned with thorns, bearing the marks of the nails and scourges, and crying out to us, “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”² If Jesus had lived in a magnificent palace, such as would have been suited to His supereminent dignity; if He had sat down daily at a well furnished table, had reclined in a soft bed of down, and given Himself up to a life of pleasure, but had ordered us to practise all kinds of austerities, to chastise the flesh by penance and mortification, and to exercise constant restraint over the senses, could we have reasonably objected to that? Should we have had

And he who does not imitate Christ herein must be ashamed of himself.

¹ *Aspicientes in Auctorem fidei, et consummatorem Jesum, qui proposito sibi gaudio sustulit crucem, confusione contempta. Recogitate enim eum, qui talem sustulit a peccatoribus adversum semetipsum contradictionem, ut ne fatigemini animis vestris deficientes.*—Heb. xii. 2, 3.

² *Si quis vult post me venire, abneget semetipsum, et tollat crucem suam quotidie, et sequatur me.*—Luke ix. 23.

the slightest cause for complaint? Would that have been too much for one who is born in sin, and who has deserved eternal torments, if thereby he could gain everlasting joys? But as it is, remember that Christ is not following you, but going on before you; He is the first to bear the cross, and His cross is the heaviest of all; He first crossed the river of extreme poverty and humiliation, of self-denial and mortification, and of bitter suffering, and men have seen Him, and see Him still by the light of faith, as a God filled with sorrow and affliction, scourged, crowned with thorns, and pierced with nails.

Especially as He has hitherto had so many followers among people of all classes.

“The men seeing him, passed over after him;” there are many men and women in strict religious orders who see Christ and follow Him, by giving up all they have, to live in voluntary poverty, and who exchange their magnificent houses for a small cell, their costly garments for a coarse habit; who, shut up in the four walls of their convent, deny themselves the pleasures they might have enjoyed, nay, deprive themselves of the little comforts that they could have even in the religious state, while they spend their lives in frequent fasting and vigils, and chastise their bodies with hair-shirts and disciplines; and all that through love of penance. “The men, seeing him, passed over after him;” many innocent children even have seen and imitated Him, as well as many kings and queens, emperors and empresses, princes and princesses, many a weak and delicate woman and tender virgin, who, as we have seen already of some, treated themselves with the greatest severity, so as to resemble more closely their suffering, crucified God. And can there be a Christian so cowardly, so delicate, as not to follow his Lord and God at least at a distance, by voluntarily taking up his cross and mortifying himself? Is there any one so degenerate as to be determined to indulge his body and its outward senses in every comfort and pleasure, without restraint? “For shame,” says St. Bernard, “to be a delicate member under a Head crowned with thorns.”¹

Without following Him, there is no hope of heaven.

Hear what the Council of Trent says: “The life of a Christian should be a perpetual penance.”² It must necessarily be so; there is no other way to heaven than that by which Jesus Christ has gone there before us, and which He has taught us by His example; and therefore there is no other way, but that of self-denial, mortification, and the cross. “He that taketh not up his cross and followeth Me, is not worthy of Me;”³ such are the

¹ Pudeat sub spinoso capite membrum esse delicatum.

² Christiana vita perpetua penitentia esse debet.

³ Qui non accipit crucem suam, et sequitur me, non est me dignus.—Matt. x. 38.

words of Our Lord Himself in the Gospel of St. Matthew. "I am the door. By Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved;"¹ but he who does not enter through Me, cannot have eternal life. "What," asks St. Augustine, "is the meaning of entering by Christ?" And he answers, "it means to imitate the life of Christ,"² and to walk on the path which He walked on. But what necessity is there for further proof? It is already a certain fact, an article of faith, that they who wish to belong to the number of the elect must in some degree become conformable to the image of the Son of God, as St. Paul expressly teaches: "For whom he foreknew, he also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of His Son; that he might be the first-born amongst many brethren."³ Why does St. Paul say that we must be conformable to the "image" of the Son of God? There is a great difference, my dear brethren, between an artist who looks at a picture in order to copy it, and another man who wishes merely to buy the picture, or simply to admire it. The latter runs his eyes two or three times over it, and admires the skill of the painter; that is a beautiful picture, he says; and he buys it, brings it home, and hangs it on the wall of his room; that is all. The former, on the other hand, whose intention is to copy the picture, looks at it a hundred times on all sides; nor is he satisfied with that; he takes his brush, and every time he makes a stroke with it, he looks at the picture again, so as to be sure of representing accurately every line of it, in order that the copy may not be different from the original. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is a picture that we must not merely look at and admire; oh, if that were all that is necessary to get to heaven, all Catholics would be amongst the elect; for there is hardly one who has not an image of the crucifixion in his house, which he looks at now and then; there is hardly one who is not struck with admiration when he reads or hears of the penitent and suffering life led by Our Lord; they all wear Our Saviour's image round their necks, and often kiss it with devotion; but that is not enough. Christ is the original picture that we must copy in our lives and actions, in order to resemble Him. "Look, and make it according to the pattern, that was showed thee on the mount."⁴ Cast your eyes on this picture, O man! look at it; but set your

¹ Ego sum ostium. Per me si quis introierit, salvabitur.—John x. 9.

² Quid est, intrare per Christum? Imitari vias Christi.

³ Quos præscivit, et prædestinavit conformes sibi imaginis Filii sui, ut sit ipse primogenitus in multis fratribus.—Rom. viii. 29.

⁴ Inspice, et fac secundum exemplar, quod tibi in monte monstratum est.—Exod. xxv. 40.

hand to work, too, to imitate the example that was shown you on Calvary.

For Christ is appointed as our Teacher, to show us the way to heaven by His example.

In former times men were sent to unreasoning animals to learn from them: "Go to the ant, O sluggard, and consider her ways, and learn wisdom."¹ Although this little creature has neither guide nor teacher, yet she "provideth her meat for herself in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest;"² learn, then, from her example how you must labor to gain heaven. "Ask now the beasts and they shall teach thee," says the Prophet Job; "and the birds of the air, and they shall tell thee. Speak to the earth, and it shall answer thee: and the fishes of the sea shall tell."³ That is, ask the horses and oxen, and they will teach you with what patience the yoke of the Lord must be borne by you; ask the birds of the air, and they, by their flight, will tell you how you must detach your heart from earthly things, and from sensual pleasures and delights, so as to soar up untrammelled towards heaven; ask the earth, and it will instruct you as to how you must bring forth fruits worthy of penance; ask the fishes in the sea, and you may learn from them how to swim in the troubled waters of worldly cares, and yet preserve the life of your soul. Thus, I say, in those days men learned a lesson from unreasoning creatures. But now, since Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has come down on earth, we have a far more perfect school in which to study. "Learn of Me," says the most perfect of all teachers; "learn how to order your lives; this body, that I have taken for yoursakes, is just as tender, weak, and delicate as yours; see how I have dealt with it, and learn from Me to treat yours in the same way, if you wish to have part with Me in My kingdom. "He that taketh not up his cross, and followeth Me, is not worthy of Me."⁴

In this they who are in trouble can find consolation.

Poor, suffering Christians, who have to labor hard in order to earn your daily bread, or who are oppressed by sickness, suffering and persecution, what a consolation it is for you, if you are only in the state of grace, to have God as your friend, to be able to bear your daily crosses and trials with patience, and to offer them to Him by a supernatural intention. Rejoice and be glad in the Lord; for what you yourselves should have done volun-

¹ Vade ad formicam, O piger, et considera vias ejus, et disce sapientiam.—Prov. vi. 6.

² Parat in aestate cibum sibi, et congregat in messe quod comedat.—Ibid. 8.

³ Interroga jumenta, et docebunt te, et volatilia cœli, et indicabunt tibi. Loquere terræ, et respondebit tibi; et narrabunt pisces maris.—Job xii. 7, 8.

⁴ Discite a me.—Matt. xi. 29.

⁵ Qui non accipit crucem suam, et sequitur me, non est me dignus.—Ibid. x. 38.

tarily otherwise, He now does for you; that is, He imprints daily on your soul the beautiful image of His crucified Son, and makes up for the penances that you should otherwise have inflicted on yourselves. If you sometimes find your trials hard to bear, so that weak nature cries out against them, take the crucifix in your hands, and say to yourselves: see, there is my God hanging on the shameful cross, and suffering here even unto death. He, who was innocence itself, crossed the river of tribulation first, in order to free me from eternal death; why should I not, then, be willing to suffer with Him? I, who by my sins have deserved to suffer a thousand times more? I, who cannot gain heaven in any other way, why should I not bear patiently for a short time the light cross that is laid on my shoulders? For by doing so I shall become like to the image of the Son of God, and shall receive the surest pledge of being amongst the chosen children of God.

Ah, you say, that would be all very well, if I could only bear my cross as I should! But as it is, how can I become like to Jesus Christ by suffering? or how can I merit heaven thereby? I do not suffer of my own free will, nor with patience; for I am always conscious of a repugnance and dislike for suffering. When anything occurs to trouble me, I am filled with chagrin and vexation, so that my very life becomes a burden to me; I am incapable of doing any good work, or even of saying my usual prayers. Sometimes I begin to think strange things of God for chastising me so severely; the thought of God and heaven does not inspire me with the least consolation. Occasionally I make an effort to resign myself to the divine will, but I remain just as discontented as before; I say, as well as I can, Lord, Thy will be done; I wish to suffer, since such is Thy will; but it is only with the lips I speak so; I do not mean it in earnest; for the fact is that I have no pleasure in the cross, and, if I could, I would free myself from it altogether. How is it then possible for me to merit under such circumstances? O simple souls that you are, to complain in that way! How I pity you; not so much because you have trials to suffer, as because you do not know more clearly how fortunate you are, for the state in which you are makes you thoroughly conformable to the image of Jesus Christ crucified. I pity you, because you do not better understand what it is to suffer with patience. O most merciful Saviour, Pattern and Model of all who suffer and are truly penitent (I have said this often enough, but it seems that they will not

For they will most surely be brought to resemble Christ, although they feel their cross, and bear it because they cannot help it.

understand me), open the eyes of those poor souls; speak to them and teach them by Thy own example, that they may at last know their faults, and learn in what true patience in suffering consists. Tell us, didst Thou Thyself prepare the heavy cross Thou didst carry on Thy own shoulders up the hill of Calvary, and fasten Thyself to it with Thy own hands? No, He would answer; the envious Jews and impious executioners prepared it for Me, and made Me carry it; My heavenly Father ordained that I should receive it from My bitterest enemies, and therefore, through obedience, I allowed Myself to be crucified. And, O Lord, didst Thou feel no dislike or repugnance to the cross? Certainly, I did, so much so, that the bare thought of it made Me tremble with fear and anguish in the Garden of Gethsemani, until I sweated blood, and, lying on the ground in anguish, called out three times to My heavenly Father to take from Me that bitter chalice of suffering, and to save Me from such a cruel death, if it might be done. Such aridity of spirit did I suffer, and such extreme desolation of soul, that, while I was hanging on the cross, I openly complained before heaven and earth of having been abandoned by My heavenly Father: “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”¹ But, O Lord, what kind of suffering was that? Was that the way to bear the cross patiently, willingly, and meritoriously? Did not that repugnance and aversion lessen the merit and the satisfaction? No, they rather made the suffering more meritorious; the repugnance and aversion arose merely from natural inclination; the superior and reasoning will, although it seemed overwhelmed and unwilling to submit, yet really resigned itself fully and completely to the will of My Father. And it is in this that true patience consists, which is all the greater, the more human nature and the weak flesh are opposed to it.

And although they may think they can do no good while suffering.

But there is one thing more, O dearest Saviour. When Thou wert hanging on the cross, full of pain and desolation, Thou wert incapable of doing any good. Thou couldst not work miracles, nor teach, nor heal the sick, as before. Would it not have been better and more meritorious for Thee to have freed Thyself from that heavy burden, and to have visited many countries, converting souls and furthering the glory of Thy heavenly Father? Yes, He answers, “I do always the things that please Him.”² I hung on the cross, because such was My

¹ Deus meus, Deus meus, ut quid dereliquisti me?—Matt. xxvii. 46.

² Quæ placita sunt ei, facio semper.—John viii. 29.

Father's will, and in that alone I did good; for never did I make My Father's glory greater before the world, than when, thus abandoned and suffering, I died on the cross. Hear, then, disconsolate souls, and learn from the example of Jesus Christ Himself, how a natural repugnance and aversion for crosses and trials will not lessen your patience and conformity to the image of your crucified God, as long as you continue with your superior and reasoning will to say to your heavenly Father: "Father, if Thou wilt, remove this chalice from me; but yet, not my will, but Thine be done."¹ Let not what I will, O Lord, but what Thou wilt, be done! Although against my will, yet let Thy holy will be accomplished in me. Never are you more like to Christ than when you have thus to suffer in body and soul, inwardly and outwardly; and therefore you cannot have a more certain sign that you are amongst the number of the elect, whom God has chosen from eternity to be made conformable to the image of His Son.

But, on the other hand, good reason for trembling have the luxurious and effeminate children of the world, who, although they have often sinned grievously and merited hell, although they still continue to sin and increase their torments in eternity, yet honor their crucified God only outwardly and with the lips, inasmuch as they do not wish to know or hear anything about mortification, self-denial, or penance, while they pamper their bodies and indulge their senses in every possible way, in idleness, comfort, and pleasure. What share can they hope for in the thorn-crowned Head? What else can they expect, but that woe that Christ pronounced on the rich and voluptuous: "Woe to you that are rich, for you have your consolation."² "Woe to you that are filled, for you shall hunger."³ "Woe to you that now laugh, for you shall mourn and weep."⁴

On the other hand voluptuaries have good reason to fear.

In order, then, to avoid hearing that woe pronounced against myself, I will, if I have not done so yet, make the following resolution for the future: first, with regard to the difficulties, annoyances, discomforts, and trials that arise from my state of life, my employment, the change of the seasons and the weather, my own weakness and delicacy of constitution, or those that others cause me, or that God Himself sends me according to

Conclusion and resolution to lead a life of penance.

¹ Pater, si vis, transfer calicem istum a me; verumtamen non mea voluntas, sed tua fiat. --Luke xxii. 42.

² Væ vobis divitibus, quia habetis consolationem vestram. --Luke vi. 24.

³ Væ vobis, qui saturati estis, quia esurietis. --Ibid. 25.

⁴ Væ vobis qui ridetis nunc; quia lugebitis et flebitis. --Ibid.

His own good will and pleasure, and which I can neither avoid nor change, these I will always bear patiently and humbly for God's sake and to gain heaven. Secondly, as I am bound to do in any case, I will at least avoid those pleasures which I cannot enjoy without exposing my soul to danger, and undertake those mortifications of the outward senses or inward appetites that are necessary or helpful to avoid sin. Finally, I will also often deny myself gratifications and pleasures that are quite lawful in themselves; in many things I will do violence to myself, and sometimes I will chastise my body by penitential works, that I may prove by my life and actions that I am a true Catholic and a real member of the thorn-crowned Head, and show that I truly adore a God who suffered and was crucified for me. Such is the conclusion I beg of you all to make with me, my dear brethren, not merely for to-day, but for your whole lives. Every day we commit faults that deserve punishment; every day the combat goes on between the wanton flesh and the reasoning spirit; every day a stroke of the brush must be made in order to represent Jesus Christ crucified in our lives and actions. Do not say, my dear brethren, that such a life must be a melancholy, sad, and sorrowful one; but rather acknowledge that it is a life that becomes a reasoning being and a Catholic Christian, and one who is predestined to heaven. Man must live according to reason, and be master over his inordinate appetites and inclinations. A Catholic Christian must live according to the rules laid down for him in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and therefore he must take up his cross daily and follow his divine Master, while one who is predestined to heaven must be made conformable to the image of the Son of God. The more we deprive ourselves of sensual comforts, as far as the body is concerned, the greater and more abundant will be the heavenly consolation we shall experience in our souls; and, what should inspire us with the greatest courage, as the Council of Trent teaches with the Apostle St. Paul, we shall thereby have a firm assurance in our hands that, as we suffer with Christ, so also we shall enter with Him into glory: "Yet so if we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified with Him."¹ Amen.

¹ *Si tamen compatimur, ut et conglorificemur.*—Rom. viii. 17.

*Another Introduction to the same Sermon for the fourth
Sunday in Lent.*

Text.

Sequebatur eum multitudo magna.—*John vi. 2.*

“A great multitude followed Him.”

Introduction.

The people were still well inclined towards Christ Our Lord; they followed Him in thousands over land and sea, mountain and valley, and that, too, in hunger and thirst, so that He was obliged to work a miracle to provide them with food, lest they should die on the way. My dear brethren, are we Christians so eager nowadays in following Our Lord and Saviour? I am afraid not; for, as Thomas à Kempis says in the third book of the Imitation: “Jesus has now many who love His heavenly kingdom, but few who bear His cross; He finds many willing to sit at table with Him, but few who wish to share in His fasting; all desire to rejoice with Him, but there are few who are ready to bear trials for His sake; many follow Jesus to the breaking of bread, but few to the drinking the chalice of His sufferings.” And so it is in reality. We cannot think without shuddering of crucifying and mortifying ourselves, of doing penance and practising self-denial, although these things are very necessary to us, because we have sinned, and because we are still capable of sinning, as we have seen on a former occasion. But there is still another undeniable argument to prove the necessity of doing penance, and it is that we must imitate Christ in His sufferings and bear our cross like Him, as we shall now see.—*Plan of Discourse as above.*

END OF FIFTH VOLUME.

SERMONS ON PENANCE,

AND ON

EVERYTHING REQUIRED FOR CHRISTIAN REPENTANCE AND
AMENDMENT OF LIFE.

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

BY THE

REV. FATHER FRANCIS HUNOLT,

Priest of the Society of Jesus, and Preacher in the Cathedral of Treves.

TRANSLATED BY THE

REV. J. ALLEN, D.D

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✦ JAMES D. RICARDS, D.D.,

*Bishop of Retimo and Vicar-Apostolic of the
Eastern Vicariate of the Cape Colony.*

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THIRTY-NINTH SERMON.

ON AN EASY AND LUXURIOUS LIFE.

Subject.

An easy and luxurious life is not the way to heaven, 1. because it is a sinful life, or one which is full of the danger of sin. 2. Because it is not a Christian life.—*Preached on the second Sunday of Advent.*

Text.

Quid existis videre? hominem mollibus vestitum?—Matt. xi. 8.
“What went you out to see? a man clothed in soft garments?”

Introduction.

No, you must not expect to find My holy precursor a tenderling of the kind. You will see that he is clad in a rough camel-skin, a penitential garment, and that his body is emaciated by constant fasting, as he goes about preaching the necessity of penance. So might Our Lord have spoken to the people, and so it was in reality. But here, my dear brethren, I am constrained to ask, what sin had John committed? Was he not sanctified in his mother's womb? Was it not he whom Christ called an angel on account of his innocence? “For this is he of whom it is written: Behold, I send My angel before Thy face, who shall prepare Thy way before Thee,” and who never in his whole life committed the least sin. Why, then, did he practise such severe penances? Alas, how he puts our weakness and delicacy to shame! For although we have often grievously sinned, as we must acknowledge, we treat ourselves so delicately and tenderly, that we shun the least discomfort, and gratify our senses on every occasion. But do we think that we can in that way gain heaven with St. John? No, Christians; that is not the way that leads thither. “From the days of John the Baptist until now,”

says Our Lord, "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away;" and this is what I undertake to prove to-day, and I say:

Plan of Discourse.

An easy and luxurious life is not the way to heaven. Why? Because it is either a sinful life, or one which is full of the danger of sin. This I shall show in the first part. Because it is not a Christian life; as I shall show in the second part, for the instruction of those who live in prosperity, that they may not forget Christian mortification and penance; for the consolation and encouragement of those who are tried by many crosses, that they may bear them with patience and resignation.

Both of these graces we expect from God with child-like confidence, trusting in the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

In what a
luxurious
life consists.

By those who lead a luxurious life I do not now understand the impure, who are addicted to the inordinate delights of the flesh; for we all know and readily acknowledge that such people have no claim to heaven. St. Paul has already rejected them: "Do not err: neither fornicators, nor adulterers. . . shall possess the kingdom of God."¹ And if there is a vice in the world that fills hell with souls, it is the abominable vice of impurity. Nor, on the other hand, do I wish now to condemn a reasonable care of the body, by which we concede to it at certain times its proper rest and comfort, food and drink, nay, now and then, too, the recreation and amusement that are suitable for it. All that is praiseworthy and sometimes necessary in order to preserve the health and strength of the body for the service of God. If the bow is bent too long, it will break, and if the body is too much fatigued, it will fall sick. By a luxurious life, then, I mean nothing but a constant seeking after bodily comforts and sensual gratifications; a perpetual flight and avoidance of all that can cause pain to the body, or displease the outward senses, or contradict the natural inclinations. In this way, everything that is delicious is given to the mouth, the eyes are allowed to look at all that is pleasing, the ears to hear what is delightful, the taste to enjoy what is sweet, the body, to feel what is soft and comforting; while, on the other hand, if any of those things is wanting, if the natural will or inclination is contradicted, then there

¹ Nolite errare: neque fornicarii, neque adulteri. . . regnum Dei possidebunt.—I. Cor. vi. 9, 10.

arises a feeling of vexation, annoyance, and discomfort, which makes one impatient, displeased, and discontented. This pampering of one's self is the cause, when possible, of an easy, luxurious life, in which a great part of one's time is spent in eating, drinking, sleeping, dressing, visiting, and amusements; in a word, one is always seeking for pleasures and distractions, although the latter may not in themselves be unlawful. This is the life against which St. Paul warned the Christians of Rome: "Make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences."¹ Mark the words, "in its concupiscences," as if he wished to say, you must not even have a desire for the delights of the flesh. O great Apostle, call out those words in the ears of all to-day! For what a vast number of men there are in the world now who thus make provision for the flesh! What a number there are who strive for such a life, and not merely those who have everything in abundance, but also they who are against their will in want of many things!

Now, I say that a luxurious life of this kind is not the way to heaven, and we must deal far more severely with our bodies, if we do not wish to wander from the right way, and to fall into the abyss of hell. And that, too, firstly, because such a life is either a sinful one, or, at all events, is exposed to the danger of sin. For otherwise the teaching of the holy Fathers of the Church does not deserve credit, and the Holy Scripture itself may be called in doubt. St. Paul, giving a short account of the vices most prevalent in the world, of which the wicked make, as it were, a chain of sin, lays down inordinate self-love as the first link of this chain, and the only cause of the manifold sins that spring from it. "Men shall be lovers of themselves," he writes to his disciple Timothy; there is the foundation, and what comes then? "Covetous, haughty, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, wicked, without affection, without peace, slanderers, incontinent, unmerciful, without kindness, traitors, stubborn, puffed up, and lovers of pleasures more than of God: having an appearance, indeed, of godliness, but denying the power thereof. . . . men corrupted in mind, reprobate concerning the faith, etc."² What a terrible catalogue of vices we

Such a life does not lead to heaven, for it is the occasion of many sins.

¹ Carnis curam ne feceritis in desideris.—Rom. xiii. 14.

² Erunt homines seipsos amantes cupidi, elati, superbi, blasphemæ, parentibus non obediētes, ingrati, scelesti, sine affectione, sine pace, criminatores, incontinentes, immites, sine benignitate, proditores, protervi, tumidi, et voluptatum amatores magis quam Dei: habentes speciem quidem pietatis, virtutem autem ejus abnegantes. . . homines corrupti mente, reprobi circa fidem.—II. Tim. iii. 2, 3, 4, 5, 8.

have there, all of which arise from inordinate self-love, that is, from the luxurious life of which we are speaking.

Nay, it is almost a constant state of sin.

But you may ask, is it, then, a sin to love one's self, to seek one's bodily comfort, and to gratify one's senses? And I am obliged to answer you, no, it is not a sin; but it is, generally speaking, a whole series of sins, nay, an almost constant state of sin. Every pleasure, considered in itself, may be lawful and becoming; but to seek and desire one pleasure after the other, and to be inordinately addicted to sensual delights, must be called a vicious life. "For the wisdom of the flesh is death," says St. Paul; and according to St. Thomas of Aquin those words mean, that "the wisdom of the flesh is a constant desire to gratify one's senses, and that is the death of the soul." "The wisdom of the flesh," continues St. Paul, "is an enemy to God: for it is not subject to the law of God: neither can it be. And they who are in the flesh, cannot please God."¹ Can one be without sin while the soul is in such a dangerous condition? Can one love God and please Him, when one is His sworn enemy? What a bitter curse is uttered against voluptuaries in the Gospel of St. Luke! "Woe to you that are rich, for you have your consolation. . . Woe to you that are filled. . . Woe to you that now laugh,"² and have an easy life of it. Who speaks thus, my dear brethren? It is Jesus Christ Himself, Our Saviour, who is otherwise so good and gentle; and who can doubt what He says? Now, amongst all created things, there is nothing but sin alone, or the state of sin, which can be the object of the divine malediction and be execrated by Christ; so that an easy, luxurious life, in which one always seeks for comfort, satisfaction, pleasure, and delight, and which Christ threatens with such grievous woes, cannot be an innocent life, or one free from all sin; or else God condemns that which is not deserving of condemnation, nor in any way blameworthy, a supposition which is impossible.

Because one can hardly keep from sin without mortifying the senses.

And truly, when I consider the matter rightly, I am not surprised that the Word of God speaks so sharply against such a life. For if you reflect for a moment on its nature, qualities, and effects, you will see that it cannot but be vicious, or the occasion of many vices. If full liberty is given to eyes, ears, tongue, and the other senses; if they are not often restrained by self-

¹ Nam prudentia carnis mors est. Sapientia carnis inimica est Deo: legi enim Dei non est subjecta: nec enim potest. Qui autem in carne sunt, Deo placere non possunt.—Rom. viii. 6—8.

² Vae vobis divitibus, quia habetis consolationem vestram. . . vae vobis, qui saturati estis. . . vae vobis, qui ridetis nunc.—Luke vi. 24, 25.

denial, must they not frequently meet with objects that are unlawful and dangerous to the soul? What is, therefore, more necessary in this respect, than constant, daily mortification, of which those fastidious people do not wish to know anything? Besides, who does not know and experience what a powerful influence the corrupt inclinations and desires of the flesh, which are always impelling and, as it were, dragging us violently to evil, have over our reasoning will? And if we do not bravely resist them, can we remain long free from sin? But we cannot resist them without doing violence to ourselves in many things, combating our evil desires, and practising mortification constantly. Now, he who is always seeking his comfort, thinks of nothing but enjoying himself, and has nothing but disgust and aversion for all that displeases him, how can he use that violence towards himself? And if he still hopes that he is on the right road to heaven, what a deceitful hope is his?

No matter how innocent pleasures seem to be in the beginning, if one becomes too much attached to them, and gives himself up to them without restraint, they take from him all relish for heavenly things; the precious time given him for the sole purpose of attending to the business of his salvation is, generally speaking, frittered away; he has no desire for prayer, fasting, or visiting the church; the duties of his state of life are neglected on account of difficulties that arise in performing them; he seldom hears the word of God in sermons, if the hour appointed for the sermon is too early, or the weather too cold; and meanwhile, for weeks and months, he neither hears, reads, or thinks of anything that could encourage him in the service of God. With regard to the fasting prescribed by the Church, since it is contrary to his bodily comfort, he finds all sorts of pretexts to dispense himself from it; his mind becomes indisposed for good works, his understanding darkened, his reason perverted; all his thoughts and faculties he directs, like the dumb brute, to his mere temporal wants, and he whose desires should be in heaven, his future country, is no longer capable of any other knowledge than that of which St. James says that it is brutish and diabolical: "This is not wisdom descending from above, but earthly, sensual, devilish."¹ He becomes the slave of his own body, to which he devotes all his cares and anxieties by day and by night, nay, he sacrifices to it his whole life; and thus he places

Pleasures, when indulged in too much, make a man brutish.

¹ Non est enim ista sapientia desursum descendens: sed terrena, animalis, diabolica — James iii. 15.

his last end in those pleasures and enjoyments which, used in due order and moderation, should serve as a means of preserving his health in order the better to do the will of God and attend to his soul's welfare; a de-ordination, as St. Augustine says, that contains all the deformity of mortal sin. When the patriarch Noe sent out the raven from the ark, why did it not return? Would it not have been well off in the ark? Yes, but it saw the carrion floating about, that was its ordinary food, and it fell upon it at once, and left Noe, who had hitherto cared for it. Even so is it at last with those slaves of their bodies. Once they have acquired a taste for earthly things, they think no more of God, they forget the future life, and would not set much store by the happiness of heaven, if they could be sure of enjoying themselves forever here on earth. "The heaven of heavens is the Lord's," they would say; "but the earth He has given to the children of men."¹

As Solomon
experi-
enced.

When the wise, and at first pious, innocent, and holy Solomon made that resolution, "I said in my heart: I will go and abound with delights, and enjoy good things,"² what was the consequence of it? He did not intend to offend God, nor had he the least idea of forgetting Him and adoring false gods; his only desire was to enjoy pleasures that in themselves were lawful and becoming, according to the law of the time; and yet, since he gave himself up to them too much, and used them inordinately, what became of him at last? "And when he was now old," says the Book of Kings (that is, as commentators say, in his fifty-second year), "his heart was turned away by women." Oh, "I will go and abound with delights, and enjoy good things!" And what was the result? His wisdom was turned to such blindness and folly, that he forgot himself, his God, and heaven, built magnificent temples for the false gods of his concubines, and bent the knee before idols of wood and stone: "His heart was turned away by women to follow strange gods; and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God."³

So that a
too easy life
is not the
way to
heaven.

See how dangerous and sinful an easy and luxurious life is. It is that broad and spacious way of which Our Lord speaks in the Gospel of St. Matthew, with moaning and lamentation: "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth," not to heaven, but "to destruction;" and, alas, "many there are who

¹ Cælum cœli Domino, terram autem dedit filiis hominum.—Ps. cxlii. 16.

² Dixi ego in corde meo: vadam et assuam delicias, et fruar bonis.—Eccles. ii. 1.

³ Cumque jam esset senex, depravatum est cor ejus per mulieres, ut sequeretur deos alienos; nec erat cor ejus perfectum cum in Domino Deo suo.—III. Kings xi. 4.

go in thereat.”¹ This is the life of which the Prophet Job long ago complained : “ They take the timbrel and the harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ : they spend their days in wealth, and in a moment they go down to hell.”² Therefore, my dear brethren, the flesh must not be treated too delicately in this life ; it should be dealt with severely, if we wish to possess heaven. Hitherto I have explained such reasons as should induce all men in general to avoid a luxurious life ; now I go on to show that, as far as Christians in particular are concerned, a life of that kind is not one that can lead them to heaven. Such is the subject of the

Second Part.

Mark what I am about to say. Either another heaven must be made for us ; or another way leading to it, different from that followed by the first Christians ; or there must be a different doctrine from that preached to the first Christians by the apostles throughout the world ; or the God of our days must be differently disposed, so that He will give us heaven on easier terms than those on which our ancestors purchased it ; or else no Christian can go to heaven who does not lead a true Christian life. There can be no doubt of that. Now, the heaven that we have to expect is not different from that which the first Christians worked for : “ from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away.”³ There is no other way but the old one to lead to this heaven : “ How narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life ; and few there are that find it ! ”⁴ The same doctrine of Jesus Christ is now preached, which He commanded His apostles to teach throughout the world, so that His words still hold good : “ But He said to them : strive to enter by the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, shall seek to enter, and shall not be able.”⁵ And, finally, we have the same God, who is immutable in His councils and designs : “ For I am the Lord, and I change not.”⁶ Everything remains as it was. Therefore

A Christian
who wishes
to go to
heaven
must lead a
Christian
life.

¹ Lata porta, et spatiosa via est, quæ ducit ad perditionem ; et multi sunt qui intrant per eam.—Matt. vii. 13.

² Tenent tympanum et citharam, et gaudent ad sonitum organi ; ducunt in bonis diebus, et in puncto ad Inferna descendunt.—Job xxi. 12, 13.

³ A diebus autem Joannis Baptistæ usque nunc, regnum cælorum vim patitur, et violenti rapiunt illud.—Matt. xi. 12.

⁴ Quam angusta porta, et arcta via est, quæ ducit ad vitam ; et pauci sunt qui inveniunt eam.—Ibid. vii. 14.

⁵ Ipse autem dixit ad illos : contendite intrare per angustam portam : quia multi, dico vobis, querent intrare, et non poterunt.—Luke xiii. 23, 24.

⁶ Ego enim Dominus, et non mutor.—Malach. iii. 6.

he who does not imitate the life of the first Christians cannot reasonably put forward a claim to the heaven of the Christians. This is again an undoubted truth.

An easy, sensual life is not a Christian one, because it is contrary to the promise made in baptism.

Now, he does not lead a Christian life, who does not keep the promise he made in baptism; he does not lead a Christian life, whose life is contrary to that of Jesus Christ; he does not lead a Christian life, who does not keep the Christian law. But none of these three conditions can be observed in an easy, luxurious life. And, in the first place, in what does our profession consist? We all took a solemn and public oath, when we were made Christians and were admitted into the number of the children of God in holy baptism. "I renounce," were the words we used, uttered in our stead by another, but which we ratified when we came to the use of reason. "I renounce." What? The world and its pomps and vanities; the devil and his works; the flesh and its desires. That is, I bind myself forever to mortify the inclination I have inherited for the empty honors and pomps of the world; I bind myself forever to crucify my flesh, and to die to my sensuality; once for all I bid good-bye to all forbidden, dangerous, and superfluous pleasures. An obligation, my dear brethren, that we publicly undertook before the altar in the church, in presence of the angels as witnesses, and in sight of heaven and earth, as St. Ambrose says. A promise that is written down, not in the registry of our baptism, but in the book of our lives; a vow subscribed by God Himself, which is more binding and unchangeable than any promise or obligation that men can bind each other with in this world. Therefore Tertullian calls Christians, "Religions of the Cross,"¹ who make their profession to the Cross, promising during their whole lives to seek, love, and bear it constantly; while St. Paul says that baptism is a crucifixion, a death and burial of man. "For we are buried together with Him by baptism in to death,"² he writes to the Romans, so that we must henceforth live for Christ alone, and die to all the desires of corrupt nature, to the flesh and its sensualities. "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin may be destroyed, to the end that we may serve sin no longer. . . . Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, so as to obey the lusts thereof."³

¹ Crucis religiosos.

² Consepulti enim sumus cum illo per baptismum in mortem.—Rom. vi. 4.

³ Hoc scientes, quia vetus homo noster simul crucifixus est, ut destruat corpus peccati, et ultra non serviamus peccato. . . . Non ergo regnet peccatum in vestro mortali corpore. ut obediatis concupiscentiis ejus.—Rom. vi. 6, 12.

Now, O luxurious man, how can you keep this promise and vow, if you always treat your body so delicately, seek its comfort in all things, gratify all its desires, and avoid crosses and discomfords as long as you can? No, in the life you lead you cannot keep your promise; you are a perjured, unfaithful, unjust renegade, who have only the name of a Christian.

Further, what is a Christian? Do you think, perhaps, that the few drops of water that were poured on your head in baptism alone suffice to make you one? No doubt, they are necessary, but they are not sufficient. What, then, is a true Christian? He is a man, says St. Bernard, whose chief and greatest business it is to follow Christ, to take Him as his Model, and to regulate his life according to that of Christ. "In vain," are the words of the Saint, "in vain am I a Christian, if I do not follow Christ."¹ "God became man," says St. John Chrysostom, "that man might become, as it were, God; He made Himself like to us, not merely to redeem us, but that we might lead a life like to His. 'For I have given you an example,' He says Himself, by way of exhortation to all men, 'that as I have done to you, so you do also.'"² In a word, it is an undoubted fact that we must become conformable to the image of the Son of God, if we wish to be amongst the number of those whom God has elected to eternal life, as St. Paul expressly says. Now, O voluptuary, compare your effeminate life with that of Jesus Christ, and see what a startling contrast it makes. Christ, poor and stripped of all earthly things; you, with your heart buried in the perishable goods of earth; Christ, torn in every part of His body with scourges; you, in such comfort that the prick of a needle is intolerable to you. You will not hear of overcoming yourself unless there is question of gratifying your sensuality. Christ, a man of sorrows; you, a child of joys; Christ, under the cross, and on the cross even to death, while you dream of nothing but pleasures, and cannot bear even the name of adversity. Could two more inharmonious things be well brought together, than the life of Christ and yours? And, therefore, what a dangerous sign of eternal reprobation that is for you. When, on your death-bed, they will place the crucifix in your hands, will it be a source of consolation, think you, and not rather a presage of your eternal damnation? The death of Christ is of no use to you, unless you endeavor to make your life resemble His.

Because it is quite contrary to the life of Christ.

¹ Frustra sum Christianus, si Christum non sequor.

² Exemplum enim dedi vobis, ut quemadmodum ego feci vobis, ita et vos faciatis.—John xiii. 15.

“And they that are Christ’s,” is the oft-repeated admonition of the Apostle, “have crucified their flesh with the vices and concupiscences.”¹

Because it
is contrary
to the Chris-
tian law.

Finally, even if you had not renounced in baptism the flesh and its concupiscences; if Christ was not proposed to you as the model you have to imitate; would you not still be obliged, if you wish to be a Christian, to obey the Christian law? What is that law? Read the New Testament, that has been written for Christians, and you will find that it inculcates nothing more frequently than self-denial, mortification, and the crucifying of one’s self. For the sake of brevity I will quote but a few passages from the lips of Christ Himself. “Whosoever doth not carry his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.”² “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world, keepeth it unto life eternal. If any man minister to Me, let him follow Me.”³ The Epistles of St. Paul are full of exhortations to the effect that the goods of this world must be enjoyed, even by those who possess them in abundance, with such moderation and in such a spirit of detachment, as if they did not possess them. “It remaineth,” he writes to the Corinthians, “that they also who have wives be as if they had none. . . and they that rejoice, as if they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as if they used it not.”⁴ Do you think that this is, perhaps, but an exhortation to do a work of supererogation, and not a positive command? But how can that be? Are we not commanded to follow Christ, in order to enter heaven with Him? But that cannot be done without bearing daily crosses, trials, and mortifications. If there is no command to deny one’s self in this life, why does Our Lord threaten with the loss of their souls those who neglect doing so? If we are not commanded to lead mortified lives, why does St. Paul exclude the effeminate from the kingdom of God? “Nor the effeminate shall possess the kingdom of God.”⁵

¹ Qui autem sunt Christi, carnem suam crucifixerunt cum vitis et concupiscendis.—Gal. v. 24.

² Qui non bajulat crucem suam, et venit post me non, potest meus esse discipulus.—Luke xiv. 27.

³ Qui amat animam suam perdet eam; et qui odit animam suam in hoc mundo, in vitam æternam custodit eam. Si quis mihi ministrat, me sequatur.—John xii. 25, 26.

⁴ Reliquum est, ut et qui habent uxores, tanquam non habentes sint. . . et qui gaudent, tanquam non gaudentes, et qui emunt, tanquam non possidentes, et qui utuntur hoc mundo, tanquam non utantur.—I. Cor. vii. 29–31.

⁵ Neque molles regnum Dei possidebunt.—I Cor. vi. 10.

But, you say, that applies to the apostles and disciples of Christ, and to religious in convents, who imitate them; it is not for me and other people in the world. What? Does it not hold good for you in the world? Then the Gospel of Christ is not for you, either. If mortification and bearing the cross are recommended as a necessary thing to religious in convents, how much more necessary is it not for you, who are exposed to so many dangers in the world? They who do their best to lead holy lives cannot enter heaven without mortification and crucifying themselves, and you expect to get there without denying yourself anything, and by leading an easy, luxurious life. And where did you see it written that such doctrine is applicable only to the apostles of Christ, and to religious in convents? Do we not read in the same place the express words of Christ, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me"? And is it not expressly stated that "He said to all," those words? ^{Which binds all Christians.} No, He spoke not for the apostles alone, but for all; not for religious in convents alone, but for people of all states, conditions, and dignities. All without exception and without dispensation, just as none are dispensed from following Christ, must deny themselves and take up their cross. "And He said to all: If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself," etc. Therefore it holds good for you, as well as for me; for the rich, as well as for the poor; for the noble, as well as for the lowly; for the innocent, as well as for the guilty. "He said to all," and, amongst others, to that dissolute youth and wanton young woman, who imagine that now is the time for them to enjoy themselves; to that man, that woman, who fritter away their time in visiting, and in idle amusements; and to all of us, no matter who we are, that we must deny ourselves, take up our cross, overcome our evil inclinations, mortify and crucify our flesh, and enter on the rough way of penance; otherwise we shall not lead Christian lives or belong to Christ, or have any claim to the eternal kingdom of heaven.

Most dangerous, then, not to say unhappy, is the state of those who live in abundance of all temporal goods, who have everything they desire, and use all they have for their bodily comfort and for the gratification of their senses. They have just reason for fearing that they are of the number of those whom Christ threatens with woe, because they have their conso- ^{Therefore they who live luxuriously, are in a dangerous state.}

¹ Dicebat autem ad omnes : si quis vult post me venire, abneget semetipsum, et tollat crucem suam quotidie, et sequatur me.—Luke ix. 23.

lation here; to fear that they are amongst those of whom Origen writes: "the prosperity of the present life is for those who have no hope of future happiness;"¹ to fear that they are walking on that broad and pleasant way that leads to destruction and eternal ruin; to fear that one day will be spoken of them the words of the Apocalypse: "As much as she hath glorified herself and lived in delicacies, so much torment and sorrow give ye to her,"² unless they are all the more careful in holding in check their evil inclinations, in avoiding sin, and in serving God zealously in their prosperity by practising the virtues of their state; and that they can hardly do for any length of time without mortification of the body and its senses.

While the poor and industrious may be consoled and pity the others.

But, on the other hand, you poor and needy mortals, who suffer want in many things, who have to labor hard for your daily bread, whose flesh is tamed by weakness and illness, by trials and troubles of all kinds, be comforted, rejoice, and be glad that the good God has removed from you the occasion of leading an easy, luxurious, and dangerous life. He Himself inflicts on you, as we have seen already, the penance you should have otherwise inflicted on yourselves; for if you bear your daily trials, troubles, and annoyances with a good intention for God's sake, you will have mortifications enough. "Do not envy those who enjoy prosperity in this world," says with reason St. Peter Damian, "but rather condole with them,"³ although we must not give way to rash judgments against our neighbor. We cannot see everything, and therefore we are often deceived by outward appearances. Many a one seems to us to lead an easy, indolent life, who has in reality secret trials and crosses enough to bear, that cause him a great deal of suffering, or else he may, unknown to us, afflict himself by voluntary mortifications. The silken garment sometimes conceals the rough hair-shirt; even at a well-furnished table the taste is often severely mortified by being deprived of some favorite article of food, and frequently, while the laugh is on the lips, the heart is devoured with anguish. Still, generally speaking, I say of those who really lead an easy, luxurious life, no matter who they are, "do not envy them, but rather condole with them;" do not grudge them the happiness they appear to enjoy, but, rather, have the greatest pity for them; "for like unreasoning beasts they are hastening, even while feast-

¹ Præsens sæculum eorum est, qui futuræ beatitudinis non habent spem.

² Quantum glorificavit se, et in deliciis fuit, tantum date illi tormentum et luctum.—Apoc. xviii. 7.

³ Noli hujus vitæ felicitatem hominibus invidere, sed condole.

ing, to the slaughter-house.”¹ You, indeed, now weep, while they laugh; you suffer hunger and thirst, while they abound in everything; you are plagued with severe labor, while they lead idle, sensual lives; but be content with what God has ordained for you; the time will come when you will laugh, and they will weep; when you will be filled, and they will suffer hunger and thirst like dogs; when you will rejoice in endless peace and delights, while they will be eternally tormented.

May I, my dear brethren, bring forward a fable by way of conclusion? It is, of course, and remains but a fable; yet it will serve to explain the truth which we are now considering. A dog, that had been for many years chained at his master's door, once saw opposite him a pig that was being fattened. Every morning, noon, and evening the latter used to receive whole trough-fuls of food, to the great discontent and envy of the dog, who at last lost patience and began to snarl and growl at the pig. What? he said, such an ugly beast gets plenty to eat, while I must suffer hunger? He is not of the least use to any one, and can only annoy his master with his grunting, while I have to remain here in heat and cold to keep guard over my master's house and chattels, and to protect his money from thieves. Ycet the useless pig gets more than he can eat, while the most that is given to me is but a dry bone or a piece of musty bread that has happened to fall from the table and got trodden under foot, while, if I chance to go too near the servants, I get a beating. Now can that be just? Thus growling and grumbling he hid himself in his kennel, full of vexation. A few mornings after he heard a most woful screaming, and sprang out at once to see what was the matter, when he beheld the butcher dragging out the pig by the ears, throwing it down violently on the ground, and then sticking a long knife into its heart; and when he had thus put an end to the pig's screaming, he threw the body into a trough, pouring boiling water over it, tore away the bristles and the skin, and then, having split it open, hung it up on a pole. The dog kept on wagging his tail, not knowing what to make of the whole affair. At last said he to himself: is that, then, the end of all that stuffing and feeding? If so, I will be satisfied with my dry bone; and he went quite contented into his kennel again. O poor and suffering Christians, you say sometimes, with discontent, how happy those gentlemen and ladies must be! They have nothing but pleasures and enjoyments in

For the end of both will be very different. Shown by a fable.

¹ Quia nimirum velut bruta animalia ad macellum edendo properant.

their lives. O how unequal is the lot of people in this world! I must toil like a slave, and even then can hardly get enough to eat. What do they do for God more than I? I do my best to serve Him, and please Him, and yet I have to suffer bitter trials; one difficulty comes after another; one cross succeeds the other. But cease your complaints, you who think thus. Have courage, and wait for the end, and then you will see what will happen. They, if they lead vicious lives, will be hurried to the terrible slaughter-house after their feasting here, like dumb beasts; while you, if you bear your trials for God's sake, will find rest and peace. "So they did eat and were filled exceedingly," says the Prophet David of the Israelites, "they were not defrauded of that which they craved." And how did things go with them? "As yet their meat was in their mouth, and the wrath of God came upon them; and He slew the fat ones among them."¹ Cardinal Hugo remarks on these words; "therefore let the lean cattle rejoice; for not they are killed, but the fat ones."² The rich glutton was a fatted swine of this kind, as St. Luke tells us: He "was clothed in purple and fine linen, and feasted sumptuously every day,"³ while poor Lazarus had to suffer the pangs of hunger: "who lay at his gate full of sores, desiring to be filled with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, and no one did give him."⁴ But how different it was with them at the end! When the rich man was fattened up, the butcher death came: "the rich man also died, and he was buried in hell."⁵ And what became of Lazarus? "It came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom."⁶ Why was the rich man condemned to suffer in hell? "Son," answered Abraham, "remember that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime."⁷ Why was Lazarus brought into the joys of heaven? "and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented."⁸

Conclusion
and resolu-

O just God, is that the way things go in this world? Is that

¹ Manducaverunt et saturati sunt nimis; non sunt fraudati a desiderio suo. Escæ eorum erant in ore ipsorum, et ira Dei ascendit super eos, et occidit pingues eorum.—Ps. lxxvii. 29—31.

² Gaudeant ergo macilentæ pecudes, qui non occiduntur, sed pingues.

³ Indubatur purpura, et bysso, et epulatur quotidie splendide.—Luke xvi. 19.

⁴ Jacobat ad januam ejus, ulceribus plenus, cupiens saturari de micis, quæ cadebant de mensa divitis, et nemo illi dabat.—Ibid. 20, 21.

⁵ Mortuus est autem et dives, et sepultus est in Inferno.—Ibid. 22.

⁶ Factum est autem ut moreretur mendicus, et portaretur ab angelis in sium Abrahæ.—Ibid.

⁷ Fili, recordare quia recepisti bona in vita tua.—Ibid. 25.

⁸ Et Lazarus similiter mala: nunc autem hic consolatur; tu vero cruciaris.—Ibid.

the end of an easy, luxurious life, and of a mortified, penitential one? Oh, if such is the case, I do not wish to enjoy pleasures! I will in future be content with my state, and will leave abundance to those who wish to have it. Let others eat, drink, and sleep well; let them pamper their bodies, and laugh and enjoy themselves; my desire is, O God, to sacrifice my body to Thy will, to chastise my flesh, and give it up to mortification and self-denial, so that I may save my soul forever; for I cannot have two heavens, one here, and another hereafter. If, therefore, I have now to sigh, with the afflicted Job on the dung-hill: "The flesh being consumed, my bone hath cleaved to my skin,"¹ I will also console myself with the same Job, saying, "I shall be clothed again with my skin, and in my flesh I shall see my God: this my hope is laid up in my bosom."² In this flesh of mine, which is now mortified and afflicted; in this flesh, which is now emaciated by daily labor; in this flesh, which is now often tormented by hunger and thirst, and want and poverty; in this flesh, which is now worn out by illness and weakness, and tried by all kinds of contradictions, in this flesh I shall see my God, and I reserve all my comfort and pleasure until then. Amen.

tion to lead
mortified
lives.

*Another Introduction to the same Sermon for the Fifth Sunday
in Lent.*

Text.

Quis ex vobis arguet me de peccato?—John viii. 46.

"Which of you shall convince Me of sin?"

Introduction.

What Christ said to the Pharisees, who, being filled with envy, found fault with all He did, He says, it seems to me, on this Passion Sunday to all Christians, but especially to those tenderlings, who shirk the works of mortification and penance of which we have spoken during the Lent: "Which of you shall convince Me of sin?" I have never done the least thing to render penance necessary for Me; never have I committed the least sin, nor could I commit one, so that I need not be on My guard against it; never have the senses of My body been inclined to evil, so that I need not keep them in check; and yet, I, your God, spent My life in penance and mortification, in order to show

¹ *Pelli meæ, consumptis carnibus, adhæsit os meum.*—Job. xix. 20.

² *Rursum circumdabor pelle mea, et in carne mea videbo Deum meum. Reposita est hæc spes mea in sinu meo.*—Ibid. 26, 27.

you how you, too, must live. My dear brethren, we must all agree to this; there is no contradicting it. For if we wish to enter with Christ into glory, we must necessarily suffer with Him, and deny and mortify ourselves, as we have seen more in detail on a former occasion; he who treats himself too delicately cannot go to heaven. And that is what I undertake to prove to-day, and I say:—*Plan of Discourse as above.*

ON FASTING AND ALMS-GIVING AS A MEANS OF SATISFYING FOR SIN.

FORTIETH SERMON.

ON THE OBLIGATION OF FASTING.

Subject.

1. We can and must fast for forty days; such is the law that binds Christians under pain of grievous sin. 2. We are not obliged or are not able to fast in the manner prescribed; such is the vain pretext of many sensual Christians.—*Preached on the first Sunday in Lent.*

Text.

Cum jejunasset quadraginta diebus et quadraginta noctibus.
—Matt. iv. 2.

“When He had fasted forty days and forty nights.”

Introduction.

You terrible Lent, are you back again? Must we again suffer hunger? And there is not even a dispensation for eating meat! Alas, how will I be able to stand that? Forty whole days, one after the other! It is too much; I shall die before Easter. Such are the complaints I seem to hear from some over-delicate Christians, who look on the obligation of fasting as a most terrible one, and shrink from it as they would from being flayed alive. But be comforted; it will not kill you. For, not to lose any more time in the introduction, there is no doubt that—

Plan of Discourse.

We can and must fast for forty days; such is the law that binds Christians under pain of grievous sin, as I shall show in the first part. We are not obliged, or are unable to fast in the manner prescribed; such is the vain pretext of many sensual Christians. This we shall examine in the second part. But if the first is true,

then the second must be false, as we shall see in the conclusion, to the consolation of those who are compelled by want to fast almost all the year, since they have neither fish nor flesh to eat, and to the encouragement of all others, that they may religiously observe the forty days' fast, according to the custom of good Christians.

Christ Jesus, Model of those who fast, give us Thy grace to this end: we beg it of Thee through the merits of Thy Mother Mary, and of our holy guardian angels.

The obligation of the forty days' fast arises not only from the law of the Church,

We must observe the fast of forty days; we are bound to do so, and there is not the least doubt of it. The law binding Christians to that effect is clear and well-known throughout the whole Catholic world. Nor is it a mere human law, or an invention of the Popes, as most people imagine, who therefore make little account of it; nay, in some places the thing has gone so far that people violate the fast and eat meat without any dispensation, like heretics, thinking that it makes no matter, as the law of fasting is only a Papal law. Such people show clearly that they have departed from sound Catholic doctrine; for they either do not look on the Pope as the only visible head of the Church on earth, or else they do not consider themselves under any obligation to obey his laws and commands. Both these errors are condemned as heretical. Even if the forty days' fast were an invention of the Popes, and were imposed by them on the Church at large, would not that fact alone be a sufficient reason to make it obligatory in conscience for every child of the Church? Not the least doubt of it.

But from Christ and His apostles.

Now, the law of fasting is a tradition that we receive from its author, Our Lord Jesus Christ, through His apostles and their successors. St. Jerome writes to Marcella plainly enough on the matter: "we fast for forty days at a suitable time, according to apostolic tradition."¹ The holy Pope, St. Leo, writes, "What every Christian ought to do at all times, let us now do with greater care and devotion, that the apostolic ordinance of the forty days' fast may be observed."² This is the reason, says St. Ambrose,³ why Christ, the Son of God, who was not in need of penance, spent forty days and nights without eating or drinking, namely, "to show us that we, too, must follow His example and

¹ Nos unam quadragesimam secundum traditionem Apostolorum tempore nobis congruo jejunamus.

² Ut Apostolica constitutio quadraginta dierum jejunii impleatur.—St. Leo, Sermon de quadrag.

³ Ut nobis exemplo esset hoc jejunium.—S. Ambr., Ep. lxxxii. ad Verull.

fast for the same time." From which he draws the following conclusion: "therefore, if any Christian does not observe the days devoted to fasting, he is guilty of disobedience and obstinacy in violating, by eating, the law of fasting that God has imposed on him for the good of his soul,"¹ so that we must fast, and are bound under a grievous obligation to observe the Lenten fast. From this it follows, without further argument, that we can observe the forty days' fast; for Christ would not have imposed on us a law that is impossible of fulfilment.

And to what does this law oblige us, since we do not hesitate to urge excuses against fulfilling it? It is not nearly as severe now as it was in olden times, amongst the early Christians, who were obliged to abstain, not only from meat, but also from everything that comes from meat, such as eggs, milk, butter, etc., and not merely that, but even from fish, spices, and wine, so that there was hardly anything they could eat except bread, salt, oil, and vegetables, and that only once a day, in the afternoon, for they knew nothing of a collation, and their evening repast was kept as strictly in the bounds of moderation as our collation now is, according to Tertullian, St. Athanasius, St. Epiphanius, St. John Chrysostom, St. Paulinus, and others who lived while that method of fasting was in vogue. And that method they had all to follow, without exception; no one dreamt of asking a dispensation. St. Bernard, speaking of Lent, says: "hitherto we religious have been the only ones to fast during the whole year; but now kings and princes, clergy and people, the noble and the lowly, the rich and the poor, all will join with us in fasting till the evening."² Even if the obligation of fasting were so strict nowadays, we should have no right to object, or to say, I cannot observe it; for all Christians have already observed it in former times, for many hundred years. How much less reason, then, have we now to allege impossibility as an excuse, since the Catholic Church, which has received from Jesus Christ full power to that effect, has lessened the severity of the law of fasting to such an extent, that it seems a mere trifle when compared to the strict observances of former times? For there is only one kind of food forbidden to us during this Lent, and that is meat; all other articles of food we may use, provided that, with the exception of Sundays, we eat a full meal but once a

Difficult as that law was for the early Christians, it is easy enough now.

¹ Quisquis ergo Christianus consecratam jejuniō non impleverit quadragesimam, pravaricationis et contumaciæ reus tenebitur, quod legem divinitus pro salute sua datam praudendo ipse rescindit.—Serm. xxxiii.

² Serm. iii. de quadrag.

day, and a slight collation in the evening. That is all we have to do now.

Therefore, since Adam sinned most grievously by violating a very easy command,

And must we look on that as an intolerable burden? Is there any Christian who will try to excuse himself from it by saying that he cannot observe it, or is not bound to do so? The very easiness with which the precept of the Lenten fast can now be obeyed makes more evident the guilt of him who deliberately violates it. In order to understand this better, my dear brethren, consider the violation of the divine command of which our first parents were guilty in Paradise. The holy Fathers, the commentators of the Holy Scripture, and the doctors of the Church can hardly find words strong enough to express the fearful malice of this first sin, which we, unhappy descendants of Adam, have still reason to regret in this vale of tears. The Abbot Rupert says that “no one can rightly estimate its malice.”¹ And in what, then, does this malice consist? If we look at the matter according to the ordinary principles of theology, not only will it not appear so terrible to us, but we shall even find a difficulty in making a mortal sin out of it. For, what was the sin that Adam committed in Paradise? He ate of a fruit that God had forbidden him to touch. That was all. But that cannot be, at the farthest, any worse than a venial sin. For theologians teach us that there cannot be a grievous obligation regarding a thing that is, of its kind, small and unimportant (with the exception of the matter of impurity, on account of the danger of sin which is always there, and for several other reasons besides). Thus, for instance, it is a sin to take a farthing from a rich man unjustly, for it is a violation of the command, “thou shalt not steal;” but since the matter of the theft is so small, the sin is only a venial one. Now, to eat a piece of a fruit, nay, even a whole apple, is, if we consider the matter alone, a very trifling affair. Why, then, should such a sin be reckoned as a most grievous one in the divine judgments, and as a most fearful sin, the malice of which no man can understand? St. Thomas of Aquin tells us why. The gravity of this offence must be measured by the circumstances, and not by the smallness of the matter of it; and, “according to those circumstances, that sin was a most grievous one.”² What were they? Mark, my dear brethren, the manner and the words in which God imposed the command on Adam: “And He commanded him, saying: Of every tree of Paradise

¹ Magnitudinem ejus nullus est qui aestimare possit.—Rup. Abb. de oper. tr. l. 1.

² Et secundum has peccatum illud habuit maximam gravitatem.—St. Thom. ii. 2. q. 68.

thou shalt eat: but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat. For in what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death.”¹ It was as if God wished to say: behold, Adam, turn round and see the beautiful garden that is made for your use and pleasure; see the beauty of its trees and flowers, the different herbs and vegetables it produces, and the sweetness of its countless fruits. All these things you can use when and how you please; but there is one tree that I reserve to Myself, in order to test your obedience, and under pain of temporal and eternal death you are forbidden to taste of it. Oh, certainly a most easy law to observe! But what did Adam do? In the midst of the superabundant delights that were at his free disposal he stretched out his hand, in order to please his wife, to that one tree that he was forbidden to taste of under pain of death. This, says Rupert, was the transgression of which no one is able to estimate the magnitude; “for, in the midst of the joys and delights of Paradise, he was unwilling to abstain from the one forbidden fruit.”²

Now to our subject, my dear brethren. When we consider the great number and variety of creatures on the earth, in the air, the sea, and the rivers, that God has prepared for the nourishment and food of man, might we not say that we have a kind of earthly paradise? There are all kinds of crops in the fields, all kinds of fruit on the trees, all kinds of wholesome and nourishing vegetables in the gardens; what a superabundance of these things there is on earth! And, then, what a great variety of animals, wild and tame, of birds, of domestic fowls, and of fishes in the waters. What a number of savory dishes can be made of those things that are procured from beasts! And the good God says, as it were, to each one of us Christians, behold, all these things I give you to use as you please; eat and drink of them when you can have them, according to your means and observing the laws of moderation, for the preservation of your health: but one article of food alone I reserve, which you must now abstain from for My sake, and that but for forty days; all the others you can use once a day, till you are fully satisfied. Is it credible, my dear brethren, that any true Christian can be found to object to such a command as this, or to say that it is too difficult to be observed? Or that any one would hesitate to obey humbly such a

So also he who breaks the law of fasting sins grievously.

¹ Præceptique et dicens: ex omni ligno paradisi comede: de ligno autem scientiæ boni et mali ne comedas: in quoecumque enim die comederis ex eo, morte morieris.—Gen. ii. 16, 17.

² Qui in tali voluptatis loco, deliciis affluent, vetito pomo inhiavit.

generous Creator, or would eat meat without urgent necessity, in spite of the express command to the contrary, or would otherwise violate the law of fasting? I can hardly imagine that any one would be so inconsiderate; otherwise, if we have to measure the magnitude of his guilt according to what the Abbot Rupert says of the sin of our first parents, "there is no one who can rightly estimate its malice." And yet, alas, how many half-Catholics there are who refuse to observe this easy law! We are not bound to fast in that way, they say; nay, we cannot fast in that way. Let us hear what they have to say for themselves by way of excuse, in the

Second Part.

The many pretexts that are alleged to evade the law of fasting are generally grounded on anxiety for one's health.

Children, who have not completed their twenty-first year, old people, who have reached their sixtieth, laborers and others, who have to work hard the whole day, sick, delicate, and convalescent people, mothers who are nursing, and others of the kind, have, indeed, good reason for saying that they cannot observe the law of fasting, at least as far as eating only one full meal in the day is concerned; although, as St. Basil testifies, among the early Christians even those people would be bound to fast strictly. Further, they who are either actually sick or are recovering from illness have also good reason for being dispensed from the law prescribing abstinence from flesh-meat; and, in fact, a general dispensation to that effect is granted where sufficient reason exists, so that such people may eat meat without violating the law of fasting. Of excuses of that kind I do not speak. But how many other people there are, of both sexes, who seek for all sorts of pretexts, furnished by their self-love, in order to evade the Christian law of fasting, so that they either turn the evening collation into a full meal, or else pamper their appetites with flesh-meat. A delicate constitution, natural weakness, weariness of the limbs, headache, a weak stomach, want of sleep and discomfort at night, catarrhs and injuries to the health that might arise from eating fish; such are, generally speaking, the great orators that persuade such people that they are justified in saying, I am not bound to fast, I cannot do it; I must eat meat, or else my health will suffer.

These excuses are generally of no avail.

But if these causes were sufficient to dispense you from the law of fasting, there would hardly be any one in the world bound to observe it, and the forty days' fast would be a useless and idle law. For where is the man in the world who is not

subject to some bodily weakness or other? These bodily ills are consequences of original sin, and are the rightful inheritance of our human nature. We are all made of the same clay. I know well that the love we have for our bodies grows up with us from our tenderest years, and that we are bound by the natural law to love them. I acknowledge that we are not lords and masters, but rather caretakers of our health, our bodies, and our lives, and therefore we are not allowed to neglect them altogether. But it is also certain that we must not act towards them as if we lived only for the sake of the body, for we must care for the body only in so far as is necessary in order to render it serviceable to the soul. Hence, not our sensual appetites and our bodily comfort, but the eternal salvation of our immortal souls, should have the preference in all things. When God proclaims to us by His Church the law of the Lenten fast, is it perhaps His intention to ruin our health and shorten our lives? Certainly not. Is He, then, ignorant of what our bodily strength can bear? By no means. How, then, can we dare to make an exception of ourselves in a command that is given to all Christians in general, and to pretend that it is impossible for us to observe that command, or that we are not bound to observe it? "The excuse you allege," says the *Glossa*, "is a temptation; because you are more anxious about the food of the body than about that of the mind."¹

I have asked the doctor about it, they say generally, and according to him fish is very bad for my health; therefore I am not bound to fast, and can eat meat with a good conscience. And because the doctor tells you that, you think it is quite enough? But a great many mistakes are made in that way. The doctor, you must know, has no power to dispense in the law of fasting; all he can do is to declare that you have a reasonable cause for asking a dispensation. He acts as confessors do, who express their opinion according to what their penitent tells them. In the same way the doctor tells you that you can eat meat, but on the supposition that what you tell him is the truth. If you are really as weak as you say; if your stomach is in bad order; if your head is so weak; if you are really in danger of losing your health, and there is no other way of helping you, then, of course, you can eat meat, that is, you have a good reason for asking a dispensation. But if your weakness is, as is generally the case, merely imaginary, if your fears are founded on self-love, sensual-

And in most cases, the doctor's opinion is not sufficient cause for dispensing one's self.

¹ Persuasio tua tentatio est; quia agis de cibo corporis, non de cibo mentis.

ity, love of comfort, gluttony, and dread of self-denial and Christian mortification, of what good will the dispensation you seek for be in the sight of God, although you have the doctor's opinion in favor of it? The excuse you allege is a temptation; the idea you have of your inability to fast is only a suggestion of your sensuality. But, you say, I know by experience that fish is not good for me. Well, then, who compels you to eat fish? Let it be, and eat something else. But that would be difficult and hard to do. Quite so, and that is precisely the reason of the law of fasting; it must be hard and difficult.

Many fast constantly and severely, and are yet in good health.

Oh, what a great number of people there are among the lower classes, who, besides having to work hard every day, hardly see a bit of meat oftener than once or twice a year, while they are just as badly off with regard to fish; and yet they are able to enjoy good health on their fare of bread and vegetables. They can do without meat for a year at a time, while you are afraid to abstain from it for a few weeks during the Lent! How many people there are, of both sexes, in convents and monasteries, who spend their whole lives without eating meat, or anything that comes from meat; and yet they reach a ripe old age. St. Hilarion was eighty years old, St. Pachomius a hundred and ten, SS. Antony, Arsenius, and Romuald lived to be a hundred and twenty. And what ascetic lives they led! Did they have meat outside of Lent? Or fish prepared with all kinds of delicious sauces during Lent? No, indeed; dry bread, herbs, and vegetables were their food, pure water their drink, and even these things they did not eat their fill of, unless on some great feast days, as we learn from SS. Jerome and Athanasius. Thus they fasted the whole year through, while they slept for a few hours on the bare ground, and scourged and chastised their bodies in different ways, and yet they enjoyed good health. Who of those people in the world who deny themselves no bodily comfort, lead idle lives, and seek out the most delicate viands for the sake of preserving their health, who of them, I say, ever attains to such a hale old age, as the Fathers of the desert did, in the midst of their fasting and austerities? Yes, they say; but people in those days were different. Yes, they were different; they were more pious, God-fearing, and desirous of their salvation than we are. You and I, O Christian, are not required to fast so strictly. All that we have to do is to abstain from meat, and to eat a full meal but once a day, during Lent; and is that so dangerous to health, or are we so weak and delicate, that we cannot endure it, and

are obliged to ask for a dispensation in the very first week of Lent, for fear that our health should suffer? Sheer imagination! “The excuse you allege is a temptation.” We can do much, if we are only willing, if we have but a proper love for God, and for our eternal salvation.

Go through religious houses of men and women, and you will find many delicate youths and tender virgins who were brought up in luxury, shuddered at the very name of fasting, and could not bear to eat fish, as they then imagined. But ask them, now that they have followed the divine inspiration and embraced the religious state, ask them, I say, if they can fast and abstain from meat. Certainly, they can fast, and that, too, without much difficulty; nor, if they now and then get fish to eat, does it do them the least harm, while, in addition to the prescribed fasts, they, out of a holy zeal, impose on themselves frequently other more severe fasts, if they are allowed to do so by their superiors. And has their constitution or their bodily strength been changed since they entered religion? No; they are just as they were when they left the world. But one thing is changed in them. What is that? Their own will; for they have become more pious, more zealous in the divine service, than they formerly were in the world; and now they can fast, because they wish to fast; just as they would have been able to do it before, if they had only been willing.

Even they who were before too delicate to fast.

I cannot for the life of me understand how people allege their weak and delicate health as an excuse for not observing the general Lenten fast imposed on all Christians. Do they not condemn themselves by their conduct? For they have strength enough for other things, which are far more injurious to the health than abstinence from meat. Hear, my dear brethren, how beautifully and forcibly the Prophet Jeremias describes such people: “Their course is become evil, and their strength unlike.”¹ Do you wish to know how their strength has become unlike? For instance, during Shrove-tide, or at some other time, you are invited to an evening party, at which you spend half the night eating, drinking, dancing, and otherwise amusing yourself; so that it is quite late when you go home. Before accepting the invitation, do you go to consult the doctor as to whether it is good for your health to appear at such a party? What an extraordinary question! you say. Why should I ask the doctor about such a thing? But are you not afraid of get-

They who say they are too weak to fast are strong enough often to do other difficult things.

¹ Factus est cursus eorum malus, et fortitudo eorum dissimilis.—Jerem. xxiii. 10.

ting ill, or of putting your head or stomach out of order, since you are so weak and delicate? Are you not afraid of injuring yourself by walking or driving through the cold air late at night, in wind and rain, sleet and snow, depriving yourself at the same time of your night's rest? No, you say; I can endure that easily enough, and find a pleasure in it. Well, if such is the case, you must have a strong constitution! To get up an hour earlier than usual in the morning, and go through the cold air, and suffer some discomfort for the purpose of assisting at some public devotion on week-days, or at a sermon on Sundays, that, I am well aware, is bad for the health, and is sure to affect the head and the lungs injuriously; but I thought it was just as bad when one went out to parties in similar circumstances. No, you answer; I have never found that to be the case. Truly, I see now that you must have a strong constitution indeed! And when you have spent four or five hours dancing, and go out of a warm room into the cold night air, and then into the warmth of your own house again, do you not find that affecting your health? No, not at all. Wonderful, indeed, must your constitution be! And when you eat or drink to excess, or fill your stomach with all kinds of fruit, sweetmeats, and sugarwater, when visitors arrive, are your head and stomach always in good order? Yes, I can bear all that without difficulty, nor does it make me the least ill. Certainly, you must be a very healthy person! For all doctors maintain that nothing is more injurious to the health than to eat and drink to excess, especially when different kinds of food and drink are used at the same time. And some have told me, too, that there is nothing more apt to cause colds and catarrhs, than the night air, and sudden changes from heat to cold, and from cold to heat. Let doctors say what they will, I have done it over and over again, and it has not hurt me. Then your constitution must be a very strong one!

But very weak where the law of God and the Church is concerned.

But tell me, is not this constitution of yours the same during Lent? How, then, is it that you were up to the present so strong and healthy that nothing could hurt you; whereas now you are so weak, that, if you abstain from meat for a time, you are sure to get sick? Ah, Christians, is it possible that one can endure anything without injuring one's health, when the laws of the world command, or the senses and desires of the flesh clamor for gratification, while, if there is question of obeying the law of God and the Church, all our strength is gone, the head is too weak, the stomach too delicate, we might grow sick and die?

Thus our strength has become unlike. Vitruvius relates a wonderful thing of a town in the island of Lesbos. He says that to-day you may see all the inhabitants full of health and strength, while to-morrow the whole town is like a hospital, so many of the people are sick, while the day after again they are as healthy as before, and so it goes on. What is the cause of this wonderful change. Nothing but the change of the wind. "When the south wind blows in that town," he says, "the people grow sick; when the north wind blows, they get well again."¹ Do we not find a nearly similar change taking place now, my dear brethren, amongst Christians? During Shrove-tide the weakest and most delicate are strong enough to spend the time in eating and drinking, in staying up late at night and amusing themselves in various ways; but as soon as the Lent comes on, then one has a head-ache, another has a weak chest, a third complains of his stomach, a fourth is subject to colds; one has this complaint, another that; no one is without some weakness or other. And when Easter arrives, they are all as well as ever. What is the reason of this change? It is due to a change of wind. We look to where the wind blows from. If from the north, that is, if the perverse spirit of the world wishes to have his vain customs observed, then all are strong and healthy; then neither wind nor weather, food nor drink, waking at night nor discomfort during the day, do any harm. But if the wind comes from the south, that is, if the Spirit of Jesus Christ urges us to take upon us His sweet yoke, alas, that I must say so, then every one is too weak and sickly. And so it is in reality, says St. Gregory: "all the lovers of the vain world are strong in earthly, but weak in heavenly things."² "Their strength is unlike;" they are strong when they please, and weak when they choose to be so, according to the wind. The law of fasting comes from the south, and does not please them, and therefore they say to themselves: I cannot fast, my stomach cannot bear fish; I must eat meat.

But what will their excuses avail before the all-seeing God, who cannot allow Himself to be deceived by any man, and who knows well what each one is able to bear? What will they avail before that Judge of whom the Prophet David says: "He shall judge the world with justice, and the people with His truth?"³ Mark these words, weak Christians; in His own divine truth He

¹ In qua civitate, Auster cum fiat, homines ægrotant; cum Septentrio, restituuntur ad sanitatem.—Vitruv. l. i., c. 6.

² Omnes hujus sæculi dilectores in terrenis rebus fortes sunt, in cælestibus autem debiles.

³ Judicabit orbem terræ in æquitate, et populos in veritate sua.—Ps. xcvi. 13.

Their excuse will not be admitted by God, and they will be all the more likely to lose their health.

will judge the world, and not according to your idle imaginations. You violate the law of fasting by eating meat, in order to preserve your health, and to prolong your life; but do you not see how the devil betrays you, making your own self-love act as the traitor, when he inspires you with such ideas? Did not the wily serpent practise the same deceit with our first parents in Paradise? What did he say to Eve, in order to persuade her to eat the forbidden fruit? "No, you shall not die the death;"¹ you shall live as gods, if you eat of that fruit. But what happened to them? As soon as they had disobeyed His command, God announced to them that they should die: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the earth, out of which thou wast taken: for dust thou art, and into dust shalt thou return."² In the same way does the tempter act with us nowadays: "You shall not die the death," he exclaims; you must not expose yourself to the danger of dying before your time; fish is bad for your health; if you eat it, you will get sick and die; you must eat meat, in order to preserve your health and live longer. But take care lest, in punishment of your disobedience, God may deprive you of health and life together.

Shown by
an example.

The holy Bishop Elphege, of England, was once exhorting his people to observe the Lenten fast. When the sermon was over one of the congregation said: that preacher is too coarse and severe, (we are accustomed to similar compliments nowadays, too;) he has been shouting there loud enough, but he has not prepared my stomach for fasting; I cannot do without meat, or fast for such a long time. The Bishop was told of this; alas, said he, unhappy man! what will become of you even before to-morrow dawns. On the following day the man was found dead in his bed. This incident is related, by Baronius, as having occurred in the year 947. Oh, if we could always see the reason of the untimely death of those men or women who were so careful of their health, or the cause of their being always in ill health, how often would we not find that the very means they made use of to evade the law of fasting and to preserve their health and prolong their lives, was made use of by God in His just judgments to bring illness and death on them!

Exhortation
and resolu-
tion to ob-
serve the

My dear Christians, unless evident necessity requires otherwise, let us strictly observe the law of God and of the Catholic Church; as, besides countless other good Christians, Cardinal

¹ Nequaquam morte moriemini.—Gen. iii. 4.

² In sudore vultus tui vesceris pane, donec revertaris in terram de qua sumptus es: quia pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris.—Ibid. 19.

Hosius did, who was papal nuncio in the Council of Trent. Lenten fast strictly. Wearing out by long journeys and many discomforts, he fell into an illness during Lent, but did not abate anything of the rigor of his fasting. His doctor, the other cardinals, and the bishops begged of him to give up fasting, lest he should injure his health. What? he said; God has commanded us to honor our father and mother that we may live long on earth; and therefore I, too, will honor my heavenly Father and my mother, the Church, and, like an obedient child, will observe the law of fasting, in the firm hope that I will thereby preserve my health and life better than if I took the most nourishing food. Ah, my God, I will also say, is it, then, possible that I should entrust my health and my life to the flesh of a dead animal, at a time when I am forbidden to use it as food, with more confidence than to Thee, the author and preserver of my life, so that I dread therefore to obey Thy law? No; in this, too, I will show that I am a good Christian; I leave the care of my health to Thy fatherly Providence. If self-love and sensuality try to persuade me that I cannot observe the general law of fasting, then I will make them the same answer that St. Augustine once made in another matter: "Why should I not do what these men and women have done?" So many Christians have kept the law of fasting for so many centuries, even when it was so strict that both fish and flesh were forbidden; why, then, should I not observe it, now that it is so easy? So many religious of both sexes can fast during the whole year almost; why should not I fast for forty days? At all events, Thou, O sovereign God, hast appointed the fast, and my mother, holy Church, has imposed it on her children; this should be enough to induce me to show myself publicly as her obedient child. And even if fasting should be somewhat more difficult to me than to others, who try to evade it by all sorts of vain pretexts, yet my soul and my spirit will have all the more consolation in Thee, and when the joyful season of Easter comes, I will be able to sing more heartily the glorious Alleluia. Amen.

On the way in which we are bound to fast, see the preceding Second Part.

FORTY-FIRST SERMON.

ON THE NECESSITY OF FASTING, IN ORDER TO DO PENANCE.

Subject.

We must fast, 1. because we must do penance; 2. because, of all penitential works, fasting is the chief, the most suitable, and the most convenient for all men.—*Preached on the second Sunday in Lent.*

Text.

Apparuerunt illis Moyses et Elias cum eo loquentes.—Matt. xvii. 3.

“There appeared to them Moses and Elias talking with Him.”

Introduction.

Why did Christ, Our Saviour, make choice of Moses and Elias, instead of so many other holy patriarchs, as witnesses of His transfiguration and heavenly glory? St. Thomas of Aquin and St. John Chrysostom assign different reasons for it; the best for my purpose to-day is given by St. Jerome, who says: “Our Lord wished to have Moses and Elias with Him in His transfiguration, on account of their having united with Him in fasting.”¹ For Moses and the Prophet Elias were striking figures of our fasting Redeemer; like Him they fasted forty days and nights consecutively, and therefore He wished to have them with Him when He appeared in His glory, in order to show the world that they who fast are the most fitted for the glory of heaven. My dear brethren, we can and must observe the prescribed Lenten fast, and the excuses that are sometimes alleged to evade that law are generally but mere vain pretexts and suggested by sensuality. Such was the subject of my last sermon. Now I say, further,

Plan of Discourse.

If there were no law to bind us to fast, if a general dispensation from fasting were given to all of us, yet even then we should and must often fast. Why? Because we must necessarily do penance, as I shall show in the first part. But of all penitential

¹ Dominus noster ob juniorum consortia Moysen et Eliam transfiguratus in monte secum ostendit in gloria.

works fasting is the chief, the most suitable, and the most convenient for all men, as I shall show in the second part. How unjustifiable, then, is the conduct of those who, without urgent necessity, try to evade the law of fasting. Such will be the conclusion.

Again, for the consolation and encouragement of all Christians who fast as they ought, help us thereto with Thy grace, O Lord, through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

He who has sinned grievously must do penance. Nor do I now allude merely to that penance which consists in detesting one's sins and confessing them with a firm purpose of never committing them again; for there is no doubt that the sacrament of penance is necessary to all who have grievously sinned, and who have the opportunity of receiving it; and that no one who has not the intention of doing penance in that way can be saved. Nor do I mean merely the penance that the priest imposes on us in confession, after we have told him our sins; for, generally speaking, it is so light, according to modern practice, that it scarcely deserves the name of penance. I speak now of that penitential spirit of which I have already treated at large, and which, according to many theologians, is a special virtue, distinct from other virtues, an act of justice, as St. Thomas calls it, by which the sinner restores to God what he owes Him, and voluntarily punishes himself for the evil he has done. For, by mortal sin, even if he commits but one in his whole life, man offers the greatest insult and injury to his God, whose infinite majesty and dignity he despises before the very eyes of God Himself, and whose commands he tramples under foot. This injury must be atoned for, although the guilt of the sin is remitted out of sheer generosity and mercy.

He who has sinned grievously must do penance.

For, just as the virtue of gratitude requires that I should perform a service for him who has done good to me, if I have an opportunity, although I may have already thanked him in words, so, also, justice requires that I should try my best to please him whom I have offended, if I have a chance of doing so, although he may already have forgiven the offence. Now, he who commits a grievous sin gives to his corrupt flesh, which enjoys a forbidden pleasure, or to some other untamed appetite, which he has satisfied against the divine law, what he had no right to give it, and thus he has incurred eternal punishment.

This is required by fairness and justice.

He must, therefore, be punished; vengeance must be inflicted on him for this disobedience; for God, when forgiving him, turned into a temporal punishment the eternal punishment his sin deserved, and that he has still to suffer. So that, just as a sovereign who generally allows his subjects to commit crime with impunity errs against justice, so, also, should I act against justice if I did not punish in myself what I have done wrong through disobedience, or if I tried to escape the punishment I deserve.

Either God must punish the sinner, or the sinner must punish himself.

This atonement offered to God for the injury done Him by sin, this vengeance and punishment inflicted on one's self, is the result of increasing one's ordinary good actions, or of voluntary penances, by which the flesh is chastised, the body made to feel pain, and sensuality mortified; unless, indeed, God Himself takes the rod in His hand, and by illness, or bodily pain, or other trials and troubles in this life, punishes the sinner for that disobedience which the latter would otherwise have to punish in himself. One or other of these two things must be done, says St. Gregory: either God must punish me, and I must accept the punishment willingly, acknowledging my guilt, or else I must perform works of penance according to the number of my sins, even if I were assured by a revelation that all my sins are forgiven. "I feared all my works," says holy Job, speaking to God, "knowing that Thou didst not spare the offender." I have examined and diligently discussed all my works with secret dread, fearing to find in them something wrong. Why? Because I know that Thou didst not spare the offender, nor allow him who has sinned to go unpunished. But how could such a holy man speak in that way? Did he not know that the goodness and mercy of God are infinite, that He never rejects the repentant sinner, and that He rejoices with all His angels over one sinner who truly repents? "Yes," says St. Gregory, speaking of those words of Job, "God pardons the repentant sinner in so far that He receives him with joy again into His friendship, but He does not pardon him completely, so as to leave him altogether unpunished, because He does not permit sin to go unchastised, for, either the sinner inflicts punishment on himself, or God inflicts it on him."¹

Even the holiest men must do

Adam, the first man and first sinner in the world, was pardoned by God for his disobedience, and yet was condemned

¹ Verebar omnia opera mea, sciens quod non parceres delinquenti.—Job ix. 28.

² Quia delictum sine ultione non desinit; aut enim ipse hoc homo in se penitens punit; aut hoc Deus cum homine vindicans percudit.—St. Greg. In c. ix. Job.

with Eve and all his descendants to hard work, to suffering, and to misery of all kinds, a punishment under which we, his children, still groan in this vale of tears. Moses, that great servant of God, was pardoned for the want of confidence he displayed in striking the rock twice to make the water flow from it; but nevertheless he was not allowed to enter the promised land, and had to die in sight of it, as a punishment of his fault. Mary, the sister of Moses, was pardoned for murmuring against her brother, but, as a punishment of her sin, she was smitten with a hideous leprosy and had to be separated from the rest of the people. King David was told by the Prophet Nathan, on the part of God, that his sins were forgiven, and yet, what persecutions and trials he had to endure by way of punishment. The pious and holy king Ezechias was pardoned for the vanity he displayed, in showing off and boasting about his treasures, but in punishment of his sin he was deprived of those very treasures. Magdalene and Peter were assured by the infallible Truth, Jesus Christ Himself, that their sins were forgiven, and yet their subsequent lives were most penitential.

But why do I speak of those who were sinners? Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was holiness and innocence itself, had to live and die a penitent. The holy Fathers ask why it is that Our Lord, whose soul, from the first moment of His conception, enjoyed the beatific vision, did not also assume a glorious body, which certainly was due to His sacred humanity? What was the necessity for such a great and constant miracle, namely, that the happiness of the soul imparted no happiness to the body, and that nature had to her greatest amazement to see in the same Man the highest dignity and the deepest abasement, superabundant wealth and extreme poverty, perfect happiness and the greatest misery, heavenly joys and sorrow even to death? Why was that? "Ah," answers Origen, "Our Saviour came into the world as a willing victim to satisfy the divine justice for our sins, and as He assumed the figure and appearance of a sinner, it was not fitting for Him to live in pomp and magnificence, in honor and glory before the world, and to lead a life of comfort and pleasure, but as a penitent He had to endure punishment and trials, pains and torments, the cross and suffering. It was not becoming for Him to bear our sins in His glory."¹ Weigh this well, my dear brethren; if Jesus Christ, the innocent Son of God, the Holy of Holies, who with even one sigh in a

penance for
their former
s'

Even Christ
Himself did
penance, as
a victim for
the sins of
others.

¹ Non decebat in gloria constitutum peccata nostra portare.

glorified body could have amply satisfied the justice of God for an infinite number of sins, if He spent His whole life in constant mortification of His body, because He had merely the figure and appearance of a sinner, which He voluntarily assumed in order to satisfy for the sins of others, how unjust and inconsistent it is for one who knows that he has committed grievous sins to lead a comfortable, easy life, and to avoid all bodily mortification. It remains true, then, that he who has sinned mortally, unless God Himself punishes him in this life, must necessarily do penance and punish himself.

We have all sinned.

But we have all been sinners, for who of us will dare to say that he has never sinned? If we had never done any evil whatever, original sin alone, in which we are conceived and born, would be a sufficient reason for doing penance all our lives. For it is in punishment for that sin that we are banished to this earth, this valley of tears, as the proper home of mortification and penance. How much more, then, are we not bound to do penance, when we consider the many actual sins we have committed in thought, word, deed, and omission, from the time when we first came to the use of reason? Is there one of us who can make an exception in favor of himself, and say, in the words of St. Paul: "For I am not conscious to myself of anything?"¹ I have never offended my God by sin! Alas, how few there are in the world who can say that! I am afraid that, if we look back on the past years of our lives, every day will supply us with new matter for penance and mortification; if we try to remember all the towns, villages, houses, rooms, gardens, streets, nay, even churches, we have been in during our lives, we shall hardly find a corner that will not reproach us with some deplorable transgression or other; if we go through the commandments of God and the laws of the Gospel, nearly every one of them will accuse us, and condemn our bodies as well as our souls; if we were to call to account the members of our bodies, our eyes, ears, tongues, mouth, and hands, hardly one of them would venture to declare itself innocent.

And must, therefore, all do penance.

Therefore we have all sufficient and superabundant reason for doing penance, in order to make some atonement for the injury we have offered our sovereign God, to punish our own wilfulness in committing so many sins, and to obtain the remission of the punishment still due to us. Let no one say or think: I have sinned, I acknowledge it; I have sinned often and grievously;

¹ Nihil enim mihi conscius sum.—I. Cor. iv. 4.

but I have long since repented, I have made a good confession, and I am firmly resolved never again during my whole life to offend God by mortal sin, while I will try to obtain remission of the punishment still due to my past sins, as well as of that which I deserve for my slight daily transgressions, by gaining indulgences, so that I do not stand in need of any special works of penance. Your conclusion does not hold good. You say that you have repented of and confessed your sins; and you have done perfectly right. You say that you are determined never to commit a mortal sin again; quite right, and it would be a great mistake for you not to make such a resolution. You try to gain the indulgences that are so liberally granted now by our holy mother the Church; a very wise thing, indeed, for thereby you can blot out a part, or, if the indulgence is plenary, the whole of the punishment still due to your sins. But by doing that you do only one part of what the virtue of penance requires of you; now, where is the other part? You must atone to God for the injury you have offered Him, and you must punish your own wilfulness; but you cannot do that by the mere purpose of not sinning again, or by gaining indulgences. It is by frequent mortification and voluntary penances, as St. Thomas of Aquin says, that you must fulfil this latter requirement of penance: "satisfaction must be made by penitential works."¹ But perhaps you do not know what penance you have to inflict on yourself? Then you can learn from this present holy season; fast, at least, by way of satisfaction for your sins, and fast strictly, as becomes a Christian, and as the law requires. For of all penitential works, fasting is the chief, the most suitable, and the most convenient for all men; as we shall see in the

Second Part.

Fasting is the chief penitential work, because, whenever the Holy Scripture exhorts the sinner to do penance, it almost always puts fasting in the first place. "Now, therefore, saith the Lord," by the Prophet Joel, "Be converted to Me with all your hearts." In what manner? "In fasting, and in weeping, and in mourning."² "Blow the trumpet in Sion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly; gather together the people, sanctify the Church, assemble the ancients, gather together the little ones,"³

Fasting is the chief of all penitential works.

¹ Satisfactionem oportet fieri per opera pœnalia.

² Nunc ergo dicit Dominus; convertimini ad me in toto corde vestro: in jejuniis, et in fletu, et in planctu.—Joel ii. 12.

³ Canite tuba in Sion, sanctificate jejunium, vocate coetum, congregare populum. . . . coadunate senes, congregare parvulos.—Ibid. 15, 16.

etc.; all without exception, old and young, great and small, must be converted to God. How? "In fasting, and in weeping, and in mourning." We read of many penitent sinners in the Holy Scriptures, but there was hardly one who did not have recourse to fasting and abstinence as the chief means of satisfying and atoning to God for his sins. "They proclaimed a fast, and put on sack-cloth from the greatest to the least,"¹ as did the penitent Ninivites. "They proclaimed a fast before the Lord to all the people in Jerusalem, and to all the people that were come together out of the cities of Juda to Jerusalem;"² as did the penitent Israelites when the prophet Jeremias exhorted them to be converted from their wickedness. The same Israelites, when the Prophet Samuel converted them from idolatry, "fasted on that day, and they said there: We have sinned against the Lord."³ We read of Achab in the Third Book of Kings, that, when he was humbled, "he put hair-cloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and slept in sack-cloth, and walked with his head cast down."⁴ The penitent king David says of himself: "I humbled my soul with fasting."⁵ "My knees are weakened through fasting, and my flesh is changed for oil."⁶ St. Paul makes the same confession of himself: "in hunger and thirst, in fastings often,"⁷ I have chastised my flesh along with other mortifications. Do you wish, says St. Ambrose, to know how to appease the God whom you have offended? "Then you must fast; for fasting is a sacrifice of reconciliation, that blots out sin altogether."⁸

The most suitable.

Again, I have said that fasting is the most suitable of all penitential works. Why? "That they might know," answers the Holy Ghost, "that by what things a man sinneth, by the same also he is tormented."⁹ The son of a rich noble had dissipated all his fortune by extravagant living and immorality, and had incurred debts to such an extent that he was in hourly danger of being sent to prison. Some of his nearest relations petitioned

¹ Prædicaverunt jejunium, et vestiti sunt saccis, a majore usque ad minorem.—Jon. iii. 5.

² Prædicaverunt jejunium in conspectu Domini omni populo in Jerusalem, et universæ multitudinî quæ confluerat de civitatibus Juda in Jerusalem.—Jerem. xxxvi. 9.

³ Jejunaverunt in die illa atque dixerunt ibi: peccavimus Domino.—I. Kings vii. 6.

⁴ Operuit cilicio carnem suam, jejunavitque, et ambulavit demisso capite.—III. Kings xxi. 27.

⁵ Humiliabam in jejunio animam meam.—Ps. xxxiv. 13.

⁶ Genua mea infirmata sunt a jejunio, et caro mea immutata est propter oleum.—Ibid. cviii. 21.

⁷ In fame et siti, in jejunis multis.—II. Cor. xi. 27.

⁸ Jejunate: jejunium enim reconciliationis sacrificium est, quod peccatum omnino delet.—St. Ambr. serm. 25.

⁹ Ut scirent quia per quæ peccat quis, per hæc et torquetur.—Wisd. xi. 17.

Alfonso, king of Aragon, to spare the young man's person, since he was not able to pay his debts. "What?" said the king; "if the worthless fellow has fallen into debt for the sake of his body, then his body, at least, shall pay for it." A clever and just answer. St. Paula of Rome, as St. Jerome tells us, pronounced the same judgment against herself; she used to scourge herself daily even to blood, and used most severe implements of penance, while she constantly shed tears of contrition. If any one advised her to mitigate the severity of her penances, she would answer, "the pleasures with which I formerly indulged my body must be paid for by those penances, and the laughing and amusements of my youth, by constant weeping." Now, my dear brethren, it was by gluttony that the first sin came into the world, and from that gluttony all our sins take their origin, so that no more suitable satisfaction can be offered for them than fasting and abstinence, which is contrary to gluttony. Such is the opinion of St. Athanasius: "as we are driven out of Paradise with Adam, our first father, by gluttony and disobedience, he who wishes to regain Paradise must do so by fasting and obedience."

Finally, amongst all works of penance, fasting is the most convenient for all kinds of people. How so? Because every one can make use of it, if he wishes; it costs no money, nor does one incur any expense by it; nay, a great deal of money, that would otherwise be spent on the pleasures of the table, is thereby saved. Nor does it cost any labor or trouble, for it consists merely in omission; do not touch the food for which you feel an inclination; eat less of it than is necessary to satisfy your hunger; that is all you have to do to fast. The poor and needy are well acquainted with fasting; for they often have nothing or not enough to satisfy their hunger fully. Weak and delicate people, too, find fasting easy; for they have, generally speaking, little appetite, and hardly strength enough to digest their food. The lower classes of citizens and laborers, who have to work hard to earn a living for themselves and their families, spend, so to speak, the greater parts of their lives in fasting and abstinence; for they have hardly anything to eat with their bread and water, unless, perhaps, a plate of vegetables cooked in fat. All these people may be quite at ease as far as the law of fasting is concerned; they fast and do penance enough, if they only offer up to God by a supernatural intention their poverty and want, their

And the most convenient for all.

¹ Ita rursus per jejunium et obedientiam in paradysum qui volet redibit.—St. Athan. l. de Virgin.

sickness and delicacy, their labor and toil, their bad and insufficient nourishment, and the other trials they have to endure daily, humbly acknowledging that they deserve such trials on account of their former sins, and that they now bear them by way of atonement. Ah yes, good people; think of this daily; see that you have God as your Friend by having a good conscience, and do not forget the good intention, if you wish your troubles to be profitable to you. There remain, then, only the rich and wealthy, who eat and drink well every day throughout the year, and that, too, without having any fatigue to undergo, since they need not work for their living; they spend their lives in ease and comfort, and are rather pleased that they have it in their power to do so. And what penance can we propose to such people as satisfaction for their sins? A hard mattress on which to take an uncomfortable sleep at night? Hair shirts, iron chains, or girdles furnished with iron spikes, with which to chastise their flesh? Disciplines, to scourge themselves with? Yes, indeed! the very name of such things would make them shudder from head to foot. They would refuse to listen to any suggestion of the kind, and if any one ventured to make it to them, they would find some pretext or other to excuse themselves from adopting it; they would say that they have no opportunity of practising those penances, since they are never alone at home, and cannot be sure of the necessary privacy. So that for such people there is no more convenient means of mortification and penance than frequent fasting and abstinence; they have time and opportunity enough for that every day, if they wish.

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other pen-
ance.

From this I conclude, my dear brethren, that they whose only means almost of penance consists in fasting and abstinence are most inexcusable when they try by all kinds of pretexts and excuses, suggested by self-love and sensuality, to evade the general law of the Lenten fast, and do not observe it with strictness, according to Christian custom. Tell me, in God's name, you who refuse to fast as you ought, although all are bound to it under pain of sin, in what have your penances, that are necessary to all sinful mortals, hitherto consisted? Perhaps in frequent vigils and interruptions of your night's rest? Yes, I quite believe that you have often done something of the kind in pleasant company, at evening parties, at balls and dances, to say nothing of things that are still worse; but is that the way to do penance in order to satisfy God for the injuries you have

offered Him, to punish yourselves for your sins, and to blot out the chastisement due to them? If any one were to advise you to sacrifice a few hours of unnecessary sleep by an act of holy mortification, in order to be present at public morning devotions, to praise God with the assembled people, and thus to be encouraged to serve God with more zeal during the whole day, as even noble and illustrious personages are accustomed to do, to the great edification of all, oh, that would be too much, altogether, to expect from you; if you did that your heads would be heavy with sleep the whole day long, and you would not be able to attend to your business! No, you consider it penance enough if you get up in time for the eight o'clock sermon during winter, and it is not all of you that overcome yourselves even to that extent; and yet you refuse to observe the Lenten fast? In what, then, does your penance consist?

Have you ever tried those penances, I will not say those that were practised by the saints in the desert, and that have been and are practised now daily by religious of both sexes (for that would be too much for you altogether); but have you had any experience of those penances that people of the highest station, princes and princesses, kings and queens, emperors and empresses have practised in their courts? I read of Ferdinand II. and Charles V., the Roman emperor, that they often scourged themselves even to blood; have you ever done anything of the kind by way of penance? I read that Claude, duke of Lorraine, a celebrated hero, used to wear on his left arm an iron ring set with sharp spikes, and that he never left it off day or night, his object in so doing being to atone in some measure for the sins of his youth; have you ever done that? I read that the count of Lemos, a rich Spanish nobleman, had certain fixed days in the week on which he used to take a severe discipline, and this holy custom he adhered to so strictly, that, when on one of those days a wedding-feast was held in his house, he, remembering that it was a day of penance for him, withdrew quietly from the guests, shut himself up in one of the rooms of his castle, and, as he had not his usual discipline with him, tore the gold chain from his neck, and scourged himself with that; have you ever done anything of the kind? I read that the princess Catharine Fernandez, whenever she was compelled by her husband to appear in costly attire, used to punish herself for this worldly vanity, which she had to adopt against her will, by wearing a coarse hair-shirt under her garments; have you done

Although many illustrious personages have practised various penances.

anything of the kind? I read that Cornelia, a noble matron, when she had to go with her husband to a feast, used to put peas in her shoes, so that, while she was dancing and apparently enjoying herself, she experienced more pain than vain pleasure. Have you ever done anything of that kind in your nightly gatherings? I read that Margaret, the daughter of the king of Portugal and duchess of Parma, when in her last illness, gave to her confessor the hair-girdle she used to wear constantly, that he might take it away with him, so as to conceal the fact of her having worn it. The same was done by a rich noble in Rome, who on his death-bed gave to his confessor a box containing girdles of hair and copper, as well as iron chains and disciplines with which he was used to chastise his body. After the death of Eleonora, wife of the great emperor Leopold I., scourges and linen cloths stained with blood were found in her bed-room; for that innocent and holy empress used to practise the greatest austerities, as I have mentioned elsewhere, and as you may read in the panegyric that was preached at her funeral. Have you, I ask, ever thought of practising such mortifications? What sort of implements of penance will be found in your bed-rooms after your death? Costly silks and laces, gold rings, bracelets, and earrings, false hair, and a number of similar things that you use to gratify your vanity in dress, to catch the eyes of others, and to attract the notice of strangers. Perhaps, too, girdles may be found that you use, not to mortify yourselves, but to add to the idle pomp of your array. Are not those really the instruments of penance with which you try to gain the kingdom of heaven, that can be borne away only by the violent? I am not anxious to share in the reward that you will gain by such means! But, in God's name, what are you thinking of? You wonder and shudder at the austerities practised by those illustrious personages of whom I have just spoken. Alas, you exclaim, what lives they led! But with that empty sigh end all your attempts to imitate them. Yet you are not minded to do even as much penance as consists in observing the Lenten fast exactly!

They who do not even bear their daily trials with patience.

In what, then, does your penance consist? For you must confess that you have often offended the great God. Have you at least borne with patience, and as an atonement for your sins, those annoyances and trials that are common to all men, such as heat and cold, rain and wind, and the insults and trouble that others sometimes cause you? Have you endured all those things in the spirit of true penance, looking on them as a well-deserved

punishment of your sins, and saying, with Joseph's brethren in prison, when they remembered how unjustly they had acted towards their brother, "We deserve to suffer these things, because we have sinned against our brother,"¹ with justice do I suffer, because I have offended my God? Perhaps you have never even thought of that, but have regarded the least annoyance with displeasure, without a good intention, not directing it to God, nor to the profit of your souls; nay, you have murmured against it, and given way to cursing and imprecations on account of it, thus increasing the punishment due to your sins, while in other things, in eating, drinking, sleeping, resting, in dress and in entertainments, you have always sought your comfort and tried to gratify your sensuality. And yet you wish to evade the law of fasting? Yet you pretend you must eat flesh-meat, and have a full, or at least a half meal in the evening, lest you should have too much to suffer from the want of food, or cause discomfort to your body, or injury to your health? And where, then, I ask again, is your penance? Where the atonement to God for the injuries you have offered Him? Where the punishment of the disobedience with which you have revolted against your God, and perhaps often deserved the pains of hell? Are you not afraid, after a life of that kind, to appear before your Judge, who walked on the rude way of the Cross, amidst all kinds of penance and mortification, in order to show men how they must by violence enter the narrow gate of heaven? Do you, perhaps, wish to leave the punishment of your sins till the next life? Ah, woe to you, if so; for far more terrible instruments of penance and a more rigorous fast await you there! How will you be able to endure them, if you now find it so hard to fulfil the easy law of fasting?

No, O my God, I will not make such a foolish resolution. I acknowledge my guilt; for to no purpose would I seek to conceal anything from Thy all-seeing eye; I confess humbly that I have sinned; I have sinned often; I have sinned far too grievously, and hitherto I have not suffered the punishment I have deserved. Therefore I will do penance, by continually mortifying my flesh and its concupiscences, and by patiently bearing all the trials and crosses of this life; at all events, I will strictly observe the fast, as Thou hast commanded all Christians to do at this time under pain of sin. Let my sensual appetites cry out as they will, I will remember my sins and how I have de-

Conclusion
and resolution
to observe the
fast strictly.

¹ Merito hæc patimur, quia peccavimus in fratrem nostrum.—Gen. xlii. 21.

served to suffer perpetual hunger and thirst. And what a profitable exchange it will be for me to escape by such a slight penance the well-deserved and severe torments of the next life, and, as I hope and trust, to arrive by the way of penance at my heavenly country, where, according to Thy promise, I will be fed at Thy table for all eternity. Amen.

FORTY-SECOND SERMON.

ON THE NECESSITY OF FASTING IN ORDER TO AVOID SIN.

Subject.

If there were no law obliging us to fast, nay, if there were no more punishment due to our sins, we should still be all bound to fast, in order to be preserved from sin.—*Preached on the third Sunday in Lent.*

Text.

Cum fortis armatus custodit atrium suum, in pace sunt ea quæ possidet.—Luke xi. 21.

“When a strong man armed keepeth his court, those things are in peace which he possesseth.”

Introduction.

What a desirable thing it is to be able to keep one's possessions in peace! Not without reason do we cry out so often to heaven: “give, O Lord, peace in our days.” And certainly we have good cause for doing so; for the whole world, and especially this country of ours, knows by sad experience what terrible and general calamities arise from the disturbance of peace. Such is the object of the prayer that the Catholic Church so often addresses to God: “that Thou wouldst vouchsafe to grant peace and true concord to all Christian kings and princes, we beseech Thee, hear us,” Almighty God, who hast in Thy hands the hearts of all potentates. But, my dear brethren, we must also do our part. “When a strong man armed keepeth his court,” says our dear Lord, “those things are in peace which he possesseth.” What arms are we to use, besides prayer, in order to obtain this much desired peace? The very same arms that we must use to preserve our souls in peace with God and to keep

them from sin ; for it is a well-known axiom of the holy Fathers, that public calamities are never inflicted by God on a country, unless on account of the sins of the people ; so that, if sin is taken away, all other evils disappear with it ; if we are safe from sin, we can be sure that we shall be able to keep our possessions in peace. Fasting and abstinence, of which we have treated already during this holy season, are the chief, the most suitable, and the most convenient arms for this purpose, for all classes of men, as St. Bernard, with many others, teaches us. “ Fasting,” he says, “ not only blots out past sins, but also preserves us from future sins.”¹ We have seen last Sunday that, if there were no law to oblige us to fast, yet we should all of us often fast, in order to make some atonement to God for the sins we have committed, and to avoid the punishment they deserve.

Plan of Discourse.

If there were no law obliging us to fast, nay, if there were no more punishment due to our sins, we should still be all bound to fast, in order to be preserved from sin and saved from the punishment due to it. Such is the subject of this exhortation. Let us all, then, at least observe as we ought the Lenten fast. Such shall be the conclusion.

With child-like confidence, O Lord and Author of peace, we address to Thee the prayer of the Church: “ grant us the help of Thy grace, that, attending as we ought to fasting and prayer, we may be freed from our enemies of soul and body;” through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary and of the angels of peace.

When we consider all men on earth as they are in the sight of God, who makes no difference between men on account of their condition, we may divide them into two classes ; for they are either innocent and just, and have never offended God by deliberate sin ; or else they are transgressors, who must acknowledge themselves guilty of many a sin. Both these classes of men must in justice often fast and perform other good works of penance, if they wish to be free from sin for a long time, and to preserve peace and friendship with God. Such, it appears, is the force of those oft-repeated exhortations of those two chief preachers of penance in the Gospel, Jesus Christ and His holy precursor, John the Baptist. John went about everywhere preaching and crying out : “ Do penance, for the kingdom of

The Innocent as well as sinners are exhorted to fast.

¹ Jejunium non solum delet peccata præterita, sed et repellit futura.

heaven is at hand.”¹ Christ comes after him, and says: “Unless you shall do penance, you shall all likewise perish.”² Mark the difference, my dear brethren. The first exhorts men to penance by holding out to them the hope of reward, and reminding them of the future joys of heaven; the second urges them to penance by the terrible threat of eternal destruction. Their words were directed to the whole world: to the just and innocent, who are easily moved to do virtuous actions by hope and charity, and to wicked sinners, who must be violently urged thereto by fear. All must do penance: the just, that they may be preserved from evil, and may not begin to sin; the wicked, that they may cease from sin, or, if they are already converted, may not fall into sin again.

The innocent, on account of their frailty, that they may avoid sin.

With regard to the just and innocent, who are in the minority in the world amongst grown-up people, they stand in need of penance as a preservative against sin; for, no matter how innocent and holy they have hitherto been, how deeply grounded in the love of God, or how earnest their resolution never to offend Him, yet they are still but human, that is, weak and frail creatures, apt to change at any moment, as St. Paul says, and they require the greatest care to preserve the costly treasure of divine grace. In this sense we may well understand the words that the Church addresses to her faithful children at the beginning of the forty day’s fast of Lent: “remember, man, thou art dust.”³ As if she wished to say, take care, O mortal, and be on your guard; for, although you may have been hitherto immovable and strong as a pillar in the house and service of God, yet remember you are but dust, that the first wind can easily blow away; therefore strengthen yourself with the weapons of the spirit, and chastise your body by fasting and penance. Nor should it require much to convince us of the inconsistency and deplorable weakness and frailty to which even the most innocent are subject; we all of us know enough about that from our own sad experience.

Their frailty comes from the violation of fasting of which our forefather Adam was guilty.

It comes from the first violation of the law of fasting of which our first parents were guilty in paradise. For, from the time when human reason raised itself up in rebellion against God, the flesh, with its concupiscences and inordinate appetites, rebels against sound reason, and to such an extent, that the understanding is darkened in supernatural things, our freedom is

¹ *Pœnitentiam agite; appropinquavit enim regnum cœlorum.*—Matt. iii. 2.

² *Nisi pœnitentiam habueritis, omnes similiter peribitis.*—Luke xiii. 3.

³ *Memento, homo, quia pulvis es.*

considerably weakened, our inclinations tend to evil, while the will is sluggish to good, so that it is only with a great effort that it can be urged to good, or kept away from evil. And no matter how thoroughly the guilt of original sin is washed away by the waters of holy baptism, yet concupiscence, which theologians call "the source of sin,"¹ still retains possession, and from it come all temptations, since the devil makes use of our own flesh and its desires as instruments and helpers to drag the soul into sin. All this is described in a few words, by the apostle St. James, in his Epistle: "From whence are wars and contentions among you," which you daily experience in yourselves? "Are they not hence, from your concupiscences, which war in your members?"² Therefore you need not go far to find the cause of the strife; you have it within yourselves.

Now, the more liberty is allowed to the flesh and its desires, the more it is permitted to enjoy itself, even in things that are otherwise lawful, the more delicately it is nourished, the more obstinate will it become in its rebellion against the spirit, and the more difficult will it be for sound reason to rule it and to keep it within the bounds of God's commandments. It resembles a restive horse, that, when it is kept a long time in the stable well fed, can be tamed afterwards only with great difficulty. Not without reason is that source of sin in our flesh called, "the fire of concupiscence."³ The more wood you put on a fire, the greater the heat, and the higher the flame; pour oil on it, and you will have great difficulty in preventing the whole house from catching fire. To pamper the body, to eat, drink, and sleep according to our desires, is nothing else than to add fuel to the fire of concupiscence and to pour oil on the flame, as St. Jerome says.⁴ And again, "a full stomach is an incentive to lust."⁵ St. Ambrose speaks in a similar way: "Lust is fed by feasting and nourished by pleasure, it is kindled by wine and inflamed by drunkenness."⁶ This fire, then, must often be kept under, even by the innocent and the just, or else it will break out into a flame that is most dangerous to the soul; this restive horse must frequently be tamed and punished, if he

It is increased by indulging the flesh too much.

¹ Fomes peccati.

² Unde bella et lites in vobis? Nonne hinc? Ex concupiscentiis vestris, quæ militant in membris vestris?—James iv. 1.

³ Ignis concupiscentiæ.

⁴ Cum cibo abundantî carnem reficimus; oleum igni affundimus, ut majores effundat flammâs.

⁵ Ventris saturitas seminarium libidinis est.

⁶ Pascitur libido convivii, nutritur delictis, vino accenditur, ebrietate inflammatur.

is to remain obedient to his master, the spirit, to be subject to reason.

Fasting
is the best
way of tam-
ing the
flesh.

How is that to be effected? Amongst the many works of penance, answers St. Gregory, that can be used for that purpose, the most suitable, the safest and the most powerful is that prescribed to us by the Catholic Church, namely, fasting, and frequent abstinence from food and drink: "The Church forbids the use of flesh-meat during Lent, that our flesh may be subject to the spirit, and our appetites to reason."¹ St. Thomas of Aquin agrees with him: "the chief object of fasting is to subdue the desires of the flesh, for chastity is preserved by fasting."² St. Ambrose expresses the same idea in the beautiful words that priests read at Prime in the divine Office: "may abstemiousness in eating and drinking subdue the pride of the flesh."³ What is meant by the pride of the flesh? Is not pride a vice of the spirit and the mind alone? How, then, can it be ascribed to the flesh? With very good reason, my dear brethren, for is it not pride for the subject to command his sovereign? the servant, his master? the maid, her mistress? Now what is our flesh? A miserable creature, of vile origin, made of a lump of earth at first, and given over to the reasoning soul to be its servant. Yet we learn by daily experience that the flesh arrogates a right over the soul, and frequently importunes it to consent to its wanton desires; nay, it often causes the reasoning soul to obey its sensuality. Is not that an intolerable pride? And what arms shall we take up to tame it? Fasting, abstinence, abstemiousness in eating, can and must subdue this pride and wilfulness of the flesh.

Without
fasting one
is easily
overcome
by the
flesh.

Naturalists tell us that when the elephant and the dragon meet, they invariably fight; if the elephant is fasting and hungry he easily overcomes the dragon; but if he has had a full meal the dragon overcomes him. A striking picture, my dear brethren, of what happened to our forefather Adam in paradise, and of what his unhappy children, who have inherited his corrupt nature, so often experience. As long as Adam was fasting, and while he observed the abstinence imposed on him by God, he remained a beloved friend of God, but when he followed his inordinate appetites by eating the forbidden fruit, he became a

¹ Ideo carnum esum interdicat tempore jejunii, ut ea ratione frænetur caro et subiciatur spiritui, ac rationi pareat appetitus.—St. Greg. Ep. ad Augustin., ep. Angliæ.

² Assumitur jejunium principaliter ad concupiscentias carnis reprimeudas, quia per jejunium castitas conservatur.—St. Thom., II., 2, q. 147, a. 1.

³ Carnis terat superbiam potus cibusque parcitas.

slave of the devil. "While he was fasting," says St. Jerome, "he was in Paradise, but hardly had he eaten, when he was cast forth."¹ "Therefore," says St. Ambrose, "no better means of defence can be found, than fasting, against the attacks of the hellish serpent."² St. Augustine, commenting on the words of Christ to His disciples, explaining to them why they could not cast out a certain kind of devil, "This kind is not cast out but by prayer and fasting,"³ "See," he says, "how powerful fasting is; it can do what was impossible to the apostles."⁴

This is the reason why even the most innocent and holy friends of God, such as Antony, Hilarion, Benedict, Bernard, Ambrose, Charles Borromeo, Francis, Teresa, Catherine of Siena, Aloysius, and countless others, fasted so rigorously. According to the testimony of Athanasius, Antony fasted so strictly during his whole life, that sometimes he neither ate nor drank for two or three days together, and then, on the fourth day, took only a small piece of bread. While Hilarion was still a young man of fifteen, he fasted just as strictly; he never ate till sundown, and then nothing but a few dried figs; nay, he often went four whole days without food or drink of any kind, so that he was sometimes hardly able to breathe, through hunger and exhaustion. St. Ambrose, as bishop, was for many years accustomed to eat but once a day, and then very little. The holy cardinal, Charles Borromeo, although he was delicately nurtured, always abstained from meat, fish, eggs, and wine; and during the last years of his life he used to take nothing but dry bread and water. Aloysius, who, as I have told you before, was more like an angel than a human being in innocence, used to weigh his food most accurately every day, lest he should give his body more nourishment than was necessary to preserve its life for the service of God. In a word, says St. Cyprian, "among all who were remarkable for sanctity, we read of none who attained it without fasting."⁵ Let no one imagine that those saints fasted so rigorously merely in order to serve God more perfectly, and to gain more glory in heaven. Truly, that was one reason why they did it, but there was another, besides; they looked on fasting as necessary, for, like other poor mortals,

Even innocent saints have done that.

¹ *Quamdiu jejunavit, in paradiso fuit; comedit, et ejectus est.*

² *Nullum remedium majus contra inimicum serpentem poteris invenire, quam jejunium.*

³ *Hoc autem genus non ejicitur nisi per orationem et jejunium.*—Matt. xvii. 20.

⁴ *Videte charissimi, quanta sit jejunii virtus, ut id facere jejunium valeat, quod Apostoli nequiverunt.*—St. Aug., *Serm. 65 de temp.*

⁵ *Quotquot viros virtutum vidimus, sine jejunio non legimus ascendisse.*

they had to groan and sigh under the slavery of their corrupt flesh, and so they considered themselves bound to call in the help of penance, and especially of fasting, in order to tame the wanton desires of the flesh and make it submit to reason, lest, if it overcame them, they should lose their innocence and holiness. They knew very well, with St. Bernard, that "no one can overcome temptations to impurity if he does not chastise his body by fasting and abstinence."¹ They knew well that, in order to preserve sanctifying grace in their souls, and to keep them free from sin and in the friendship of God, they required a special, powerful, helping grace from God, and they acknowledged with St. Augustine, that, as long as they continued to do penance, so long would they receive the help of this grace.²

Therefore they who lead luxurious lives are in a dangerous state.

How much attention is paid to this by those who, although they do not seem to be addicted to any gross vices, yet pamper their bodies, seek their comfort in all things, gratify their sensuality by eating and drinking as they please, and, besides, when Lent comes on, bring forward all kinds of empty pretexts, to excuse themselves from observing the fast? And by those who do not wish to hear a word about Christian mortification and crucifying the flesh, to which St. Paul and Our Lord Himself so frequently exhort all men, but lead idle, luxurious lives from one year's end to the other, and are, generally speaking, among the first to use the dispensation for eating meat during Lent, if one is granted (I do not say that this is unlawful for them; for I freely acknowledge that, when the dispensation is conceded to a town or district, they commit no sin by using it), or otherwise to do their best to evade the Christian law? If they happen to fast until evening, abstaining from all kinds of food and drink, on Good Friday, according to what I acknowledge to be a laudable custom, they think they have done wonders in the service of God, and that He, whom they have offended, must be satisfied with that amount of mortification from them during the whole year. Under such circumstances, indulging their bodies in everything as they do, how can they reasonably expect always to keep free from other sins, to which the wanton and unmortified flesh is sure to tempt them?

Shown by the parable of the rich glutton.

St. Luke describes, in a few words, the eternal ruin of the rich glutton: "And the rich man also died; and he was buried in hell."³ Why? What wrong had he done? Was he, perhaps,

¹ Tentationes vincere non poteris, nisi carnem per abstinentiam castigaveris.

² Tamdiu enim gaudet et sustentatur a gratia, quamdiu sustentatur a penitentia.

³ Mortuus est autem et dives, et sepultus est in inferno.—Luke xvi. 22.

guilty of idolatry, so that he refused to adore the true God, and bent the knee before gods of wood and stone? Or did he commit a sacrilege by profaning and robbing the temple? Was he a revengeful man, who persecuted, wounded, or even killed his enemy? Was he an adulterer, addicted to the brutish vice of impurity? Was he a thief, who had got possession unjustly of the property of others? No; we read nothing of the kind in the Gospel. And in what, then, did his guilt consist? Hear the reason on account of which the divine and all-just Judge condemned him: "he was clothed in purple and fine linen; and feasted sumptuously every day."¹ That was all, and it was enough to condemn him in the next life to eternal torments, as we see from the answer that Abraham made to his complaints in the midst of his intolerable sufferings: "Son, remember that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime."² Remember what an easy life you had, and therefore "thou art tormented."³ But, you will ask, what is the harm in being well-dressed, in eating and drinking well every day, and enjoying one's self lawfully? That is the usual mode of life of those who can afford to live in that way. I can and will not say anything certain of the mode of life common in the world; but the Holy Ghost tells me, by the wise Ecclesiasticus, "Go not after thy lusts; but turn away from thy own will;" for, "if thou give to thy soul her desires, she will make thee a joy to thy enemies."⁴ If you make a rule of doing and enjoying everything that is lawful and agreeable, you will not be long without doing something that is unlawful and forbidden, until at last you will enter on the broad and pleasant way that leads to destruction.

Therefore, just Christians, no matter how innocent you are, if you wish to preserve yourselves free from sin, and to be able to conquer temptation, you must often call in to your help the mortification of the flesh, and especially frequent fasting and abstinence from food and drink. What does a gardener do to preserve the good seed he has planted from being eaten up by the birds? He covers the earth with sharp thorns to keep the birds away. And that was what the penitent David did, in order to preserve his soul from the attacks of the hellish birds of prey: "I covered my soul in fasting,"⁵ an example we

The innocent, too, must fast. Shown by an example.

¹ Induebatur purpura et bysso, epulabatur quotidie splendide.—Luke xvi. 19.

² Fili, recordare quia receperisti bona in vita tua.—Ibid. 25. ³ Tu vero cruciarius.—Ibid.

⁴ Post concupiscentias tuas non eas, et a voluntate tua avertere. Si præstes animæ tuæ concupiscentias ejus, faciet te in gaudium inimicis tuis.—Ecclesi. xviii. 30, 31.

⁵ Operui in jejuniis animam meam.—Ps. lxxviii. 11.

should do well to follow. "Oh, what a beautiful mantle that is," says St. Ambrose, speaking of these words; beautiful is the cloak that covers the soul, so that the tempter cannot attack it: "he who does not fast is naked and unprotected, and is exposed to the danger of being wounded."¹ Ruffinus tells us that there was once a young religious who complained bitterly to an old member of his Order that his life was intolerable to him. What shall I do, Father? said he. I cannot stand it any longer; I am plagued day and night by impure thoughts and horrible desires. Tell me what to do. What thoughts do you speak of? asked the old man. I know nothing of them, nor do I remember ever having been troubled with them. What? cried out the young man, astonished; how is it possible that there is a single individual in the whole world who is not now and then assailed by such thoughts? I will tell you, answered the other; from the time that I entered the religious life I have never eaten enough bread to satisfy my hunger, nor drunk enough water to quench my thirst, nor slept enough to rest the body completely; so that, as my stomach is always clamoring for food and drink, and my wearied body for rest, I have no time to think of impure objects, and the desires of the flesh give me no particular trouble. The young man went off, quite consoled by this advice, and firmly determined to adopt the same plan in order to conquer temptation. So true are the words of St. Ambrose, "hunger is a friend of purity, an enemy of lust; while satiety ruins chastity and nourishes concupiscence."²

How much more, then, should not those who have been sinners fast.

I have spent too long, my dear brethren, talking of the innocent and just; yet, from what I have said, it is clear that they who have been sinners and have been addicted to many vices during their lives must often have recourse to fasting and abstinence in the matter of food and drink, although they have already satisfied God for their sins. For, if an innocent man, who never tasted a forbidden pleasure, nor transgressed the law of God to gratify his evil inclinations and carnal desires, must still fast and do penance, in order to avoid sin and overcome temptation, how much more necessary must not fasting be to him who has sinned grievously, and who, on account of his former bad habits, is much more inclined to sin? For, just as in baptism,

¹ Bonum animi operimentum, quod animam tegit, ne a tentatore deprehendatur: qui non jejunat, nudus et intectus est, patet vulneri.

² Fames amica est virginitati, inimica lasciviae; saturitas vero prodigit castitatem, nutrit illecebram.—St. Ambr. serm. de quadrag.

although the soul is cleansed from the stain of original sin, yet the flesh still remains rebellious against the spirit, so, also, after having received the sacrament of penance, although the stain of guilt is removed from the soul, yet, in addition to the punishment that still remains to be suffered, there are two other terrible effects of sin, which do not disappear, and which are called by the Council of Trent, "the relics of sin."¹

The first is a certain facility and audacity, setting shame at defiance, in repeating one's former sins, as all sinners know by experience. What fear and dread you experienced, O man, how hard it seemed to you, and what a great struggle took place in your heart, the first time you made up your mind to offend God by mortal sin! The very name of mortal sin caused you to shudder, and was enough to keep you from committing it. But after you had consented a few times to sin, did you not find that shame and dread disappearing either completely, or at least in proportion to the gravity and number of your sins? The other effect consists in the rebellion and disobedience of the carnal appetites, which become more headstrong and obstinate in proportion to the amount of indulgence conceded them, so that the spirit is weakened and is less able to control them. Hence it happens that one falls so easily and at the first temptation into his former abominations, and comes to confession with nearly the same sins each time, unless he is particularly careful and does violence to himself constantly. A converted sinner is like a convalescent patient, who is recovering from an attack of fever; he does not suffer so much as before, but for a long time he feels a weakness and lassitude in his limbs, and if he is not careful of what he eats and drinks, and does not observe the laws of temperance, he runs a great risk of falling into his former illness again. Oh, what manifold mortifications such a person is obliged to practise! How often is he not compelled to abstain from food for which his mouth waters! How often must he not, against his will, stand up from the table without having fully satisfied his hunger! And if he refuses to do so, he is at once reproved by those around him; if you go on like that, they say, you will see how it will end with you. Why, O Christians, are people so careful of the health of the body, while they do so little to keep the precious soul from relapsing into its former maladies? If we can fast and abstain with great self-denial from food of which we are very fond, for the sake of the body, should we not be

On account
of the relics
of sin.

¹ Reliquias peccati.

much more willing to fast and to overcome ourselves for the sake of the immortal soul?

Which cannot be eradicated without fasting.

For that is the way in which to destroy little by little those relics of sin, and it is prescribed to penitents by the Council of Trent as a most efficacious means to that end.¹ Of fasting in particular, St. Augustine says: "Fasting cleanses the mind, subjects the flesh to the spirit, scatters the clouds of concupiscence, extinguishes the flames of lust, etc."² What a great mistake they then make, who, when they have got rid of the heavy burden of their sins at Easter, think and say, thank God, that much is done; I am free from that burden; I have confessed all my sins, and performed my penance. And then they persuade themselves that they can enjoy themselves as before, and live as if they had never done any wrong. No; you must know that you have not done enough for your soul. If you have had true sorrow and a firm purpose of amendment, and have candidly declared your sins in confession, the unclean spirit is certainly driven out of you; the house is swept and garnished; but be careful; for what did you hear in to-day's Gospel? "I will return," says the unclean spirit who is gone out of man, "I will return into my house whence I came out. Then he goeth and taketh with him seven other spirits, more wicked than himself, and entering in they dwell there. And the last state of that man becomes worse than the first."

As we learn from the example of penitents.

St. Nilus had committed but one sin in his youth; and, in order to prevent a relapse, and to keep away the unclean spirit, he imposed on himself a most rigorous fast during his whole life; he used to eat nothing but vegetables and fruit; water was his only drink; he slept on the bare earth, and thus preserved the health of his body as well as that of the soul for ninety-five years. And can one who has sinned so often, who has so often laid aside the burden of his guilt in confession, and come again to confession with the same sins, can he reasonably hope that, amid the countless dangers and occasions to which he is exposed in an easy, comfortable life, pampering his body in every way, eating and drinking as he pleases, he will be always able to withstand temptation? St. John Chrysostom, considering the words of St. Paul, "I chastise my body and bring it into subjection; lest, perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should be-

¹ Medentur peccatorum reliquiis, et vitiosos habitus tollunt.

² Jejunium purgat mentem, carnem spiritui subiecit, concupiscentiæ nebulas dispergit, libidinum ardores extinguit, etc.

come a cast-away”¹ (and according to St. Jerome and St. Ambrose that chastising of the body consisted principally in fasting and abstinence), considering these words, St. Chrysostom cries out with a deep sigh: “If Paul was so much afraid of sin and reprobation,” although he had so often bewailed and done penance for the sins of his life, and had labored more than the other Apostles for the honor of Jesus Christ; although he had converted so many souls by his preaching, and had become, as it were, an angel; but in spite of that, he still thought it necessary to chastise his body by fasting, alas, “what have we to say for ourselves?”² What ought not we to do, in order to avoid sin and eternal damnation! Do we still venture to say, I cannot fast; I must have meat; I must have a full meal in the evening, or else I shall become too weak; I shall not be able to sleep, and my health will suffer?

Away with those deceits and false excuses of sensuality! The health of my soul should certainly be more dear to me than the welfare of my mortal body; and if I cannot preserve it unless I chastise the body by fasting, abstinence, and works of penance, then I am fully determined that the body must suffer. Far be it from me to make use of any pretext whatever to evade the general law of the Lenten fast, that is imposed on all Christians, especially in the present, troublous times, when we should in any case try to appease the anger of God by penance and mortification, that He may avert from us the public calamities that threaten us. No; I will fast strictly; and not only will I deprive the stomach of flesh-meat, but my whole body shall have its share of mortification. My eyes, my ears, my tongue, my hands shall fast, that they may neither see, hear, say, nor touch what might be even a remote danger or occasion of sin to them, so that, being thus always armed against my enemy, I shall be able to keep my soul and its salvation in peace, and help to bring peace and prosperity to our dear native land. Amen.

Conclusion
and resolution
to keep
the law of
fasting.

¹ Castigo corpus meum, et in servitatem redigo, ne forte, cum aliis prædicaverim, ipse reprobus efficiar.—I. Cor. ix. 27.

² Si autem Paulus hoc timuit, postquam prædicavit, et factus est angelus: quid nos atxerimus?

FORTY-THIRD SERMON.

ON THE NECESSITY OF ALMS-GIVING FOR THE SAME END.

Subject.

For the same purpose for which we must fast it is also necessary to give alms, whether we consider the past or the future.—
Preached on the fourth Sunday of Lent.

Text.

Unde ememus panes ut manducent hi?—John vi. 5.
“Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?”

Introduction.

Ah, if only all who have the means were so merciful and charitable that, with Jesus Christ, our dear Saviour, they would often open their coffers, and take counsel with each other in the same words that I have quoted, “Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?” Husband, wife, whence shall we buy bread to feed the poor and needy in our neighborhood? If, I say, all who could afford it were thus merciful and charitable, there would not be so many decent poor crying out: alas, where can we buy bread that we and our children may eat? My dear brethren, we have hitherto treated of the law, the obligation, and the necessity of fasting. But, good and salutary as fasting is in itself, yet the Catholic Church does not command her children to fast merely that they may abstain from meat and eat a full meal but once a day. For, amongst other reasons, the Lenten fast is imposed, according to the teaching of the holy Fathers, “that what the stomach is deprived of may be given to the poor;”¹ and while the stomach is fasting from its ordinary food, the hand may busy itself in generosity to the needy. Hence, according to some doctors, they who are blessed by God with wealth are not less obliged to perform the corporal works of Christian charity during Lent, than those who are in good health and strength are bound to do works of penance; nay, they say that there is no use in fatiguing the body by depriving it of food, unless at the same time the members of Jesus Christ, that is, the poor, are fed and nourished by alms-deeds. Ah, dear Lord, if the world and all it contains were mine, Thou knowest how

¹ Ut detur pauperi, quod subtrahitur ventri.

willingly I would give it all to Thee in the persons of Thy poor; do Thou now place the words on my tongue and give them the strength of Thy grace, through the Mother of Mercy and the help of our holy guardian angels, that that Christian charity and generosity, which I am not in a state to practise, may at least be aroused in the hearts of others. Relying on Thy help and grace, I say:

Plan of Discourse.

Besides fasting we must also give alms according to our means; for alms-giving is required for the very same purpose for which we must fast. Such is the whole subject of this exhortation. It is required as far as our past lives are concerned, as we shall see in the first part. It is required as far as our future lives are concerned, as we shall see in the second part.

As far as our past lives are concerned, we should and must often fast, in order to atone for our past sins and to satisfy the justice of God for them; and as far as our future lives are concerned, in order to subdue the inordinate desires of the flesh, and to receive the help of God's grace, that we may avoid sin and eternal damnation. These two objects form the chief end of fasting and bodily mortification, as I have shown on former occasions. But they also are the reason why alms-giving should always accompany fasting. For, with regard to the first object, it is certain, as De Lyra says, that of all penitential works none is more efficacious in appeasing the anger of God and obtaining a remission of the punishment that still remains due to our sins, than alms-giving and generosity to the poor and needy.¹

Alms-giving satisfies for the punishment due to sin.

Nor does this truth stand in need of a long proof, for it is emphatically and expressly declared in the Holy Scripture by God Himself, so that to doubt it would be to call in question the very word of God. "Charity covereth all sins,"² says the Holy Ghost by the Wise Man, no matter what they are, or how great be their number. "Before all things," as St. Peter says in his First Epistle, "have a constant mutual charity amongst yourselves." Why? "for charity covereth a multitude of sins,"³ so that, as St. Thomas of Aquin says, even the most grievous sins, when covered by works of charity and mercy, are, as it were, not considered by God, who will take no notice of them, nor punish

Proved from Scripture.

¹ Est enim eleemosyna virtus inter omnia opera poenalia maxime satisfactoria.

² Universa delicta operit caritas.—Prov. x. 12.

³ Ante omnia autem mutuam in vobismetipsis charitatem continuam habentes; quia charitas operit multitudinem peccatorum.—I. Pet. iv. 8.

them.¹ The elder Tobias, when exhorting his son, recommended him specially to practise charity towards the poor and needy: "For alms deliver from all sin and death."² The same was afterwards affirmed by the archangel Raphael: "For alms delivereth from death, and the same is that which purgeth away sins, and maketh to find mercy and life everlasting."³ "Give alms," says Christ Himself to the wicked Scribes and Pharisees; "and behold all things are clean unto you."⁴

Confirmed
from the
Fathers.

The holy bishop St. Ambrose, considering those words of the wise Ecclesiasticus, "Water quengeth a flaming fire, and alms resisteth sins;"⁵ compares alms-giving with the sacrament of baptism, and says, alms-giving blots out sin, just as baptism extinguishes the fire of hell. Oh, what a good and gracious God we have, he continues; how many powerful means He has supplied us with to enable us to save our souls easily! He has instituted the sacrament of baptism, that not only blots out the guilt, but also takes away all the punishment due to all the sins that one has committed. But if a poor, weak mortal offends God grievously after baptism, and thus again deserves the eternal torments of hell, behold, he has two other means at hand to free himself from sin; the one is the sacrament of penance, which takes away the guilt of sin, and the other is alms-giving, which remits the punishment due to it. So far St. Ambrose.

Anything
can be done
with men
by bribery.

The reason of all this is evident, my dear brethren. Experience teaches that with money, presents, and bribes one can do anything with others; the bitterest enemies can be reconciled and made good friends, and the greatest injustice can in a short time be rectified. Plutarch relates that Philip, king of Macedon, once gave a large sum of money to a man who was accused of having spoken ill of him; and the effect of his liberality was to make his former calumniator henceforth speak of him always in the highest terms of praise. "See," said Philip, "it is in my power to cause my detractors to sound forth my praises."⁶ The same Philip was on another occasion attacking a certain fortress, when his scouts advised him to desist from the attack, as the place was so well situated, on a steep rock, that it was impossible to take it by assault. "Is the place, then, so steep," asked Philip, "that

¹ *Ne scilicet appareant ad puniendum.*

² *Quoniam eleemosyna ab omni peccato et a morte liberat.—Tobias iv. 11.*

³ *Quoniam eleemosyna a morte liberat, et ipsa est quæ purgat peccata, et facit invenire misericordiam et vitam æternam.—Ibid. xii. 9.*

⁴ *Date eleemosynam, et ecce omnia munda sunt vobis.—Luke xi. 41.*

⁵ *Ignem ardentem extinguit aqua, et eleemosyna resistit peccatis.—Eccles. iii. 33.*

⁶ *En in manu mea est facere ut detractores sint laudatores.*

not even a laden mule could climb up to it?" "Oh, certainly," answered the other, "there is no doubt that a mule could reach it." "Then," replied Philip, "it is easy of access, and it can be taken."¹ He thereupon sent a mule laden with gold to the commandant of the fortress, and the latter, blinded by the money, left the place with his army, so that Philip took it without the loss of a single man. Similar effects are worked daily still amongst men by bribes, presents, and money. Hence, in the Old Law, God gave this command to judges: "Thou shalt not accept person nor gifts." And He immediately adds the reason: "for gifts blind the eyes of the wise, and change the words of the just."² No matter how pious and just a judge may be, if he accepts a bribe, then good-bye to his justice; his eyes are blinded to the guilt of a criminal; his ears are closed, so that he cannot hear any accusation against him; his hands are tied, and he cannot punish the malefactor as he deserves; his mouth is shut, and cannot pronounce a just sentence. Alas, this is but too true!

Now, what do I mean by all this, my dear brethren? Dare we, then, venture to help our case before the divine tribunal with money and presents, so as to gain something to which we have no right? Not a doubt of it. St. John Chrysostom gives an apposite answer, and cries out in astonishment: "O wonderful power of alms-giving. It creeps into the divine tribunal, and there enables us to meet our Judge without fear."³ For Jesus Christ, the Judge of the living and the dead, stretches forth His hand whenever we give anything to the poor in His name; He it is who takes the bread, the money, or whatever other gift we bestow, as we know from His own lips: "As long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to Me."⁴ Thus He allows Himself to be bribed by the sinner, so that He has no eyes to see his sins, in order to punish them; no tongue to pronounce against him the sentence of eternal death; no hands to inflict on him the chastisement he so well deserves; and the alms He has received converts Him from a bitter enemy into a dear friend of the sinner. "Give alms and behold all things are clean unto you;" you will thereby make up for everything.

¹ Ergo accessu et expugnato facilis est.

² Non accipies personam nec munera; quia munera excæcant oculos sapientum, et mutant verba justorum.—Deut. xvi. 19.

³ O singularem eleemosynæ vim! Sola ad divinum tribunal irreptit, ne Judicem timeamus.

⁴ Quamdiu fecistis uni ex his fratribus meis minimis, mihi fecistis.—Matt. xxv. 40.

And even
with God, by
alms-giv-
ing.

As David
and others
experi-
enced.

That was the way in which David tried to make good his cause with the God whom he had offended, as he says himself: "I will wash my hands among the innocent."¹ But David, what are you thinking of? Will you wash among the innocent those hands that are stained with the filth of adultery, and with the blood of Urias? Will you cleanse them so that they will resemble the soul of an innocent man? Yes; so clean will I wash them. In what manner will you do it? By giving generous alms to the poor; such is the answer that the learned Hugo gives in the person of David, commenting on this text: "I will wash my hands among the innocent; that is, I will cleanse my works from the stain of sin, in the laver of alms-giving."² In the same way, too, the otherwise impious emperor Zeno succeeded in bribing the Almighty God by alms-giving, so that he escaped the punishment he had long deserved. Baronius, writing of the year 474, relates that a certain poor woman, whom this emperor had persecuted most unjustly, threw herself on her knees before a picture of the Mother of God, and cried out: "avenge me on Zeno."³ Whereupon the Blessed Virgin answered her, believe me, I have not been careless of your interests all this time, and would long ago have inflicted the desired punishment on him; "but his hand prevents me."⁴ "For he was," says the historian, "very charitable and good to the poor."⁵

Therefore
sinners
should give
generous
alms to sat-
isfy for
their sins.

Hear, O sinners, cries out St. John Chrysostom; you, who on account of the multitude and deformity of your crimes despair of finding mercy and grace at the hands of God, take courage; no matter how great your wickedness, how numerous your sins; not one of you has cause to despond, much less to despair; only give alms according to your means, and you will find it a most powerful means of obtaining the grace of repentance and the forgiveness of your sins from the mercy of God. King Nabuchodonosor, who was a monster of wickedness, when the Prophet Daniel announced to him, in the name of God, the dreadful punishment that was in store for him, could, if he had followed the Prophet's advice, have escaped that punishment by the same means; for Daniel said to him: "Wherefore, O King, let my counsel be acceptable to thee." And what was the counsel? "redeem thou thy sins with alms, and thy iniquities with works

¹ *Lavabo inter innocentes manus meas.—Ps. xxv. 6.*

² *Lavabo inter innocentes manus meas, id est, opera macula peccati lavacro elemosynarum.*

³ *Vindica me de Zenone.*

⁴ *Sed manus ejus prohibet me*

⁵ *Erat enim valde misericors et elemosynas faciens.*

of mercy to the poor: perhaps He will forgive thy offenses.”¹ Read the eleventh chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke; there you will see how Jesus Christ condemns the Pharisees and their hideous vices. “Woe to you, Pharisees!”² He says frequently; woe to you, hypocrites! “because you are as sepulchres that appear not,” etc.³ They are condemned and rejected most vehemently several times. And why? Was their condition really desperate? No. Was there no means of salvation for them? Certainly, there was. What was it? Our Lord Himself tells them: “But yet that which remaineth, give alms: and behold all things are clean unto you.”⁴ As if He meant, says Venerable Bede, “this is the only chance of salvation remaining for you; give alms and be generous to the poor.”⁵ And St. John Chrysostom, speaking of charity towards the needy, exclaims: “this is the medicine for our vices; this cleanses the stains of the soul; this is the ladder that reaches up to heaven.”⁶ So powerful, my dear brethren, is alms-giving in appeasing the anger of God, and in blotting out or keeping off altogether the punishment due to our sins. But it is not less powerful with regard to the other object for which fasting is useful, namely, to keep our evil inclinations in check, to gain the favor and friendship of God, and to be freed from further sin, and from eternal damnation, as we shall now see in the

Second Part.

After the inordinate desires of the flesh and the innate ap-
Avarice
leads men
into almost
every vice.
petite for carnal pleasures, common to all men, there is no inclination from which more sins arise than from the concupis-
cence of the eyes, that is, the inordinate desire of possessing worldly goods and of increasing one's store of them, which is also called avarice. If the heart of man is once taken up with this passion, then good-bye to devotion, piety, the fear of God, and justice. There is no use in looking for such things in one who is given to avarice; for there is no law so holy, that he is not ready to violate it for the sake of money; no sin so great, that he is not willing to commit it, if he can add to his store

¹ Quamobrem, rex, consilium meum placeat tibi, et peccata tua eleemosynis redime, et iniquitates tuas misericordis pauperum: forsitan ignosceat delictis tuis.—Dan. iv. 24.

² Vae vobis Phariseis.—Luke xi. 44.

³ Quia estis ut monumenta, quæ non apparent, etc.—Ibid.

⁴ Verumtamen quod superest, date eleemosynam, et ecce omnia munda sunt vobis.—Ibid. 41.

⁵ Hoc solum remedium restat: date eleemosynam.—V. Bede, l. iv. in Luc.

⁶ Hæc nostrorum scelerum est medicina; hæc animæ sordes emundat; hæc scala quæ in cælum usque pergitur.—St. Chrysos. hom. vi. in c. iii. ep. ad Titum.

thereby. What the Holy Ghost Himself says, by the wise Ecclesiasticus, must be infallibly true: "Nothing is more wicked than the covetous man. There is not a more wicked thing than to love money; for such a one setteth even his own soul to sale; because while he liveth he hath cast away his bowels."¹ He forgets his own salvation; he forgets all about the kingdom of heaven, for which he is created; he forgets his God and his Creator; money is his heart, his soul, his only good, his god. And the worst and most dangerous characteristic of this vice is that there is hardly any means of healing it, once it has taken possession of the heart; for the inordinate desire of wealth cannot be satisfied even by the possession of that which it seeks. The more it has, the more it desires; the greater its wealth, the more eager its efforts to accumulate; and while nearly all the other vices decrease with old age, when health and strength begin to fail, avarice grows stronger, and follows a man even to the grave. Therefore it must be a great benefit for the soul to have found a remedy against this vice, for that remedy is also a preservative against countless sins. Is not that so, my dear brethren?

Generous
alms-giv-
ing con-
quers
avarice and
gains the
grace of
God.

This most powerful remedy is charity and mercy towards the poor; for generosity is a virtue directly opposed to avarice, since it perforce takes away the object of concupiscence of the eyes, that is, money and worldly goods, and gives it to others. Now, there can be no better and holier generosity than that which is exercised towards Our Lord Himself in the person of the poor, by alms-giving; and therefore he who is charitable to the poor and bestows on them generous alms, sharing his worldly goods with them, has certainly overcome the concupiscence of the eyes, and with it, temptations to many sins and vices. Besides, with regard to gaining the favor and friendship of God, and being preserved from further sin and from eternal damnation, who can promise himself that with greater confidence than the generous alms-giver? "Alms shall be a great confidence before the most high God, to all them that give it,"² says Tobias to his son; therefore, my son, if you wish to be a friend of God, follow my advice, and "give alms out of thy substance, and turn not away thy face from any poor person."³ The Holy Ghost confirms

¹ *Avaro autem nihil est scelestius. Nihil est iniquius quam amare pecuniam; hic enim et animam suam venalem habet; quoniam in vita sua projecit intima sua.*—Eccles. x. 9, 10.

² *Fiducia magna erit coram summo Deo eleemosyna omnibus facientibus eam.*—Tob. iv. 12.

³ *Ex substantia tua fac eleemosynam, et noli avertere faciem tuam ab ullo paupere.*—Ibid. 7.

that by the wise Ecclesiasticus: "Be merciful to the fatherless as a father, and as a husband to their mother: and thou shalt be as the obedient son of the Most High, and He will have mercy on thee more than a mother."¹

And this follows necessarily from what we have seen in the first part. For, if an angry God allows Himself to be bribed by a great sinner who gives alms, and if He is appeased to such an extent, that He is ready to forget his transgressions, and, so to speak, is compelled to give him the grace of repentance, and to remit a great part of the punishment due to his sins, how will not the good and most generous God be influenced by the alms-giving of one who is already in the state of grace? Can that God, who never allows Himself to be outdone by His creatures in generosity, and who expressly says to us: "Give, and it shall be given to you,"² can He, I ask, refuse any favor to him who shares his worldly goods with God's poor children? Could a generous alms-giver be allowed to go into the everlasting flames of hell by that faithful God, who, when He will come to judge the living and the dead, will call His elect to His eternal kingdom only because they have been diligent in the performance of the works of Christian charity towards Him? "Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you; . . . for I was hungry, and you gave Me to eat."³ No; there is no place in hell for the generous alms-giver. "For," continues Tobias, "alms deliver from all sin and from death, and will not suffer the soul to go into darkness."⁴ When the city of Sodom was destroyed by fire from heaven on account of its horrible crimes, Lot alone with his family was led out of it in safety by the angels; how did he merit that favor? By his generosity in giving alms, answers St. Peter Chrysologus; for Lot received the angels into his house, when they were in the appearance of poor wanderers, and entertained them hospitably; but, "the divine fire cannot burn mercy; and therefore," concludes the Saint, "let him who wishes to have no reason to fear the flames of hell practise mercy."⁵ St. John Chrysostom gives us the same exhortation:

Nay, often saves the soul from hell.

¹ *Esto pupillis misericors ut pater, et pro viro matri eorum: et eris tu velut filius Altissimi obediens, et miserebitur tui magis quam mater.*—Eccles. iv. 10, 11.

² *Date, et dabitur vobis.*—Luke vi. 38.

³ *Venite, benedicti Patris mei, possidete paratum vobis regnum; . . . esurivi enim, et dedistis mihi manducare.*—Matt. xxv. 34, 35.

⁴ *Quoniam elemosyna ab omni peccato et a morte liberat, et non patietur animam ire in tenebras.*—Tob. iv. 11.

⁵ *Misericordiam nescit ignis divinus exurere; faciat ergo misericordiam, qui vult gehennæ incendium non timere.*—St. Chrysol. serm. xlii.

“Therefore I beseech you, while we have time, let us blot out the stains of our souls by generous alms-giving; for there is nothing that can save us from the fire of hell so well as charity to the poor.”¹ St. Augustine agrees with him: “Mercy stands at the gates of hell,” he says, and “allows no one who is merciful to enter there.”²

Shown by
an example.

Oh, if all who have the happy experience thereof could speak to us, and tell us how they escaped the fire of hell and gained the happiness of heaven, we should, indeed, acknowledge the truth of what we have seen hitherto! To pass over in silence many other examples of which ecclesiastical history is full, St. Peter Damian tells us of a nobleman in Germany who, as he was out hunting one cold winter’s day, found a poor, ill-clad widow and her daughter trudging bare-foot through the snow. Filled with pity for the poor people, he took one of them up on his horse and commanded his servant to take up the other, and so they went on till they came to an inn, where the nobleman caused the two women to be well looked after, and before he went away he gave the mother his own cloak, that she might have some protection against the bitter cold. This act of charity soon met with an evident reward in the shape of the grace of a religious vocation, which the nobleman received, in consequence of which he left his servants all he possessed in the world, and retired into a monastery, there to serve God for the rest of his life. Not many years after he fell dangerously ill, and as he was in his death-agony he commenced to cry out most piteously to the brethren who were standing round; help me, said he; do you not see what a swarm of raging demons are waiting for my poor soul to carry it off to hell? The brethren began to pray, and tried to console the dying man by telling him to despise the temptations of the Evil One and to put his trust in God; but all to no purpose. At last the dying man turned to him who had formerly been his servant on the hunting expedition; look, said he to him with a cheerful countenance, do you not see the woman whom I took up behind me on my horse that day? She is standing by my bedside, holding in her hand the mantle I gave her to protect her from the cold; the moment she entered the room all the demons took to flight at once; and now, as a reward for my

¹ Idcirco obsecro, ut, cum tempus habemus, detergamus animi sordes largis eleemosynis; nihil enim prorsus ita nos eximere potest a gehenna ignis, atque largitas eleemosynæ.

² Ante fores gehennæ stat misericordiæ, et nullum misericordem permittit in carcerem mitti.—St. Aug. 1. 50, hom. 39.

charity, she has invited me to enter into heaven. Having said these words, he gave up his happy soul.

Still more wonderful is the event which, according to the learned Cardinal Baronius, happened in the year 1537 at Alexandria, during the patriarchate of Paul, to a heathen girl. The latter had been deprived of her parents by death, but had been left in good circumstances. One day she saw a man trying to hang himself with a rope; full of fright, she cried out: "unhappy man, what are you doing?" "Leave me alone," said he; "I am weary of life; I am so deeply involved in debt, that my creditors importune me wherever I go, and I have no means of paying them; therefore I am in a state of desperation, and am resolved to make away with myself in order to get out of my misery." "No;" said the compassionate child; "do not do that; take all I have, and pay your debts, and do not put an end to yourself." And she actually gave him all she had. But what did she do herself? She had nothing more, and there was not a soul to whom she could appeal for help; so, in order to save herself from beggary, she resolved to give herself up to a life of impurity, and carried her resolution into effect. After some considerable time, the unhappy girl fell dangerously ill, when she entered into herself, saw the error of her ways, and begged of the bishop to baptize her, that she might be cleansed from her sins and die as a Christian; but neither the bishop nor any other person would have anything to do with her on account of the life she had been leading. As she was thus abandoned by God and man, and was bitterly bewailing her unhappy condition, an angel appeared to her in the form of the man to whom she had given all her property. "How are you?" he asked her. "Ah, my good friend," she answered, "death is not far from me; I am very anxious to be baptized and to die a Christian, but no one will help me to carry out my wishes." "Be comforted," said the supposed man; "I will help you;" and he at once sent for a priest and deacon to instruct her, after which he immediately vanished. When the bishop was told that the woman had been publicly baptized, he grew very angry, summoned the priest and deacon before him, and asked them how did they dare to baptize such a person. "A certain man," they answered, "sent for us suddenly; who he was, we know not, for as soon as we had done our duty, he disappeared." The bishop was filled with amazement at this, and thought that there was something miraculous about it. He went at once to the sick woman, and said to her: "my daughter, tell

Confirmed
by another.

me, what kind of a life have you led? What good have you done?" "Alas," said she, "I have lived as a public sinner, as every one knows." "But," continued the bishop, "have you never done a good act in your life?" "No," was the answer; "none that I know of; yet, now that I remember it, when I was a little girl I saw a man about to hang himself on account of his debts, and, moved with pity, I gave him all I had; the same man came to me lately, and did for me what no one else would do, for he helped me to receive baptism." Hardly had she said these words, when she died. "O God of goodness," exclaimed the bishop, "how wonderfully just and holy are Thy judgments!" And how true it is, I conclude, that "alms deliver from all sin, and from death, and will not suffer the soul to go into darkness."

Conclusion
and exhortation
to
give gener-
ous alms.

My dear brethren, if we were all to look back on our past lives, we should find a great many sins and transgressions of the divine law, for which we are still indebted to the justice of God, and therefore we have good reason to fear that in those times, which seem so full of danger, we shall have some calamity to suffer. If we consider our future lives, we must humbly acknowledge that we are in need of the favor of special grace of God, in order to be preserved from sin, and, what is all-important, to be saved from an unhappy death and from the eternal damnation that follows it. Now, we have a sure means of securing both those objects in generous alms-giving and in Christian charity towards the poor. Let us, then, constantly practise this virtue according to our means, and thus bribe our divine Judge to forget our sins, and, if we have not yet repented, to give us the grace of true contrition, while by the same means, too, we shall make sure of the friendship of the Most High, so that He will keep us from sin, and will protect us in our last moments from the attacks of the Evil One. Father Drexelius, who was himself present, and saw the whole circumstance, relates that a certain rich man was dangerously ill, and was warned that it was time for him to give up all unnecessary cares for earthly things, to raise up his mind to heaven, and, as his last moment had come, to prepare for eternity. "Ah," sighed he, "I see the gate of heaven far off, but I see, too, that it is bolted against me. Who will open it to me, that I may enter?" Such thoughts and words are not unusual with dying people, when they feel the approach of death. What was to be done? asks Father Drexelius. How was the gate of heaven to be opened to him? Here

is what I said to him: "Take your money and make for yourself gold and silver keys, with which you will be able to open a thousand locks.¹ But in order that those precious keys may not be lost commit them to the charge of the poor; they will keep them safe for you, and will give them over to you without fail at the gate of heaven."² The same advice I give, my dear brethren, to all who are in a position to help the poor. There are some, perhaps, who cannot fast, according to the Christian law (for this once I am willing to believe that they have a good reason for not fasting); then, in that case, let them at least open their purse-strings to feed Christ in the person of His poor; they certainly should not dare to evade this obligation, as I have shown at length on a former occasion. We have opportunities enough to show our generosity; there are poor and needy enough, who suffer the pangs of hunger, either in the public streets or in their own houses, where they cry for bread with their famished children; there are poor citizens and peasants enough, who, with tears in their eyes, offer the little money they have for the necessaries of life, and often cannot get them. Ah, be merciful and help those people as well as you can! If we have not much, then let us give of the little that God bestows on us back again to Christ in the person of His poor, according to the advice of Tobias to his son: "According to thy ability be merciful; if thou have much, give abundantly; if thou have little, take care even so to bestow willingly a little; for thus thou storest up to thyself a good reward for the day of necessity, that is, for the end of thy life."³ Christians, let us all profit by this good advice; and the good and most generous God will never turn away His face from us; we shall have some hope left in those troublous and dangerous times of escaping a general calamity, and, at all events, we can be quite sure that we shall get rid of the punishment due to our sins, and, what should be our chief concern in this vale of tears, that one day, after our death, the same poor whom we have helped in this life will, according to the promise of Our Lord, receive us into eternal tabernacles. Amen.

On the Obligation of Alms-giving, and also on the Temporal as well as the Eternal Advantage to be derived from it, see several sermons in the preceding First Part.

¹ Claves factio argenteas et aureas; istis vel mille seras recludes.

² Pauperibus eas committe perferendas.

³ Quomodo potueris, ita esto misericors; si multum tibi fuerit, abundanter tribue; si exiguum tibi fuerit, etiam exiguum libenter impertiri stude; præmium enim bonum tibi thesaurizas in die necessitatis.—Tob. iv. 8-10.

ON PATIENCE UNDER TRIALS.

FORTY-FOURTH SERMON.

ON THE ADVANTAGE OF TRIALS, AS A MEANS OF ATONING FOR SIN.

Subject.

The trials of this world, when they are borne with patience and resignation to the will of God, are a good cross, for they are a satisfaction for the greatest evil which we have deserved by our sins; therefore we must accept them willingly from the hand of God and bear them with patience.—*Preached on the Feast of St. Andrew, the Apostle.*

Text.

O bona crux.—Ex verbis Sti. Andreae Apostoli.

“O good cross.”—Such was the exclamation of St. Andrew, when he embraced the cross on which he was to suffer.

Introduction.

But, great Saint, what is the meaning of those words? Can the cross, which the world has always so hated, be good? Can that be good which is the reward of thieves and murderers? which takes away life and everything else from you? Tell that to delicate worldlings; nay, show them your cross at a distance, and they will fly from it in horror; they will look on it as a cursed thing; but you say that it is good? Yes, my dear brethren, the holy Apostle of Jesus Christ, as well as other enlightened souls, knew well what a great treasure is hidden under the cross. And if we judged of things, not according to the dictates of our personal comfort and sensuality, but according to reason and to the will and intention of God, we should also cry out with Andrew: “O good cross.” I have recently treated of this matter, and have shown that the trials of this life are a good cross for us, and especially for those who are in the state of sin, because the good God thereby impels the sinner to do penance.

To-day I shall explain the same matter further, and shall show how, for another reason, those trials are a good cross for us. I say, then,

Plan of Discourse.

The trials of this world, when they are borne with patience and resignation to the will of God, are a good cross, for they are a satisfaction for the greatest evil which we have deserved by our sins; therefore we must accept them willingly from the hand of God, and bear them with patience. Such is the whole subject of this discourse.

May it serve to console those who, having sinned (and they are unfortunately in the majority), must bear afflictions, and to instruct all who are afflicted, that they may bear their trials with patience, and thereby be kept from sin. Do thou, O Mother of sorrows, and you, holy guardian angels, and you, too, holy St. Andrew, Apostle of the cross, obtain for us this grace from the crucified God, so that, filled with consolation, we, too, may say: "O good cross."

Of two evils of which we must necessarily suffer one, we should certainly choose and desire that which is the lesser and the easier to bear; and he who allows you to select a lesser calamity, that you may avoid a greater one, does you a service. A debtor would be very grateful to the creditor to whom he owes ten thousand dollars, if the latter would ask him for only a hundred. You would thank me if I were to pull you out of the river by the hair of the head, and thereby save your life, although I should cause you some pain in doing so. A criminal, caught in the act, and hurried into prison, would be very glad to escape with a few hours' confinement and a flogging, inflicted on him to appease the anger of the people outside, who have taken up stones to fling at him, and who can be quieted only by being told that the thief has suffered due punishment. All three, although they have had to suffer, would cry out, with joy and gratitude: it is well for me that I was put into prison; I am glad that by having a few hairs pulled out of my head my life has been saved; it is well for me that I got off so easily. Is not that the case, my dear brethren?

O man, whoever you are, who have transgressed the divine law and sinned grievously, even if it is only in thought, and but once in your whole life, have you ever seriously considered what

Of two evils
the lesser
should be
chosen.

The sinner
has griev-
ously of-
fended God.

you have done ; what a terrible evil you have brought on yourself ? You have made an enemy of the great, infinite, and almighty God, and have incurred His anger, hatred, and reprobation. But that is not all, although it is the worst of all evils ; you have, besides, contracted a debt which you can never pay out of your own resources alone. You have plunged into a boundless sea, a profound abyss of punishment, out of which no man or angel can free you, for all eternity ; you have given yourself up to the rage of the demons, who would have tortured you, without end or limit, in the flames of hell. Now, as you have repented, the good God has certainly forgiven your sin, and also laid aside His anger against you ; He has freed you from the pains of hell, but that does not yet suffice. How so ?

So that he
must be
punished in
this life or
in the next.

Imagine that a dissolute, ungrateful son has run away from his loving father, and done some shameful deed, that brings dishonor on the whole family. He comes back repentant, and, falling at his father's feet, bathed in tears, begs to be forgiven ; what does his loving and merciful father do ? See, he says, you wicked child, I had fully made up my mind to disinherit you, and not to look on you any longer as my son, yet I pardon you this once ; you shall be my son as before, but I cannot allow your crime to go unpunished ; you must feel the father's rod in chastisement. In the same way our heavenly Father acts towards the man who runs away from Him by mortal sin ; after confession He receives him again into favor, out of mercy ; but He still keeps in reserve the punishment which His justice must inflict on sin. He changes the eternal into a temporal punishment, so as to make up in some measure for the pains of hell, nor can any sinner have the least hope that God will give way in the least on this point, or allow the least sin to go unpunished. Sin is an act of disobedience, which must necessarily be chastised ; by whom ? St. Augustine answers, "either by man inflicting voluntary penance on himself, or by God, who punishes the sinner."¹ And where will He inflict that punishment ? Either here in this life, or in the next life. In what manner ? Here, by temporal calamities, crosses, and trials, with which He visits sinners on earth, and, according to the Council of Trent, if those trials are willingly received and borne with patience and humility, as coming from the hands of God, they will be accepted by Him in satisfaction for our sins ; in the next life this satisfaction must be made by a burning and purifying fire.

¹ Aut ab homine penitente, aut a Deo vindicante.

It now remains to be seen which of those two punishments we should make choice of; and you will all agree with me in saying that we ought to choose the easier and more salutary. If you, O man, put off the settlement of your accounts in this respect till the next life, then you will have far more terrible torments to suffer. Hear what St. Cæsarius says of it: "That purgatorial fire will be far more severe than any punishment that could be thought of, or seen, or felt in this life."¹ Read that golden book of Thomas à Kempis, the "Imitation of Christ," and there you will find the following words: "there," that is, in purgatory, "one hour of torments will be more intolerable than a hundred years here in the severest pains and works of penance." And I am forced to believe those holy servants of God in this matter when I consider the circumstances of the case. For, in the first place, the temporal trials and crosses that we suffer in this life, generally speaking, affect only the mortal body, while in the other life it is the soul separated from the body that must endure punishment. Now, the more tender and delicate a nature is, the greater its capacity for feeling pain; and what can be more tender than the soul, which is simple, without parts, and therefore suffers in its whole essence and substance? If my eye pains me, the hands, feet, and the rest of the body are free from pain; but if some disease were to attack at once every part of my body, head, eyes, hands, feet, and stomach, the tortures I should suffer would be far more intolerable than if one member only of the body were affected. How great, then, must not be the torments of the soul, which cannot suffer without its whole substance being affected in all its faculties? How great must not be the torments of such a tender soul, of a soul that is, so to speak, infinitely sensitive, since it is the origin of all the sensation we have in our bodies? Besides, the trials we have to suffer in this life are mostly inflicted by men and other creatures, who cause us to suffer loss, poverty, trouble, or persecution; but in the next life it is the God of infinite justice who will inflict the punishment. "Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you, my friends," cry out the souls in purgatory, in the words of Job. And why should we have pity on you? What is the matter with you? "Because the hand of the Lord hath touched me."² Mark, my dear brethren, that they do not complain of the heat

The punishment of the next life is worse than the trials of this.

¹ Ille purgatorius ignis durior erit, quam quicquid potest penarum in hoc sæculo aut cogitari, aut videri, aut sentiri.

² Misereamini mei, misereamini mei, saltem vos amici mei; quia inausus Domini tetigit me. —Job xix. 21.

of the fire which burns them, nor of the darkness in which they are confined, nor of the rage of the demons who mock them; it is the hand of God that causes them pain: "have pity on me, because the hand of the Lord hath touched me."

The latter are very slight, compared to the former.

Now I understand why the Holy Scripture, speaking of the trials of this life, makes so little of them; and why St. Paul describes them as momentary and slight. "For that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation," etc.;¹ and why the Prophet David, speaking of the great persecutions and crosses that the Israelites had to suffer from the Idumæans, Philistines, and other enemies, says nothing more to God, than, "Thou hast showed Thy people hard things."² "Thou hast given a warning to them that fear thee."³ What? A warning? Had they not severe calamities to suffer in those days? It is this, says Bellarmine, that shows the goodness and mercy of God, who sends us trials here, as it were, only to frighten us; for they are far lighter and easier to bear than we imagine; nay, they are to be accounted as nothing, when compared to the punishment that our sins deserve in the next life. St. Paul, as St. Augustine remarks, speaks of the trials and crosses of this life as one would speak of the vain phantoms of a dream. He who has dreamt during the night would not say, when relating his dream, I have eaten, or drunk, or found a treasure; but, I thought I ate, or drank, or that I was digging for a treasure. A poor, hungry, and thirsty beggar often speaks in that way, but he remains just as much a beggar as he was before. Such, too, is the way in which the Apostle speaks to the Corinthians, when exhorting them to patience in all tribulations. "As dying," he says, "and behold we live: as chastised, and not killed: as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing: as needy, yet enriching many: as having nothing, and possessing all things."⁴ Our sickness and death are but the shadow of sickness and death; our chastisement is only the appearance of a chastisement; our sadness, the phantom of sadness; our poverty, the bare image of poverty; in fact, none of these things can be looked on as a real evil or misfortune.

Nay, they are reck-

Yes, you say to me, it is easy for you to talk; God help me, my trials are not a mere shadow, I feel them keenly enough

¹ Id enim, quod in presenti est momentaneum et leve tribulationis nostræ.—II. Cor. iv. 17.

² Ostendisti populo tuo dura.—Ps. lix. 5.

³ Dedisti metuentibus te significationem.—Ibid. 6.

⁴ Quasi morientes, et ecce vivimus: ut castigati, et non mortificati: quasi tristes, semper autem gaudentes: sicut egentes, multos autem locupletantes: tamquam nihil habentes, et omnia possidentes.—II. Cor. vi. 9, 10.

every day; my illness, desolation, poverty, trouble, and the persecution I have to endure, are not shadows; they are real illness, desolation, poverty, trouble, and persecution. I acknowledge that what you complain of is quite true; but will you not feel the reality of suffering in the next life, too, if you will have to atone to the divine justice for your sins in purgatory? No matter how great, bitter, or cruel our sufferings are here, they are very slight, nay, nothing at all, when compared to the punishments of the next life. For during this life God punishes our sins according to the measure of His goodness and mercy, and, like a father with his dear child, the chastisements He inflicts on us are not nearly as severe as we deserve. Moreover, our trials in this life, when borne patiently with a supernatural intention for God's sake, are of great value and merit when united with the infinite merits, with the passion and death of Jesus Christ, who places that treasure in our hands, that we may pay the debt we have contracted with our heavenly Father. Hence, if we bear our cross according to the all-wise arrangement, the good will, and pleasure of God, and, so to speak, with Jesus Christ, we can, by suffering meritoriously for one hour here, do more to pay what we owe the divine justice, than by enduring the grievous torments of purgatory for many years. For in the next life it is the divine justice alone that will take sword in hand and strike without mercy; not the least thing will be remitted or condoned; the punishment will be measured out according to the debt contracted by sin; for there, there will be no merit, or satisfaction, or union with the sufferings of Christ to be hoped for: "Thou shalt not go out from thence till thou repay the last farthing."¹

Now, O mortal, if you have ever sinned grievously in your life, you can see what a good cross it is for you to have to suffer contradictions in this life, and what a great and precious grace and benefit the good God bestows on you by inflicting His paternal chastisements on you for a short time here, that He may save you from a far greater evil, and enable you to escape the inexorable severity of His justice. To realize more fully the greatness of this benefit, consider the number of sins you have committed since you first came to the use of reason, down to the present moment; examine all the glances of your eyes, the curiosity of your ears, the touches of your hands, the speeches of your tongue, the movements of your body, the thoughts and desires of

oned as
nothing.

Therefore
contradictions are a
mild punishment, especially for
him who
has sinned
often.

¹ Non exies inde donec reddas novissimum quadrantem.—Matt. v. 26.

your heart; count up how many sins you have committed through wilful malice, how many through weakness and carelessness, how many in thought, how many in act, how many by omission, how many knowingly, how many through ignorance, how many secretly, how many in company; how many sins of your own you committed; how many you caused others to commit by negligence or scandal-giving; how many mortal, how many venial sins you have been guilty of, and how many you have altogether forgotten. Alas, what a fearful number of sins you will discover! And how long do you think you will have to suffer for them in that painful prison in the next life? Perhaps twenty years? Perhaps a hundred years? Perhaps a thousand years? Perhaps till the Day of Judgment? You know nothing about it; but there is one thing you can be quite assured of, and that is that, even if the good God forgives all those sins, you will still have to suffer for them, unless you atone for them in this life. And what atonement have you offered for them hitherto? What penance have you done? What would you say if penances were to be imposed nowadays, similar to those of olden times? A most severe penance of five years was imposed for the habit of drunkenness, seven years for a public sin against holy purity, eleven years for a false oath or giving false witness, fifteen years for adultery, and twenty years for murder. Where should we find time and years enough to satisfy for numerous mortal sins, and how wretched would seem the penance we have hitherto done? We have confessed our sins, perhaps, as candidly as we were obliged to do; we have struck our breasts a few times, and made an act of contrition out of our prayer-books or by heart; perhaps it proceeded from a true supernatural motive; we have said with the lips: I purpose to amend my life, and perhaps we have been in earnest; we have said a rosary or performed whatever penance our confessor enjoined on us, and we persuade ourselves we have settled the whole business completely thereby.

So that he should rejoice, if by suffering here he can escape the punishment of the next life.

Such has perhaps been your conduct hitherto, O mortal, and, moreover, you have been daily adding to the punishment due to your sins, by committing at least venial sins; have you, then, reason (and this is a question that deserves your serious consideration) to complain if the good God sends you crosses and trials? Should you not rather esteem yourself fortunate, and kiss the hand that chastises so gently with the greatest humility, nay, with the greatest joy, when you remember that the God whom you have so often and so grievously offended is pleased to accept the

few crosses of short duration that you have to bear in your state of life, according to His decree, in place of the terrible punishments that by right you should have to suffer in the fiery prison of the next life, provided you only bear those crosses with resignation to His will, with meekness and patience, with a supernatural intention, and with constancy? And, certainly, the good God will be content with those dispositions on your part; for, as Tertullian says, His chief object in punishing here is to save from eternal punishment hereafter.¹

To return to the similes I have adduced already, He acts like that steward in the Gospel of St. Luke, who was accused to his lord of having squandered away his goods, and was therefore on the point of being dismissed. How did he act? "Therefore, calling together every one of his lord's debtors, he said to the first: How much dost thou owe my lord? But he said: a hundred barrels of oil." Go, said the steward to him, "take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty." And you, he said to another, "how much dost thou owe?" "A hundred quarters of wheat," was the answer. "He said to him: Take thy bill and write eighty."² O sinful man, in the same way, it seems to me, your sovereign Lord and God speaks to you: "How much dost thou owe? My justice? What do you owe on account of the misspent years of your youth? What do you owe on account of the vicious life you led afterwards? What do you owe for the ten, thirty, forty, fifty years, or more, that you have spent, perhaps, in heaping sin on sin? "How much dost thou owe," O woman? What do you owe My justice for the precious time given you for the purpose of saving your soul, but which you have squandered away so frivolously? What do you owe for the idleness in which you have lived? What do you owe for the unlawful passion in which you have indulged? What do you owe for having enticed others to impure love by your allurements, caresses, or extravagant dress? for the hearts that you have, as it were, bewitched and stolen from Me? for the souls of your own children, whom you have brought up in worldly luxury, so that you are to blame for the sins they commit? "How much dost thou owe," O man? What do you owe for your sins of gluttony and habitual drunkenness? What do you

Shown by a simile from Holy Scripture.

¹ Ut temporali afflictione aeterna supplicia expungat.

² Convocatis itaque singulis, debitoribus domini sui, dicebat primo: quantum debes domino meo? At ille dixit: centum cados olei. Dixitque illi: Accipe cautionem tuam, et sede cito, scribe quinquaginta. Deinde alii dixit: Tu vero, quantum debes? Qui ait: Centum cores tritici. At illi: Accipe litteras tuas, et scribe octoginta.—Luke xvi. 5-7.

owe for the scandal you have given? for your crimes of impurity and adultery? for your many acts of injustice, usury, and unfair dealings? for your unbridled anger, your vindictiveness, your slanders and calumnies against your neighbor? for your abominable cursing and swearing? for the quarrelling and dissensions you have caused in your family? for your great sloth and carelessness in My service? "How much dost thou owe" for all this? Ah, your debts are almost without number; and if I were to deal with you according to the strictness of My justice, I would pitilessly hurl you into hell amongst the demons, or else I would condemn you to suffer a thousand years in purgatory. But I do not wish to act so severely with you; I will let you off easier. "Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty;" do as I tell you; suffer patiently for a few days, or months, or years, those trifling pains with which I visit you, and I will be satisfied. Instead of the hundred years you should have spent in purgatory, in order to pay off your debts, "write fifty;" be patient towards this enemy of yours, who persecutes you everywhere; bear meekly with the faults of your drunken husband, who treats you so cruelly; bear with your peevish wife and her ill-humor; with father, or mother, or ill-reared child; with obstinate servants or hard-hearted masters; with that faithless friend, that quarrelsome neighbor, who causes you so much trouble. In a word, no matter what it is, or where it comes from, take up this cross, and bear it for My sake; it is your bill. "Take thy bill and write fifty;" by means of it you can get rid of thirty, forty, fifty, or more years of suffering in the next life; and if, moreover, you bear this contradiction with Christian patience and constancy, you will satisfy My justice in full.

Confirmed
by other
smiles.

"How much dost thou owe?" O sinner, what have you deserved on account of your past transgressions? You should now be sunk in that raging, roaring lake of fire, in which you would be, as it were, drunk with intolerable torments, but the good and merciful God drags you out of it by the hair of the head. He hurts you and causes you pain by the fever or other painful illness which takes away the strength of your body, and deprives you of all pleasure; He hurts you by taking away from you by death the husband, wife, child, or dear friend whom you loved so much; He hurts you by that misfortune which He sends you, by that unmerited oppression, or the bad season which has deprived you of your worldly goods, and thereby caused you to go down in the world, or reduced you to secret poverty. But do

not complain with bitterness; be satisfied and rejoice rather, and give thanks to your good God, because He has thereby saved you from far greater and more terrible torments. "How much dost thou owe?" What have you deserved? Long ago the divine justice has cried out for vengeance, and has called out to its ministers, away with that wretch, that rebel, throw him into prison; but the merciful God has taken His fatherly rod in His hand, and chastised you by a trial of short duration, so that He can say to His justice, be still, he is already punished, and must not suffer twice for the same fault. I have already tamed his pride, by putting him to public shame; I have punished his avarice and his concupiscence of the eyes, by temporal losses; his carnal pleasures, by bodily sufferings; his gluttony and drunkenness, by poverty, hunger, and thirst; his vindictiveness and enmity, by submitting him to persecution. He has accepted those trials with willingness and patience, and has received them from My hand, humbly acknowledging his fault, so that he has paid off everything.

O God of goodness, how is it that Thou art so gracious to us here on earth? In truth, I must acknowledge, with Thy Prophet David, "Thou wast a merciful God to them, and taking vengeance on all their inventions;"¹ that is, Thou hast, indeed, taken vengeance on their sins, but in such a way as to show them the greatest grace and favor; for Thou didst inflict on them a very slight chastisement, instead of the severe punishment they deserved for their sins. Alas, that we men should be so blind as to have such little appreciation of this priceless benefit! If we could only hear the terrible cries with which, I will not say the damned in hell, but the souls in purgatory bewail their miserable condition, what a far different opinion we should have, and how far more highly we should appreciate the trials and contradictions of this life. Alas, they cry out in the flames, "the hand of the Lord hath touched me," and we could have avoided those pains so easily, if we had wished, during our mortal lives! Oh, cries out one, would that I had been always in bed, suffering from all imaginable illnesses! Would that I had lived in continual poverty, hunger, and thirst, sighs another. Oh, that all men had risen up against me, and had persecuted me in every possible way, exclaims a third, for then I should not have to endure such long and fearful torments! If the just God were to allow me to return again to life in order to satisfy

Hence he must thank God for trials, as for a benefit.

¹ Deus tu propitius fuisti eis, et ulciscens in omnes adinventiones eorum.—Ps. xcviil. 8.

for the year, the month, the day, nay, even the single hour I have still to suffer here, I would with the greatest joy and gratitude bear all the bitterness and trouble of the whole world for a countless number of years.

And he who is impatient under trials acts un-justly.

I have a heart-felt compassion for those poor souls, my dear brethren, but I do not know whether I should not bewail far more the really unfortunate trials that so many of us mortals have to suffer. Ah, how unjust we are towards the good God, when we complain that He is too hard on us, and that He causes us too much pain, for He always means so well to us. How unjust we are to our own souls, when we bear the cross, that we must bear in any case, and cannot avoid, with murmurs and discontent, with cursing and swearing, without any good intention directed to God, and simply because we are forced to bear it, so that the very means that we could have used to wipe out our debt of punishment becomes the cause of increasing that debt; the means by which we could and should have appeased the God whom we have offended we misuse to embitter Him still more against us, and, instead of extinguishing the flames that are destined to torture us, we rather pour oil on them, and increase their violence, thus making our sufferings in the next life longer, because we have suffered for a short time here below. We are like the wild beast in the forest, that, when wounded, runs away from one hunter only to fall into the hands of another. In the same way, when we are wounded by the chastening rod of the good God, instead of hastening to Him, and loving Him all the more, in order to rejoice with Him hereafter in heaven (for that is His only object in sending us contradictions), we run farther and farther away from Him by our impatience, and often separate ourselves from Him to such an extent, that we fall into the clutches of the devil. Is not that a lamentable state of things?

Exhortation to bear all trials patiently in the spirit of penance.

Ah, oppressed souls, whatever be the cross under which you are groaning, I beg of you, let us be reasonable, and use for our own greater good this great benefit; let us at least make a virtue of necessity, and while we weep and moan under the cross, let us humbly resign ourselves to the will of God. Weep and moan, I say, for that does not mean giving way to impatience; we cannot help feeling the pain, and that is the very reason why God visits us with contradictions. Let us weep, then; our tears will help us to recover health and will free us from the filth of our sins. "Why dost thou fear the fire," asks St. Augustine, "that

cleanses thee?"¹ Oh, woe to us, if God were to allow us to lead lives of pleasure in this world, and were to withdraw from us His fatherly chastisements! Woe to us, if He does not help us to pay what we owe Him by inflicting trials on us in this life; if He does not make us feel the rod here below. For then we should be like the servant who has broken some costly vessel; if the master keeps silent, the servant will be deprived of his wages in order to make the loss good, but if he reproves the servant, the latter is then free from further punishment. If the merciful God does not punish us now, we shall be written down in the book of His justice, and will have to satisfy that justice to the full hereafter. Therefore, let us profit by that earnest exhortation which Our Lord gives us in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "Be at agreement with thy adversary betimes, whilst thou art in the way with him."² This adversary is the Almighty God, whom you have so often and so grievously offended; be at agreement with Him speedily, and be resigned to His fatherly will, "whilst thou art in the way." For, if you neglect doing so, if you strive against Him (and what good will that do you?), what will happen to you? "Lest perhaps the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Amen, I say to thee, thou shalt not go out from thence till thou repay the last farthing."³

Do not think or say, what have I done more than others, to be afflicted so severely? Ask your own conscience what you have done at different times, in different places, to offend God; it will answer and tell you plainly enough that you are not treated unjustly. Say humbly, with the Prophet Job: "I have sinned, and indeed I have offended, and I have not received what I have deserved."⁴ What I now suffer is slight indeed, compared to my sins. I have deserved the everlasting fire of hell; I have deserved it a hundred times; I have deserved it oftener than many thousand souls that are now suffering there. Ten, twenty, thirty, forty years ago I should have been damned; and yet do I dare to complain because the merciful God is now satisfied to inflict on me such a slight and short trial, which He will accept from me in full compensation for all that I owe Him for my sins? True, I feel the great pain and inward heat caused by this ill-

Humble
acknowledgment of
and thank-
giving for
the trials
sent us by
God.

¹ Quid times ignem, qui tibi sordes tollit?

² Esto consentiens adversario tuo cito dum es in via cum eo.—Matt. v. 25.

³ Ne forte tradat te adversarius iudici, et iudex tradat te ministro, et in carcerem mittaris. Amen, dico tibi, non exies inde, donec reddas novissimum quadrantem.—Ibid. 25, 26.

⁴ Peccavi, et vere deliqui, et, ut eram dignus, non recepi.—Job xxxiii 27.

ness from which I am suffering; but "I have not received what I have deserved;" this illness is nothing to the fire that I should suffer in the next life. I am filled with sorrow at that premature death, which has caused me the greatest grief; "but I have not received what I have deserved;" my grief is nothing to that undying worm of conscience, which should torture me forever. This want and poverty that I have to suffer in secret is hard to bear; "but I have not received what I have deserved:" it is nothing to that hunger and thirst which I should endure for all eternity. This disgrace, this public shame and humiliation seems insupportable to me; but "I have not received what I have deserved;" it is nothing to the shame that should cover me for all eternity. My husband, or wife, or master, or mistress, or servant, or neighbor, or enemy, or friend, causes me to suffer many contradictions; but "I have not received what I have deserved;" these people are not cruel demons, nor can they torture me forever. I am rejected, humbled, and despised by others; I am a poor orphan, and in a state of destitution, but my state is not yet as miserable as it should be, for I am not yet abandoned by God and by all creatures. No, my God; I must again acknowledge that all my crosses and trials are but a shadow when compared to what I have deserved by my sins. Therefore, in future, I will be resigned to Thy holy and fatherly will; every day and hour, when I feel my cross weighing on me, I will cry out: "I have sinned, and indeed I have offended, and I have not received what I have deserved." I thank Thee a thousand times, O my heavenly Father, for not having spared me up to the present; for having been so merciful and good to me in this life. One thing I am sorrow for, and detest with my whole heart, and that is that I have had such little appreciation of this goodness of Thine, and have looked on it as cruelty, and that I have so often daily offended Thee by bearing my cross with murmuring and impatience. In future my cry shall be, "Lord, here burn, here cut, that Thou mayest spare me in eternity;"¹ and, filled with consolation, I will exclaim, with Thy holy Apostle St. Andrew, "O good cross!" O welcome trouble, that releases me from the greatest of troubles! Welcome poverty, that frees me from perpetual hunger and thirst! Welcome sickness, by which I can escape intolerable torments! Welcome contempt and persecution, which will save me from eternal shame! O good cross, by which I can in such a short time pay off such

¹ Domine, hic ure, hic seca, ut parcas in aeternum.

enormous debts! Come; like Andrew, I will embrace thee with both hands, hold thee constantly, and, as long as is pleasing to God, bear thee with patience and joy, not as an act of vengeance on the part of the justice of God, to destroy me, but as a salutary gift of His mercy, by which He wishes to free me from the severe punishments I have deserved for my sins. O God, only grant me this patience, which I now humbly beg of Thee, and I will constantly confess, think, and say, "O good cross!" Amen.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost.

Text.

Noli flere.—Luke vii. 13.

"Weep not."

Introduction.

Ah, dear Lord, it is easy to say, "weep not;" but has not a poor widow, bereft of her husband, reason to weep? "Behold, a dead man was carried out, the only son of his mother: and she was a widow." He was the sole consolation left her. Had she not, then, cause to weep? No doubt, our compassionate Lord knew well that she had; and therefore He took pity on her, and restored her son to life: "and he that was dead sat up and began to speak. And He gave him to his mother." My dear brethren, if I, too, were to say to you those words, weep not, there are many of you who would think, yes, it is easy for you to talk; if you knew the cross I have to bear, you would certainly speak differently to me. I am suffering secretly from poverty and want; have I not reason to weep? I have lost a great deal in those troublous times; have I not reason to be sad? I am attacked by a painful illness; shall I not weep? I am a desolate widow or orphan; shall I not weep? I have an intolerable cross to bear at home, in the person of a cruel and wicked husband, of a peevish and obstinate wife; shall I not weep, and give way to sadness? If you could by a word free us from our trouble, then we would change our tears into laughter, and our trouble into joy. And I quite believe what you say; but it is not in my power to free you from your cross. But I can say to you: poor, suffering Christians, who have such contradictions to endure, and have good reason for weeping, at least bear your cross and trial with patience and resignation to the will of God, and I assure you that this very trial will free you from a far

heavier cross, and from far greater suffering. Is not this promise of mine able to console you somewhat, and to persuade you that your cross is good and salutary for you? And that is what I am about to prove to you now.—*Plan of discourse as above.*

FORTY-FIFTH SERMON.

ON TRIALS AS A JUST PUNISHMENT FOR ANY KIND OF SIN.

Subject.

We all deserve trials in this life, 1. on account of the venial sins we commit daily; 2. on account of the sins we have committed in our past lives.—*Preached on the feast of St. Laurence, Martyr.*

Text.

Ignem me examinasti, et non est inventa in me iniquitas.—Ps. xvi. 3.

“Thou hast tried me by fire, and iniquity hath not been found in me.”

Introduction.

Was it right and just to roast on a gridiron, and to allow to be slowly burnt to death, amid intolerable tortures, a St. Laurence, in whom no sin or injustice could be found? Is it right to condemn to death, and to death by fire, an innocent man, who cannot be convicted of any crime? For, even before putting an accused person to the question, some proof, at least, of his guilt must be forthcoming. How, then, did the just God allow such a thing? Such is the way in which we reason sometimes, my dear brethren, when we imagine that we are treated unjustly, if the good God visits us by crosses and trials, which, according to the words of St. Augustine on the text quoted, are compared in holy Scripture to fire: “tribulation may be called a fire, because it burns.”¹ Alas, we sigh, what evil have I done, that the hand of the Lord should press so heavily on me? But the God of infinite wisdom passes a far different judgment. If you, O man, who thus complain, had never committed a sin in your life; if you were more innocent than the holy martyr, St. Laurence; even

¹ Ignis, quia, urit, vocanda est tribulatio.—St. Aug. in Ps. xvi.

then you could not say that you are treated unjustly; for it is necessary that the fire of tribulation should try your virtue, and increase your merit. Still, that you may see how unjust it is to allege our virtue as an excuse, I shall show to-day that none of us, no matter how holy he may be, is so innocent that he does not richly deserve to be tried in the fire of tribulation.

Plan of Discourse.

Even if no grievous sin is found in us, yet the venial sins we commit are reason enough why we should be thus tried, as I shall show in the first and longer part. Even if we are now free from all sin, yet our past sins are reason enough why we should be thus tried as I shall show in the second part.

May my words prove a source of consolation even to the most just souls, so that they, as well as others, may take up their cross as a well-deserved punishment, bear it, like St. Laurence, with patience and constancy, and avoid sin above every other evil. And may God give us His light and grace to this end, through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

If we look at those sins that we are accustomed to call small and venial as they are in themselves, and if we consider their innate malice, we should agree at once, without further proof, to the truth of this proposition, and should all humbly acknowledge that even for one venial sin we deserve to be severely tried by God with the hottest fire of temporal tribulations during this life. But since our understanding is darkened by the sin of our forefather Adam, and our judgment perverted, we are like one struck with paralysis, who is quite lame on one side of his body, while the other is strong and healthy. On the left side, on which we consider temporal trials and crosses, we are sensitiveness and delicacy itself, so much fear, horror, and aversion have we for them; but on the right side, which represents to us the spiritual evils of the soul, we are without feeling, and, like persons who have neither sense nor reason, we appreciate nothing truly. For we look on temporal goods, the esteem and respect of men, a high position, riches, freedom, health, and bodily comfort, as great and valuable possessions, so that the loss of such things, which is the result of trials and contradictions, seems to us exceedingly bitter and terrible. Therefore we cry out, oh, what that poor man has to suffer in that loss he experienced recently; how miserable the lot of those wretched people,

We look on temporal misfortune as great evils.

who have hardly bread enough to feed themselves and their children; how deplorable the condition of that man, who is so unjustly persecuted; what a grief for that poor woman to have lost her husband by such an untimely death; how pitiable the fate of that sick man, who has been confined to his bed for such a long time; and so on. We look on all those things as exceedingly great evils, although in the sight of God they are very slight indeed.

And on venial sins as of small account.

But, on the other hand, what do we make of a venial sin? Oh, we think, what great harm can it be to tell a lie to please others, or in jest? What great harm can it be to indulge our curiosity by looking at a person of the opposite sex with vain pleasure, to give way to impatience and murmurs in contradictions, to put on a sour countenance, to give a sharp answer, to make a sarcastic remark or to indulge in some slight anger or dislike towards our neighbor, to give way to a voluntary distraction in prayer, to be guilty of irreverence in church or of carelessness in the service of God, or to indulge in vanity in dress, provided we give no scandal by such things? These and similar faults are of daily occurrence; and he who has nothing else to confess finds it difficult enough to awaken true sorrow for them; they are not considered as of any account, and, merely because they are not called mortal sins, people commit them without fear or shame, as if there was no evil or harm in them. Ah, if we only understood the bare name of sin; if we rightly comprehended what it is to offend the great and infinite majesty of God, who is worthy of all fear and love, and to insult Him by even one idle word, what a far different judgment we should form of those so-called small and venial sins, which are in reality, when we consider them with reference to God, very grievous evils.

Although one such sin is worse than all imaginable misfortunes.

Ask those holy Fathers and Doctors, who were so enlightened by the Spirit of God, and they will tell you about them. They will say that even one of those sins, no matter how small it seems to be, is an evil far more to be dreaded than all the sicknesses, troubles, and contradictions of this world put together. Why? Because venial sin offends the Lord God. And is not that bad enough? Venial sin is a certain dishonoring and contempt of God, so that we have reason to say with St. Dorotheus, and according to the opinion of all theologians, "that it would be far better for all created things to perish, and for heaven and earth to be destroyed, than that one venial sin should be com-

mitted." You are so grieved, O man, at the loss of an important law-suit or of your temporal goods, at an injury offered you, or at the untimely death of some dear friend; how, then, can you look on that as a small evil which is worse than the destruction of all creatures? Imagine that at the present time all the kings and potentates of Europe are engaged in a bloody war; many thousands lose their lives; whole families are ruined; towns reduced to ashes; whole provinces laid waste; millions of men deprived of their substance and reduced to extreme poverty, while the whole European world is plunged in grief and suffering from famine. May the good God save us, you think, from such a dreadful calamity! And yet all this is a far less evil than a single voluntary distraction in prayer, or a single lie told in jest; and if you could by that lie avert all those temporal calamities, it would not be lawful for you to tell it, even if thereby you could also convert all sinners, and free all the souls out of purgatory, and the damned from hell, and bring them to heaven. All who have any understanding of the matter are fully agreed in this. Yet sometimes, when you are reprov'd for telling a lie, oh, you say, what harm is in it? I only did it to make people laugh, or to prevent disunion in the family. But do you not know that it would be a matter of far less importance, if, instead of that lie being told, your whole house and all it contains were struck by lightning and burnt to ashes? or if your husband, children, friend, were to fall down dead? or if he for whose pleasure you told the lie were to lose all that he has, his honor and good name before the world, his repose, pleasure, and joy, nay, even his very life?

You seem to be astonished at this, as it appears to you a strange proposition, but yet it is a self-evident truth; for the least transgression of the divine will is more to be feared, detested, condemned, and avoided than the destruction and ruin of all created things. What is it to the great God, who is infinitely happy in Himself, whether a man lives for a long or a short time, whether one's family is in good circumstances or not, whether this or that potentate gains a battle, whether the Turks or the Persians, the Germans or the Spaniards rule the world; whether this kingdom is laid waste while that other is exalted? The only thing of importance in the sight of God is, whether His creatures know, serve, and love Him above all things; so that all, great and small, rich and poor, prince and peasant, keep His law inviolate, dread offending Him more than anything else in any

For it offends God.

circumstances whatever, and give Him the honor that belongs to the sovereign Monarch of heaven. Now, this honor cannot be taken away from God by any temporal evil, no matter how great it is, but it is lessened by the smallest venial sin, even by a jocose lie. And now I ask you, my dear brethren, whether he who has deliberately committed a venial sin can with reason complain of being treated unjustly, or say that he suffers trials, or poverty, or misfortune without having deserved it, while the venial sin he has committed far surpasses all the imaginable evils of the whole world put together? But this is a matter we do not wish to understand; nor can we see how it is possible.

In the Old Law venial sins were severely punished by God.

Do Thou, then, O good and just God, explain to us this hitherto unintelligible truth. And how wilt Thou do it? By representing to us the terrible punishments Thou dost inflict on venial sin, thus showing, as Salvianus says, "that nothing by which God is offended can be looked on as of small account."¹ Read the Holy Scripture, and you will see that a certain woman was at once turned into a pillar of salt, as a just punishment. Who was she? The wife of the pious and God-fearing Lot, and that punishment was inflicted on her at the very moment when the angel was leading Lot and his family out of Sodom. What was her crime? She had turned aside, out of curiosity, to see the burning city: "And his wife, looking behind her, was turned into a statue of salt."² One of the Israelites was by divine command stoned to death by the people, as you may read in the Book of Numbers. Why? What crime had he committed? He had gathered a few sticks from the ground on the Sabbath day: "And it came to pass, when the children of Israel were in the wilderness, and had found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day, that they brought him to Moses. And the Lord said to Moses: Let that man die, let all the multitude stone him without the camp."³ Who would have thought it a grievous matter, worthy of death, to commit a fault in the ceremonies of the sacrifice, as Nadab and Abiu did by using unconsecrated fire in their censers? And yet, as a punishment for that fault, fire burst forth from beneath the altar and consumed them on the spot, as the Holy Scripture tells us in the same Book: "Now Nadab and Abiu died, without children, when they offered strange

¹ Ut nihil leve aestimetur, quo Deus læditur.

² Respiensque uxor ejus post se, versa est in statnam salis.—Gen. xix. 26.

³ Factum est autem, cum essent filii Israel in solitudine, et invenissent hominem colligentem ligna in die sabbati, obtulerunt eum Moysi. . . Dixitque Dominus ad Moysen: Mortemoriatur homo iste; obruat eum lapidibus omnis turba extra castra.—Num. xv. 32, 33, 35.

fire before the Lord, in the desert of Sinai.”¹ Was it such a great crime for king Saul, who was kept so long waiting for the arrival of the Prophet, to begin the sacrifice himself? And yet, as a punishment for having done so, it was at once announced to him that he should lose his crown: “And Samuel said to Saul: Thou hast done foolishly, and hast not kept the commandments of the Lord thy God, which He commanded thee,” and therefore, “thy kingdom shall not continue.”² Who would not think that Oza deserved to be rewarded rather than punished for having stretched out his hand to keep the Ark of the Covenant from falling? “Oza put forth his hand to the Ark of God and took hold of it: because the oxen kicked and made it lean aside;” and yet he was punished by being struck 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 What would you say if I could show you an immense plain filled with dead bodies, and tell you at the same time that all that slaughter was due to one small sin? Yet such was once really the case. Read the twenty-fourth chapter of the Second Book of Kings, and you will see how David, wishing to know the number of his people, ordered them to be counted, and gave way to a feeling of vanity at being such a great king. On account of that vanity, which we might look on as laudable, since the cause of it proved that he was a careful ruler, who looked after his people, the following announcement was made to him by the Prophet on the part of God: “I give thee thy choice of three things, choose one of them which thou wilt, that I may do it to thee. 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.”⁴ David chose the latter punishment, “and in three days seventy thousand people died of the plague.”⁵ O my God, such a terrible punishment for a single act of vanity! Who would

¹ Mortui sunt enim Nadab et Abiu, cum offerrent ignem alienum in conspectu Domini in deserto Sinai, absque liberis.—Num. iii. 4.

² Dixitque Samuel ad Saul: Stulte egisti, nec custodisti mandata Domini Dei tui, quæ præcepit tibi. . . Nequaquam regnum tuum ultra consurget.—I. Kings xiii. 13, 14.

³ Extendit Oza manum ad arcam Dei; quoniam calcitrabant boves, et declinaverunt eam. Iratusque est indignatione Dominus contra Ozam, et percussit eum super temeritate: qui mortuus est ibi juxta arcam Dei.—II. Kings vi. 6-7.

⁴ Trium tibi datur optio, elige unum quod volueris ex his, ut faciam tibi. 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. xxiv. 12, 13.

⁵ Et mortui sunt ex populo a Dan usque ad Bersabee septuaginta millia virorum.—Ibid. 15.

believe it, if Thou, O God of truth, hadst not revealed it? Who would look on it as just, if Thou, the God of justice and goodness, hadst not inflicted it?

They are still more worthy of punishment in the New Law.

Do you think, my dear brethren, that perhaps now in the New Law such sins are of less account, and not deserving of such severe punishment? Does the Lord think less now than formerly of insults offered His infinite majesty? Does He set more value on the vain goods of the world now, than formerly? Has He more need of our bodily health and temporal well-being than in past times? Are not all men, no matter how great they are, but dust and ashes in His eyes? Have His almighty power, His Justice, His holiness, and His supreme sovereignty over all things been lessened? It is true, He does not deal with us now with such manifest and remarkable severity as He did with His people in the Old Law, and that He does not strike us dead on the spot when we offend Him; yet it still remains true that our sins and shortcomings are deserving of equal, nay, of greater punishment, on account of our greater ingratitude, than the same sins would have deserved in the Old Law.

And are actually often severely punished.

Oh, if God were to allow us to look into His inscrutable designs, and there to see the cause of the calamities that sometimes befall us, what dreadful misfortunes we should see inflicted on us as just punishment for sins that appear to us mere daily faults! We should see that often our sensuality is punished by a long illness; inordinate joy and pleasure, by trouble and sadness; self-complacency and vanity, by public shame and confusion; the venial oaths and curses we utter in anger, by thunder and hail storms, that lay waste whole provinces. But we do not think of those things; there is no prophet sent to us now, as formerly, to warn us of the punishment about to overtake us on account of our sins. "Behold the days shall come," said Isaias to king Ezechias, "that all that is in thy house, and that thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried away into Babylon."¹ No prophet, I say, cries out to this vain, idle worldling, who is slothful in the divine service, behold, the days shall come, when you, despised and abandoned by every one, shall sit in your chamber, weeping, as a punishment for your vanity. No prophet calls out to that purse-proud man, behold, the days shall come when your goods will be taken from you by war; when you will lose your credit, authority, and good

¹ Ecce dies venient, et auferentur omnia, quæ in domo tua sunt, et quæ thesaurizaverunt patres tui usque ad diem hunc in Babylonem.—Isa. xxxix. 6.

name before the world; when you will be reduced to poverty; and all this as a punishment of your present pride. No prophet calls out to that passionate woman, who gets angry at the least word of opposition, behold, the days shall come when your husband will die a premature death, and leave you and your children in debt, trouble, and secret poverty, as a punishment of that ill temper, to which you now daily give way in your family. There are no longer any prophets to speak to us in that way; but God, who is inscrutable in His judgments, does not therefore cease to inflict punishment even on sins that appear small, such as curiosity of eyes and ears, impatience and murmuring, idleness and sloth in the divine service, vanity in dress, sensuality in eating, drinking, and sleeping, slight acts of uncharity against our neighbor, and similar vices, that are sometimes all found in the one individual. Confusion, humiliation, persecution, misfortune, poverty, desolation, illness, mental trouble, etc., these are the rods that God often makes use of to punish such sins. What proportion is there between the guilt and its chastisement? Is not the latter too severe for us weak mortals? I acknowledge that I would probably think so, if Thou, my God, didst not inflict the punishment. But, O God of infinite goodness and mercy, since Thou chastisest us far less than our sins deserve, I am driven to the conclusion that even small, venial sins are a grievous evil in Thy sight, and I must acknowledge that for such sins we well deserve to be tried and purified by temporal crosses and tribulations.

Where are you now, Christians, you who dare to murmur and complain that you have too much to suffer, and that you are treated unjustly when you feel the weight of a cross that you imagine to be a heavy one? If any one of you can now venture to say with truth: "Thou hast tried me by fire, and iniquity hath not been found in me," let him come forward. Thou, O Lord, hast sent me this illness, this misfortune, this poverty, this persecution; and yet I do no wrong; I am innocent; I do not deserve such a cross! David would give you your answer, when he speaks thus to his Lord and God: "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant; for in Thy sight no man living shall be justified."¹ St. John the Apostle would answer you in his First Epistle: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is

Now, no one is so just as not often to sin venially.

¹ Non intres in iudicium cum servo tuo: quia non justificabitur in conspectu tuo omnis vivens.—Ps. cxlii. 2.

not in us.¹ We sometimes, but, alas, very rarely, find in the world men whose eyes are free from lust, whose hands are not stained by theft and injustice, whose bodies are not sullied by impurity, whose hearts and consciences are not defiled by mortal sin. Job was one of those just men, and he spoke of his innocence to God, when he said: "I have not sinned, and my eye abideth in bitterness."² But that men are so perfectly holy and pure as not to have the least stain of imperfection, and not sometimes to fall into venial sin, who will believe that? Who can dare to boast of such sanctity? I can safely say that there is no just man of that description amongst us. Job himself, that holy servant of God, acknowledges his guilt in this respect: "I have sinned; what shall I do to Thee, O keeper of men?"³ Alas, it is but too true that the just man falls seven times a day! Examine your ordinary daily life; how useless and suspicious your thoughts are sometimes; how inordinate your desires; how rash and obstinate your judgments; how perverse your intentions, and how seldom directed to God; how inconsiderate, false, slanderous, quarrelsome, and discontented your talk; how slothful your works, and how wanting in a supernatural intention; how sensual and often immoderate you are in eating, drinking, and sleeping; how vain in dress; how curious in seeing and hearing; how impatient in suffering; how voluntarily distracted in prayer; how tepid and cold in good works and devotions. Oh! what a number of venial sins and imperfections you will find; and if you examine your conscience properly, you will see that you fall, not like the just man, seven times only, but seventy times seven; and one fall is enough to deserve punishment.

Therefore
there is no
one who
does not de-
serve
crosses.

So that you are not so innocent, after all, as not to deserve that the just God should try you daily by the fire of tribulation and temporal crosses. Do not, then, complain that you have too much to suffer; nor say, with the sorrowing Job: "Oh, that my sins, whereby I have deserved wrath, and the calamity that I suffer, were weighed in a balance. As the sand of the sea this would appear heavier."⁴ For the same answer would be given to you that the Prophet Daniel gave king Balthasar: "Thou art weighed in the balance, and art found wanting;"⁵ you might

¹ Si dixerimus quoniam peccatum non habemus, ipsi nos seducimus, et veritas in nobis non est.—I. John i. 8.

² Non peccavi, et in amaritudinibus moratur oculus meus.—Job xvii. 2.

³ Peccavi, quid faciam tibi, O custos hominum?—Ibid. vii. 20.

⁴ Utinam appenderentur peccata mea, quibus fram merui: et calamitas, quam patior, in statera. Quasi arena maris hæc gravior appareret.—Ibid. vi. 2, 3.

⁵ Appensus es in statera, et inventus es minus habens.—Dan. v. 27.

find that you suffer far too little, and that the sins you have committed are a hundred times heavier than the contradictions you have to endure as a punishment for them. Be satisfied, and bear your trials with patience. Say, with Nehemias: "O Lord God, creator of all things, dreadful and strong, just and merciful, who alone art the good king,"¹ terrible art Thou in the vengeance Thou inflictest even on small faults; powerful in the ways Thou findest out of taking this vengeance! Nevertheless Thou art infinitely just, for Thou dost not impose on me a burden heavier than I can bear, or than I have merited; Thou hast every right to punish me; but I have not the least right nor cause to offend Thee in any way. And besides, with all this, Thou art a God of infinite goodness and mercy; for Thou chastisest me here, as a father does his dear child, so that I may not have to suffer longer and more grievous torments in the next life, and, by the short sufferings of this life, may gain greater joy and glory in Thy kingdom of heaven. Thou art just and merciful. It is therefore right, my dear brethren, that we should often be visited by temporal trials and contradictions; for we deserve it on account of the venial sins and imperfections we are guilty of every day; how much more, then, do we not deserve it on account of the sins we have committed in the past? This we shall see briefly in the

Second Part.

Not every one who is now good and pious has been so always; and there are many who now commit only venial sins, who formerly committed grievous mortal sins, and that, too, perhaps very often. And if you look into your past life, you will probably have to reckon yourself amongst their number, so that, no matter how holy you are now, God has just reason for visiting you with temporal trials. Consider the misfortunes that befell the penitent David. He had already heard the comforting assurance of the Prophet Nathan: "The Lord also hath taken away thy sin; thou shalt not die."² This grace had cost him but a single sigh, "I have sinned against the Lord;"³ and yet, what miseries he had to endure! The sword of the divine wrath was never turned away from his house, as the same Prophet told him: "Therefore the sword shall never depart from thy house, because thou hast

God punished David, after having forgiven his sins.

¹ Domine Deus, omnium creator, terribilis et fortis, justus et misericors, qui solus es bonus rex.—II. Mach. i. 24.

² Dominus quoque transtulit peccatum tuum: non morieris.—II. Kings xii. 13.

³ Peccavi Domino.—Ibid.

despised Me.”¹ One of his sons slew another, in the presence of his other brothers at a feast; another of his sons rebelled against him; a great part of his kingdom revolted, and David himself was forced to fly and to seek refuge with strangers. No doubt, all this was a long and severe trial for such a king. And what was the cause of it all? Nothing but the sins of adultery and murder which he had committed, and which God had forgiven. “My sin is always before me,”² he says himself; my sin persecutes and punishes me. This was the punishment that he could not avert with all his fasting, watching, sighing, and humiliation; this was the punishment to which he humbly submitted.

So also they who repent of their sins deserve to be punished for them.

And this, too, O sinful man, is the punishment which, if you have not yet felt it, is in store for you, on account of your past sins, which you have repented of. You look on your youth as a time for enjoyment, and make little of the sins you then committed, as if the merciful God were disposed to look on them with pity, rather than to punish them in His just anger. The sins you committed some time ago you think no more of now, because you have declared them all in confession, and have repented of them; but wait; the all-knowing God will remember them; the joyous time of youth will pass away, and will be followed by years of sorrow and trouble. In the midst of the good works which you will perform in later years, and while you are leading a pious and holy life, you will feel that the roots of the same sins, that you think you have quite eradicated by penance and confession, are beginning to shoot out again; you will be aware of their unhappy fertility, and will taste the bitter fruit of tears, and trouble of heart, and the fire of tribulation and contradictions; in a word, if you are not punished for those sins in this life, you will certainly be in the next. One or other, my dear brethren, must be our fate. There are few of us, I believe, who are altogether free from trials and crosses; and no wonder; for, how many of us are there whose lives have always been free from sin? Now we sin no longer (and may God grant that to be the case!); but we have sinned in the past. All our sins have been forgiven in confession (ah, if we could only be quite certain of that!); but have we blotted out all the punishment due to them? “Be not without fear about sin forgiven,”³ says the wise Ecclesiasti-

¹ *Quam ob rem non recedet gladius de domo tua usque in sempiternum, eo quod despexeris me.*—II. Kings xii. 10.

² *Peccatum meum contra me est semper.*—Ps. i. 5.

³ *De propitiato peccato noli esse sine metu.*—Ecclesi. v. 5.

cus: and why? Because there still remains a considerable debt that must be paid.

To what is he bound who has borrowed money? First, until the capital is paid off, he must pay interest yearly. O sinner, if you have grievously transgressed the divine law, it is, says St. Basil, as if you had signed with your own hand an acknowledgment of your debt.¹ And do you know to what you have bound yourself? To nothing less, if you have committed mortal sin, than to eternal tortures in hell, and that is the amount of your debt. Meanwhile the good God has, after your confession and repentance, lessened this amount and placed it in purgatory: I have explained elsewhere what long and terrible torments must there be undergone, even for one sin. While this amount stands, and until it is fully paid up, the just God demands, during this life, the interest on it, that is, the temporal punishments that the sinner has to suffer by way of satisfaction. Do not wonder, then, if an unexpected and grievous misfortune sometimes comes upon you, nor think to yourself, where does this come from? I have now been for a long time in the state of grace, and, I hope, have served my God with zeal. Yes, that is all right, and it is no more than your duty. But think back a little, and see how you have served God in the past; examine what you have done in your youth, and in your later years; see what you have done here and there at different times. Your Creditor has not forgotten those things; and the trials you now have to endure, and which you, perhaps, do not now deserve, are the interest that the divine justice exacts for the debt you contracted then.

You will find a clear example of this in the Holy Scripture, in the brothers of Joseph, as they lay together in prison in Egypt, and gave way to their grief. What was their fault? They had come, out of filial obedience to their father Jacob, to buy corn during the famine, and were accused of being spies, and were thrown into prison. But they were quite innocent of such a crime; it was the last thing they thought of; and already thirteen years had elapsed since they had sold their innocent brother Joseph, after having treated him so cruelly and cast him into a pit through hatred and envy. See, says St. John Chrysostom, how God finds out everything in His own time, and punishes it. After thirteen years, and while the brothers were engaged in a work of charity and obedience, they were overtaken by the divine justice; they were bound as traitors, and cast into prison, where

Shown by
simile

And by an
example
from Scrip-
ture.

¹ Est chirographum quoddam adversum nos manibus nostris subscriptum.

they sighed forth : alas, good people, what have we done ? why should you treat us thus ? You are not to blame now, it is true ; but go back in thought, and recall what you did when your innocent brother Joseph came to you in the field, and how you threw him into the pit, without any mercy for him. Alas ! that is true, they say ; “ we deserve to suffer these things, because we have sinned against our brother, seeing the anguish of his soul, when he besought us and we would not hear.” He cried out for mercy, but we paid no attention, and sold him into slavery : “ therefore is this affliction come upon us.”¹

Confirmed
by another
example.

You are doubtless aware of what happened to St. Ephraim. He related the occurrence himself, as abbot, to his brethren in religion (most interesting it is to read this story in the *Bollandists*;² I will only give you a short extract of what the holy man describes in detail). “ When I was still a young man,” he says, “ I came one day across a cow in the forest, and, out of mere boyish wantonness, pelted the poor animal with stones till it died, and the following night it was devoured by wild beasts. Some months after, I could not go to mind the sheep as usual, and a wolf entered the fold and scattered the flock. I was at once seized and accused of having allowed thieves to enter and steal the sheep ; and the shepherds, in spite of all my protestations of innocence, brought me before the judge, who ordered me to be put in prison, where I lay for forty days, with two others, who had also been imprisoned without just reason. At last a young man appeared to me, and said : ‘ Ephraim, what are you doing here ? ’ ‘ Sir,’ I answered, with a flood of tears, ‘ I am quite innocent ; the shepherds have imprisoned me unjustly.’ Whereupon the young man smiled and said : ‘ I know that you are innocent of the crime of which you are accused ; but I know, too, what you did some time ago, when you killed a poor man’s cow. Learn now that God is a just Lord, and that He is now punishing you for that sin ; and in order to see His justice all the clearer, ask your two companions in prison, who have also been accused of a crime of which they are innocent, ask them what evil they have done in their past lives.’ Whereupon the young man disappeared. The next morning I asked my fellow-prisoners why they were arrested. ‘ I,’ answered one, ‘ have been accused of murder ; but I am not guilty of it in the least.’ ‘ And I,’ said the other,

¹ Merito hæc patimur, quia peccavimus in fratrem nostrum : videntes angustiam animæ illius, dum deprecaretur nos, et non audivimus : idcirco venit super nos ista tribulatio.— Gen. xlii. 21.

² Bolland. in Act. SS. die 1 Feb.

‘am here for an act of adultery of which I know nothing.’ ‘But,’ I asked further, ‘what sins have you committed in your past lives?’ ‘I will tell you candidly,’ said the first; ‘some time ago I saw a man throwing another into a river from a bridge; I could have saved the drowning man by merely stretching out my hand to him; but I did not take the trouble to do so, although he cried out to me for help, and I went my way and let him drown; that was my sin, and I now see that the just God allows me to be punished for it by permitting me to be imprisoned, although innocent.’ ‘Two years ago,’ said the other, ‘there were two brothers, who on the death of their parents tried to exclude their sister from her share of the inheritance, on the pretext that she had been living in adultery and impurity; they asked me to confirm that accusation, and I, for the sake of getting money from them, took a false oath; I see now that God is punishing me as I deserve.’ Thus we all adored the wonderful decrees of God. Not long after the two prisoners were set at liberty by the judge, their innocence being fully established; but I was still kept chained in prison for forty days longer. During that time three other criminals were brought in, in whose company I remained for thirty days. Again the young man appeared to me, and said; ‘do you know now, Ephraim, what you have done? and do you see that God knows how to punish sin in His own good time? These three last companions of yours are in similar circumstances to yourself; for they are imprisoned for crimes of which they are innocent, yet none of them is so innocent as not to deserve death. Two of them are the brothers who falsely accused their sister of adultery, and deprived her of her share of the inheritance; the third is he who pushed the man from the bridge into the water, as your former companions told you.’ He again vanished and left me filled with dread and anguish. When my three companions had confessed their guilt, and were condemned to the scaffold, I became quite downhearted, not knowing how the affair would end for me, when the same young man appeared to me a third time. ‘Ah sir,’ said I to him, with a deep sigh, ‘how long, then, must I remain in prison?’ ‘Ephraim,’ replied he, ‘remember the cow you killed. You should have been more cautious, and put some restraint on your wantonness; but be comforted, in twenty days’ time you will be released;’ and his promise was fulfilled. Immediately after, according to a promise I had made in prison, I entered the religious state.” So far St. Ephraim.

Humble acknowledgment that we deserve trials.

What are we to think of this, my dear brethren? What can or should we say to our God, when we are unexpectedly overtaken by some misfortune? Must we not, like St. Ephraim, when we consider our past lives, acknowledge that the judgments of God are right and just, and say, with Joseph's brothers, "we deserve to suffer these things, because we have sinned against our brother"? Alas, yes, O Lord, I have sinned, and sinned often; and not alone venially, which would be bad enough, but mortal as well. I have sinned against Jesus, my Brother, Thy only begotten Son! I have despised His inspirations and graces! I have given Him up for a vile pleasure, for some worthless thing! I have ruthlessly trampled His blood under foot. "We deserve to suffer these things;" with justice, O Lord, and I cannot deny it, is this calamity come upon me! Alas, what did I do on that occasion, in that place, in that company! My soul, my eternal salvation, Thou, my God, were worth nothing to me then! I imagined that a good confession would make everything completely right again; but now I feel Thy chastising hand, now I find in Thee a Judge who takes vengeance on me for the past. Be Thy name blessed, O Lord; Thou dealtst with me as I deserve; nay, far more mercifully than I deserve. "We deserve to suffer these things;" justly do I now groan under this pain and sickness; for I have often misused my health against Thy holy will. "We deserve to suffer these things;" justly am I now overwhelmed with confusion; for I have formerly, in my pride, despised others. "We deserve to suffer these things;" justly has this misfortune come upon me, this poverty overtaken me; for I have been so vain, so intemperate, and have lived so extravagantly. "We deserve to suffer these things;" justly am I now persecuted by others, for I have often sinned against the love of my neighbor. "We deserve to suffer these things;" justly am I now in trouble and desolation; for while I was in good circumstances, I was slothful in Thy service, and attended only to my sensuality, according to the vain customs of the world. "We deserve to suffer these things;" justly do I now burn in the fire of tribulation; for in my past life I have been guilty of many sins. Thou art just, O Lord, and all Thy judgments are right and holy. I will never complain again, or else I will complain of my wickedness alone, which is the sole cause of my sufferings. I will humbly resign myself, take up my cross daily, deplore nothing so much as my sins, and devote all my care to avoiding sin, although I have to groan under the weight of tribulation. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same Sermon for the Second Sunday after Easter.

Text.

Ego sum pastor bonus, et cognosco meas.—John x. 14.
“I am the good Shepherd, and I know Mine.”

Introduction.

But how is that? If Jesus Christ is such a good Shepherd that He knows His just sheep, who try to follow every sign of His; if He is such a loving Shepherd that He gave up His life for them; if He is so merciful and generous that He looks after them continually, lest any harm should befall them, or they should want proper nourishment; how comes it, then, that He so often seems to abandon them and leave them to weep and moan in sorrow and tribulation, without coming to their help? How are we to explain that? We can easily understand that sinners, who do not wish to amend their lives, and who wilfully abandon their Shepherd, should be visited with crosses and trials; for they deserve it, and must receive their trials as blessings and graces, which will compel them to enter into themselves and be converted. But that even just souls, who are not conscious of any grievous sin, and who do their best to fulfil the will of God as well as they know how, that they, too, should have grievous contradictions to suffer, is what we find a difficulty in understanding. Such is sometimes the current of our thoughts, my dear brethren, and we think we are treated unjustly when God visits us with temporal afflictions. What evil have I done, we say, that the hand of the Lord should weigh so heavily on me? I have long since amended my life. But the decrees of the divine wisdom are far different from what we imagine. Even if we had never done any wrong in our whole lives, we still should have no reason to complain of being treated unjustly by being visited with trials in this vale of tears; for even the innocent, by a just judgment of God, have to bear the punishment of the sins of others. Still, that you may see how unjustly and—*continues as above.*

On the holy Sacrifice of the Mass as an Infinite Satisfaction for the Punishment Due to Sin, see the following Fourth Part.

ON THE GRATITUDE WE OWE TO GOD AFTER DOING PENANCE.

FORTY-SIXTH SERMON.

ON THE APPRECIATION OF THE BENEFIT RECEIVED BY PENANCE.

Subject.

The forgiveness of sin is one of the greatest benefits we receive from God. 1. It is great in itself; 2. It is great in the manner in which God bestows it on us; and therefore we owe to God a special debt of gratitude for it.—*Preached on the twentieth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Filius tuus vivit: et credidit ipse et domus ejus tota.—John iv. 53.

“Thy son liveth; and himself believed and his whole house.”

Introduction.

Nothing more did this man require than to hear the words, “thy son liveth,” thy son, who was at the point of death, is now alive and well; this was the whole benefit that his prayer had obtained from Jesus Christ: “and himself believed and his whole house,” and, without doubt, he persevered in the faith. How comes it, my dear brethren, that similar and even far greater benefits are daily conferred on us—for there are probably few among us who have not experienced during their lives such wonderful effects of the divine goodness—and yet we hardly think anything of them? For, whenever one is absolved from mortal sin in sacramental confession, God says to him, “thy soul,” that was dead, “liveth.” That benefit, which is almost the greatest of all, is the one for which we least of all return thanks to God, because we do not value it as we ought. To-day I shall try to

show the greatness of it, that all who have experienced it may be always grateful to God. I repeat, then, that—

Plan of Discourse.

The awakening of the soul from death, or the forgiveness of sin, is one of the greatest benefits bestowed on us by God; such is the whole subject of this sermon. It is great in itself, as I shall show in the first part. It is great in the manner in which God bestows it on us, as I shall show in the second part. Therefore he who has sinned grievously and obtained forgiveness owes a special debt of gratitude to God; such shall be the conclusion.

Grant us Thy grace, O God of goodness, to fulfil it; this we beg of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

He who wishes to appreciate truly what a great benefit it is to recover the health of the body should go back in thought, and remember what he had to endure in his illness; and when he compares that with the agreeable change and the bodily comfort he now experiences, he will be forced to cry out, in the joy of his heart, infinite thanks be to the good God! What a great benefit He has bestowed on me, in raising me up from my bed of suffering, and restoring me to health! In the same way, to see the greatness of the benefit we receive in the forgiveness of our sins, we need only remember the unhappy state of our souls while we were living in sin, and compare it with the wonderful and happy change wrought by the grace of repentance and sacramental absolution. From both these circumstances we can reasonably conclude that the forgiveness of sin must in truth be an extraordinarily great benefit, for which, once we have received it, we can never be grateful enough to the good God during our whole lives.

The greatness of the benefit of the forgiveness of sin must be gathered from the unhappy state in which the sinner was, and the happy one to which he is raised.

And now, justified soul, who have even once during your life offended God by mortal sin, have you ever considered what you were before, and what you are now? To have some idea of both these states, come with me in imagination to the court of Constantinople, and see what happened there in former times. Michael Balbus, an illustrious prince and minister of the emperor Leo, was accused and found guilty of having conspired against the emperor. He was thrown into prison and was condemned to be burnt alive, as a punishment of his treason. It happened to

Both states are explained by an example from history, by way of simile.

be Christmas time as he was led out to execution, and the empress Theodosia, seeing the miserable state of the unhappy prince, and influenced, too, by a feeling of reverence for the holy season, fell at the emperor's feet, and earnestly besought him not to sully the great festival by such a horrible tragedy. Leo was displeased at her request, but consented to put off the execution till after the festival. What happened? The night before the day on which the guilty man was to be led out again and burned alive Leo died, and Michael Balbus was brought forth from prison and proclaimed emperor; and as they could not find the keys to unlock the chains with which he was bound, they placed him on the throne fettered as he was, and on the following day he was solemnly crowned in the church of St. Sophia. What a wonderful change that was for him! From a prison to a throne, from fetters to a crown, from the fire, in which he was on the point of being burnt alive, to the highest glory of the empire. Who, my dear brethren, could describe the joy of that prince at such a sudden and miraculous change of fortune? Could he ever have been sufficiently grateful to him who was the cause of it. But, great as was his good fortune, it is but a shadow compared to that of the human soul, which is freed by grace from the state of sin, and again received by God into favor.

The sinner
was before
in a very
unhappy
state.

Think, O penitent sinner, of what you were. By the sanctifying grace you received in baptism you were made a prince and an heir of the kingdom of heaven, an intimate friend of the sovereign God; but when you rebelled against God, that is, when you, for any reason whatever, consented to mortal sin, into what a deplorable and unhappy state you fell! Your beautiful soul, so much loved by God, became in an instant a hideous monster in the sight of heaven, and more disgusting than any foul carrion can be in the sight of men on earth; as a rebel, guilty of high treason, it became the captive of the devil, and lost its dignity as child and friend of God; it was deprived of all the merits and supernatural graces that you had gained by all your good works during your life; it forfeited all claim to heaven, and sentence of everlasting damnation to the fire of hell had already been pronounced against it; it was on the point of being sent to hell, where it would have suffered forever, without hope of release. Can any more deplorable or lamentable state be imagined? All that God, whom you had offended, and who was so angry with you, had to do, was to turn away His eyes

from you, and allow you to go to destruction; for there was no heaven any longer for your poor soul. Hell had already opened its jaws, and was ready to swallow you up at any moment as an eternal holocaust; death was commanded, perhaps, on the very day on which you sinned, to carry the sentence into execution; you were actually on your way to the stake, for every hour of your life brought you nearer to death and to hell. Who put off the execution? Who prevented the sentence that was pronounced against you from being carried out? No one but the merciful God, who looked on you with eyes of pity, and persuaded His own enraged justice to give you a little more time. "Unless the Lord had been my helper," you may well say, with thankful heart, like the penitent David, "my soul had almost dwelt in hell."¹ The good God forestalled you with His grace, and touched your heart, softening it, so that you repented of your sins, confessed them, and received absolution.

Now see what a great and sudden change took place in you at the moment when you were absolved by the priest. What idea have you of the great good fortune that was then your lot? Shall I say that you were delivered from temporal death, brought out of a foul prison to be placed on a throne, and freed from fetters to be adorned with a diadem, like Michael Balbus? Ah, that would not half describe your good fortune! After having loosed the bonds in which the foul fiend kept you enslaved, the good God generously clothed you with the costly robe of sanctifying grace, adorned you with His divine gifts and supernatural virtues, and restored to you all the merits you had gained when you were in the state of grace; you are placed, so to speak, on the divine throne, as a beloved child of God and a lawful heir of the kingdom of heaven, to whom the crown of honor and glory belongs as a right, that you may reign with God forever. O miracle of goodness, wonderful change, divine state! such is the exclamation of St. Augustine in considering it: "Pardon is given to the sinner, and the Holy Ghost, too, along with the hope of justification, and charity, and love, in which he may do all good things; and besides all this, eternal life will be his portion."² Human soul, how did you feel when this wonderful change was wrought in you? How were you able to contain yourself for sudden joy? Is it possible that you could ever forget

From which
God has
raised him
to the hap-
piest state
on earth.

¹ Nisi quia Dominus adjuvit me, paulo minus habitasset in inferno anima mea.—Ps. xciii. 17.

² Data est venia peccatori; datus est Spiritus et spes justificationis; data est charitas et dilectio, in qua omnia bona faciat; et super hæc dabit et vitam æternam.—St. Aug. in Ps. cxlv.

such a great benefit? Is it possible that you do not acknowledge and openly confess that you are eternally bound to your God, and that you owe Him a debt of the greatest gratitude therefor? With what jubilation and festivity great princes celebrate their birth-day, in honor of their first appearance in the world. What honor, praise, and thanksgiving, then, should not you and I offer to our good God, on that day on which, by the holy sacrament of penance, we have been raised from the death of sin to the life of grace?

The forgiveness of sin is a greater benefit than creation.

Our creation is, as we must acknowledge, a great benefit on the part of God, since, in preference to countless creatures, which He has left to their nothingness, He has drawn us forth from nothing and given us this temporal life; but what is it compared to the goodness by which He has rescued our souls, which were dead in sin, from the jaws of hell, and restored them to eternal life? By the temporal life of the body God has opened to us the door to the transitory goods of this earth, which are accompanied by many annoyances and contradictions; but with the spiritual life of the soul He has again opened to us the door to eternal, heavenly goods, which will never have an end, after that door had been closed on us by our sins. This consideration so touched the heart of the penitent king David, that he made the firm resolution of spending the rest of his life in praising and blessing God: "For Thy mercy is better than lives: Thee my lips shall praise;"¹ that is, the mercy Thou hast shown to me, such a great sinner, far surpasses all other life, and therefore my lips shall praise Thee unceasingly: "Thus will I bless Thee all my life long: and in Thy name I will lift up my hands."²

And as great as redemption.

What do we not owe Jesus Christ, my dear brethren, for the inestimable grace of redemption? For He, the great Son of the eternal God, for our sake, and in order to save us from hell, to which we were on the point of being condemned forever, descended from the throne of His heavenly glory, became man like us, spent thirty-three years in poverty, and finally sacrificed Himself for us completely, dying the bitter death of the cross. If we had a hundred thousand lives at our disposal, and gave them all up to Him out of gratitude, we should still fail to make Him an adequate return; and yet this redemption was but a means to the forgiveness of sin, without which the offended

¹ Quoniam melior est misericordia tua super vitas: labia mea laudabunt te.—Ps. lxi. 4.

² Sic benedicam te in vita mea, et in nomine tuo levabo manus meas.—Ibid. 5.

justice of God could not have been fully satisfied for even one mortal sin. The justification of the sinner was the chief end of that redemption, which cost the innocent Son of God so much that, in order to accomplish it according to the will of His heavenly Father, He had to suffer and die. "Who was delivered up for our sins," says St. Paul to the Romans, "and rose again for our justification." Therefore, if the merciful God forgives me even one mortal sin, when I have done penance for it, He has conferred on me a benefit for which I owe Him as much gratitude as for that wonderful and exceeding great benefit which I have received from the Son of God, who suffered and died on the cross for me.

Further, in order to see the full magnitude of this effect of the divine goodness, read the holy Gospel, and there you will find that Jesus Christ, Our Saviour, makes more account of the conversion of one sinner, than of raising the dead, or of all the other miracles He wrought during His life on earth. Mark, my dear brethren, that, after He had raised from the dead Lazarus, who had been already four days in the grave, with one word, "Lazarus, come forth,"² He allowed him at once to go away: "Loose him and let him go."³ When He raised the son of the widow of Naim, "He gave him to his mother."⁴ As we read in to-day's gospel, He raised the ruler's son without even deigning to go into his house, although He was implored to do so. "Go thy way," He said to the father, "thy son liveth."⁵ On the other hand, when He cast an eye of mercy on the sinner Matthew, whose heart He had softened and converted to penance, He did not say, "go way," but, "follow Me," I wish to have you with Me. When He converted the public sinner Zachæus, He said: "Make haste and come down; for this day I must abide in thy house," and eat and drink with thee: "this day is salvation come to this house. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."⁶ These words He never spoke when He raised the dead or healed the sick.

Is much more to be prized than all the miracles of Our Lord.

What is the reason of this difference, my dear brethren? Why did Our Lord make companions of converted sinners, while He

For in the conversion of the sin-

¹ Qui traditus est propter delicta nostra, et resurrexit propter justificationem nostram.—Rom. iv. 25.

² Lazare, veni foras.—John xi. 43.

³ Solvite eum et sinite abire.—Ibid. 44.

⁴ Dedit illum matri suæ.—Luke vii. 15.

⁵ Vade, filius tuus vivit.—John iv. 46.

⁶ Festinans descende, quia hodie in domo tua oportet me manere. . . . Hodie salus domus huic facta est. . . . Venit enim filius hominis querere et salvum facere quod perierat.—Luke xix. 5, 9, 10.

ner Christ shows His power and glory more than in all His miracles.

allowed those whom He raised from the dead, or healed, to go away from Him? One might reasonably imagine that He would rather keep constantly at His side, and bring with Him everywhere, those whom He had raised from the dead; for they were a living proof of His almighty power before the people. True; but God derives far more honor and glory from the soul that He raises from the grave of sin than from the body that He restores to temporal life; for, as St. Augustine says, in the conversion and justification of the sinner He shows to the world, not only His goodness and mercy, but also His infinite and divine omnipotence, and that, too, far more than in the raising of the dead; since a dead body cannot resist His will, He can do with it what He pleases; but a sinner, whose soul is dead, has full liberty, either to obey divine grace or to resist it, and therefore often opposes His holy will. Hence God must, so to speak, use more artifice and power in order to win the sinner's heart and convert him to Himself; consequently, says St. Augustine, "the triumph of the Lord is the justification of the sinner."¹

As we see in the case of the penitent thief.

Jesus Christ, dying on the cross, wished to give the world at the last moment of His life a clear proof of His divinity. What was it? The Pharisees and the rabble, standing around, were crying out with mocking laughter: "If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross;"² then we will believe that Thou art really God, as Thou sayest. The high-priests and Scribes, too, mocked Him in the same way: "If He be the king of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him."³ Ah, cries out St. John Chrysostom, unable to contain himself at the consideration of these words, ah, blind people, blind synagogue, do you now seek for another miracle in order to believe that Jesus Christ is really the Son of God? Have you not seen with your own eyes the dead whom He has raised to life, the blind whom He has made to see, the deaf whom He has made to hear, the cripples, the lepers, the countless sick people whom He has healed in a moment? What more do you want? But wait a little; on the cross itself, on which you see Him hanging, He will now work another miracle, which will be a still greater and more wonderful proof of His divinity than all the other miracles He wrought during His life. Look at the thief, who is crucified at His right hand; he was a murderer and robber during his life, who had often deserved the pains of hell; and now, in a moment,

¹ Magnificentia Domini est peccatoris justificatio.

² Si filius Dei es, descende de cruce.—Matt. xxvii. 40.

³ Si rex Israel est, descendat nunc de cruce, et credimus ei.—Ibid. 42.

he will be changed and converted from a ravening wolf into a meek lamb, from a wicked sinner into a saint, from a blasphemer into a champion of the honor and innocence of Christ. Full of sorrow and repentance for his past sins, he prays in your presence to this Man, who is crucified with him, as to God, and protests before heaven and earth that he wishes to share in His kingdom. "Lord," he sighs forth, "remember me when Thou shalt come into Thy kingdom."¹ "Oh," exclaims St. Augustine, "this conversion of the thief is the change of the right hand of the Most High."² It is a miracle which far excels all the others. And St. John Chrysostom agrees with him: "Our Lord was pleased to change the thief's perverse heart suddenly, and to excite it to penance, so as to give an undoubted proof of His Godhead."³ To change a hideous demon into a beautiful angel, a bond-slave of the devil into a child of God, that is, to convert a wicked sinner, and, after he has done penance, to receive him again into the state of grace, that, indeed, is a change of the right hand of the Most High. So that the forgiveness of sin and the receiving of the sinner again into His friendship is a benefit for the accomplishment of which God requires His almighty power. And how often, O man, has not that benefit been bestowed on you and me? What a debt of gratitude, then, do we not owe the merciful God? If we wish to see our obligation still more clearly, let us consider the manner in which He confers this benefit on us.

Second Part.

It is not every one who has it in his power to do good to others; and what better am I, if he who can help me has not the will to do so? It is far more creditable to do good in reality; yet we have in the Gospel an instance of one doing good against his will, in the man who, conquered by the importunity of his neighbor, gets out of his bed at night to give him the required three loaves of bread. The best and most excellent quality of a benefit is the willingness and readiness with which it is conferred, so that the benefactor rejoices and is pleased at being able to do a favor to another. A service that is obtained only by dint of hard begging is not valued much by the world, and still less by the almighty God. Hence the Apostle St. Paul warns us,

Readiness
and willing-
ness on the
part of the
benefactor
enhances
the benefit.

¹ Domine, memento mei cum veneris in regnum tuum.—Luke xxiii. 42.

² Hæc mutatio latronis dexteræ Excelsi est.

³ Latronis mentem aversam voluit commutare, ut ex omni parte ejus divinitas sentiretur.

“Every one as he hath determined in his heart, not with sadness, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.”¹

God forgives sin with the greatest readiness and willingness.

And that, my dear brethren, is the very circumstance which renders still more excellent the benefit of the forgiveness of sin, great and wonderful as it is in itself. For the merciful God bestows it with the utmost willingness and readiness. It is the source of the greatest joy and exultation to Him if the sinner is only willing to accept it; and, in fact, He rejoices more therein, than in giving His other graces to His beloved children, to innocent and pious souls, as we learn from the testimony of Christ Himself in the Gospel of St. Luke. After having described the joy of the shepherd who has found the lost sheep, He adds: “I say to you that even so there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance.”² Therefore the justification of the sinner is ascribed by the Council of Trent to the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Holy Ghost; and hence the prayer of the Church which the priest says at the altar: “may the Holy Ghost renew our hearts, for He is the remission of all sins.”³ Not as if the Father and the Son did not also forgive sins, but in order to show the greatness of the loving tenderness with which God forgives the sins of him who truly repents; for the Holy Ghost is the mutual love of the Father and the Son.

And that, too, as soon as the sinner wishes.

He confers this benefit on every sinner who earnestly desires it, no matter how numerous and grievous his sins are. No one who implores that grace is rejected by Him, as long as life lasts; never does the sinner come too late to receive forgiveness. Jesus Christ, Our Saviour, was pleased to leave us a loving proof of that immediately after His death, according to St. Augustine. “One of the soldiers with a spear opened His side,”⁴ as we read in the Gospel of St. John. Why was His side opened? Did the soldiers, perhaps, wish to assure themselves of His death, by thrusting a lance through His heart? No, for they knew already that He was dead: “But after they were come to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs;”⁵ “but one of the soldiers with a spear opened His

¹ Unusquisque prout destinavit in corde suo, non ex tristitia, aut ex necessitate: hilarem enim datorem diligit Deus.—II. Cor. ix. 7.

² Dico vobis quod ita gaudium erit in cœlo super uno peccatore penitentiam agente, quam super nonaginta novem justis, qui non indigent penitentia.—Luke xv. 7.

³ Spiritus sanctus reparet mentes nostras, quia ipse est remissio omnium peccatorum.

⁴ Unus militum lancea latus ejus aperuit.—John xix. 34.

⁵ Ad Jesum autem cum venissent, ut viderunt eum jam mortuum, non fregerunt ejus crura.—Ibid. 33.

side." Perhaps Our Lord wished thereby to signify to us His desire to suffer still more for us? No, for a dead body has no feeling, and cannot suffer. What, then, is the meaning of the mystery? There is a great difference, my dear brethren, between a wound inflicted on a living body, and that which is inflicted on a corpse. For in the living body the wound closes again in time, while no medicine or care can close the wound of a dead body. Now, the wound in the Heart of Jesus is the ever open door, always ready to admit penitent sinners, and therefore Christ wished to receive it, not while He was still living, but after the life had left His body, so that it could never be healed, and that all sinners might at all times find the door of mercy and forgiveness open to them.

Finally, God bestows this great benefit before the sinner asks for it, nay, before he even thinks of it. For God must always first move the sinner by His inspirations, in order to enable the latter to desire and ask for the grace of repentance and forgiveness. We have a beautiful example of this in the Acts of the Apostles. As St. Peter and St. John went to the temple one day, they saw sitting before the gate a man who had been a cripple from his birth. "He, when he had seen Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked to receive an alms."¹ He knew well, says St. John Chrysostom, that they were disciples of Christ, and that they had the power of working miracles; nevertheless, he did not ask them to heal him; such a thought never entered his head. He was suffering a twofold trial, poverty and lameness; and, no doubt, the latter was worse than the former, for it is better to be poor than to be a cripple. Should he not, then, have first begged to be freed from the greater evil? Certainly, if he had acted reasonably, but he did not think of that, as he was used to his lameness. Yet he got what he did not ask for, for Peter said to him: "Silver and gold I have none, but what I have I give thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise and walk; and he, leaping up, stood and walked."² What a sudden joy filled his heart at the great and unexpected benefit he received, instead of the trifling alms he had asked for. "He went with them into the temple, walking and leaping, and praising God."³ Sinner, look back on the past; did not the same

Nay, even before he thinks of it God offers him that benefit.

¹ Is cum vidisset Petrum et Joannem incipientes introire in templum, rogabat ut elemosynam acciperet.—Acts iii. 3.

² Argentum et aurum non est mihi; quod autem habeo, hoc tibi do: in nomine Jesu Christi Nazareni, surge et ambula: et exsiliens stetit et ambulabat.—Ibid. 6.

³ Intravit cum illis in templum, ambulans, et exsiliens, et laudans Deum.—Ibid. 8.

thing happen to you, as to this cripple? When you were still in the state of sin, what was the end of your desires and wishes? Ah, you were begging for a worthless alms from some creature, for a miserable and momentary carnal pleasure, for the vain esteem and good opinion of men, for some wretched gain, or for the satisfaction of your passion for this or that person. Such was your whole aim; such were the desires of your heart. And how was it, meanwhile, with your poor soul? The most important thing for you was to see that it was restored to health, freed from the miserable state in which it was, saved from hell, and placed on the right road to heaven. But you never even thought of that; your vicious habits had made you insensible to such things. Many and many a time you went into the church without feeling the least wish to ask God for the grace of repentance and conversion; nay, perhaps you studiously avoided hearing the word of God in sermons, lest your bad conscience should get alarmed and make you uneasy. You did not wish to be freed from your secret malady, for you were determined to continue in sin; nor did you dread anything so much as that the occasion of sin might desert you, that the person with whom you were indulging your unlawful passions might die or go away from you. And while your soul was actually in that state, the good and merciful God thought of your salvation, and had in readiness for you the wonderful benefit of forgiveness. The unforeseen good inspiration, the recollection of what you had heard in a sermon, the sickness that suddenly attacked you, the premature death of some dear friend, was the fore-stalling grace and the beginning of your conversion, by which God drew you to Himself, until, by true repentance, He healed your soul from its sins, rescued you from the slavery of the devil, placed you again among the number of His children, and made you an heir of the kingdom of heaven. O unequalled benefit! again exclaims St. Augustine, O infinite mercy! "Thou didst not forget us, although we forgot Thee."¹ Thou hast proffered us that great benefit even before we thought of asking it of Thee.

The sinner receives that great benefit, as it were, for nothing. Shown by an example.

And what did God ask from us in return? The strict and long-continued penance of a St. Macarius? The constant fasting of a St. Antony? The hair-cloth and the scourgings of a St. Mary Magdalene? No; He was fully satisfied with a penitent sigh, "I have sinned, I am sorry for what I have done;" with the candid confession of our misdeeds to a man like ourselves in

¹ Nos oblitus non es, cum nos obliti te fueramus.

the confessional; that was enough to induce Him to remit the guilt of our sins and the eternal punishment due to them. Hear, my dear brethren, and you especially, O sinner, who are perhaps cast down by the thought of the number of your sins, and are beginning to lose confidence in God, a remarkable occurrence that happened to a young woman, whose happy conversion is described by Cardinal James de Vitry, and also by Julius Mazarinus, as a well known fact. One cannot relate without shuddering the fearful crimes committed by this person. She entered on her wicked career by sacrificing her purity, and after that she was guilty of a twofold horrible murder. She poisoned her mother, and with her own hand cut off her father's head, for the sole reason that her parents reproached her for the wicked life she was leading. After having committed those horrible crimes, she took the best of the furniture from her home, and went away into a foreign country, where she gave herself up to a most dissolute life, forgetting God, His saints, and heaven. She had, in fact, made up her mind to go into eternal torments, and as she despaired of her salvation, she determined to deny herself no pleasure that this world could give her, since she had no hope for the next. While in this miserable state, she happened to enter a church, impelled thereto, doubtless, by her guardian angel, and, as it happened, a zealous preacher was occupied in explaining the infinite mercy of God. The poor sinner listened and heard the preacher say that there is no sin, no number of sins, no vice, so abominable, that the good God is not ready to pardon, provided that He is only humbly asked for that grace with a contrite heart, and that no man, no matter who he is, has reason to despair, for, even if he is buried in the filth of sin, he can still obtain eternal glory as long as he is in this life. These words planted the first seeds of hope in the heart of the sinful woman; but still she could hardly persuade herself that it was possible for the great and infinite God, whom she had so often and so grievously offended, to forgive her her sins and admit her to eternal happiness. Therefore, when the sermon was over, she went to the preacher, and asked him if all that he had said in the pulpit of the mercy of God was true. "Certainly," answered the priest, "there is not the least doubt of it." "And," she continued, "will God be ready to pardon me, and to give me His grace, although there is no greater sinner on earth than I am?" "By all means," was the answer; "God is always ready to do that." "Alas," she sighed out then,

“how could I have offended such a good God?” And thereupon she was filled with a lively impression of the divine mercy, and saw clearly that, for His mercy alone, God is worthy of infinite love. This thought inspired her with a deep sorrow, so that she was unable to contain herself, and burst out into sighs and tears. She confessed all her sins, and kept on crying out: “O my God, Thou art so good, and I am so ungrateful; Thou art so full of love, and I am so presumptuous; Thou wast ready to give me heaven, although I have deserved a thousand times to be buried in the depths of hell.” Thus she wept, beat her breast, and interrupted her confession by frequent and fervent acts of contrition. After having received absolution, she was unable to leave the church, for her sorrow was so great that, after having made another act of contrition, she fell dead on the ground. When her confessor heard of her sudden death, he asked his brethren in religion to pray and offer up the holy sacrifice for her soul. And behold, as they were all assembled together for that purpose, a loud voice was heard from heaven, speaking these words: “You need not pray for her, she will rather pray for you.”¹ By these words God gave them to understand that He had forgiven not only the guilt of her sins, but had also remitted all the temporal punishment due to them.

The penitent sinner, then, owes the greatest gratitude to God.

What must have been the sentiments of that soul, my dear brethren, on its first entry into heaven, after such a short penance, and after having despaired to such an extent as to look on hell as its portion forever? Oh, what praise and thanks it must have given the divine mercy! Sinners, may we not all cry out with David, “What shall I render to the Lord?”² What return can we make Him for having so often and with such readiness and willingness pardoned our sins after a short repentance on our part? Should we not leap for joy, like the lame man, and praise the divine goodness? St. Peter Damian tells us that some merchants, who were sailing on the Adriatic, once landed on an island, where they saw a lion entangled in the coils of a dragon so firmly that he could not move, nor do anything to save himself from death. The merchants, pitying the poor beast, took their swords and cut the dragon into pieces, so that the lion was able to free himself. Wonderful was the effect that gratitude for such a benefit had even on an unreasoning animal! As long as the merchants remained on the island, the lion brought them

¹ Non est opus ut oretis pro ipsa, potius ipsa orabit pro vobis.

² Quid retribuam Domino?—Ps. cxv. 12.

every day the skin of some rare animal as a present. Ah, how he puts to shame my ingratitude, and that of many others! We must acknowledge, O sinner, that, when we were in the unhappy state of sin, we were in the power of the hellish serpent, and were delivered over to eternal death. To whom do we owe our freedom, since we could not free ourselves by our own strength? And who has so often freed us? Who else but the infinitely good and merciful God? And now we can rejoice and say, with the penitent David: "Our soul hath been delivered as a sparrow out of the snare of the fowlers. The snare is broken and we are delivered." "What shall I render to the Lord?" What return shall we make our benefactor? Tell me, O sinner. I ask myself and you, too, if the just God had, as He had every right to do, taken you out of the world immediately after you had committed the last mortal sin, how many years would now have elapsed since your death? Nay, how many months, or days, perhaps? But let them be few or many, your poor soul would now be in hell, without any hope of release. Is not that the case? Now suppose, what will never be the case with any lost soul, that the merciful God had recalled you to life, and saved you from eternal torments, promising at the same time to bring you to heaven with Himself, if you would serve Him truly for a short time here on earth, how would you act towards your God? What gratitude would you not owe Him? Now, is it not precisely the same benefit He bestows on us, when He forgives our sins? For it comes to the same thing in the end. Nay, the latter is even a greater benefit, for He does not condemn us to hell, as we have deserved, but forgives us without sending us there.

O my God of infinite goodness and mercy, what do I not owe Thee? What return can I make Thee? That of never offending Thee again? But that is no better than robbers and murderers do, who spare the lives of those whom they get into their power. No, O God of love, that is too small a return for me to make. What, then, shall I do? Love Thee with all my heart? Yes, that is all I can do for Thee; and that I am determined to do, as long as I live on this earth. I will love Thee, my sovereign Benefactor, with my whole heart, above all things; with this love I will thank Thee daily for having so often forgiven my sins; and through this love I will always do Thy holy will to the best of my ability. "The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever."¹

Conclusion
and resolution
to be
always
grateful to
so good a
God.

¹ Anima nostra sicut passer erepta est de laqueo venantium: laqueus contritus est, et nos liberati sumus.—Ps. cxxiii. 7.

² Misericordias Domini in æternum cantabo.—Ps. lxxxviii. 2.

FORTY-SEVENTH SERMON.

**ON THE GOODNESS OF GOD TOWARDS THE PENITENT, AFTER
THE LATTER HAS BEEN CONVERTED.**

Subject.

After the conversion of the sinner, 1. God forgets forever all his sins; 2. and promises him His friendship and still more abundant graces.—*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.

If I had lived in the time of Our Lord, and had not then been a sinner, as I now am, for I acknowledge publicly that I am in the greatest need of the sovereign mercy of God, I should perhaps have murmured with the Pharisees, and shown how displeased I was to see Christ so intimate with notorious sinners. At least, I should have said to myself, what is the meaning of this? If the Lord is so merciful and so ready to forgive, He ought to wait till sinners humble themselves and repent, before receiving them. Why does He make so much of them? There is no necessity for Him to go into their houses, to seek them out everywhere, to eat and drink with them. “This man receiveth sinners;” that is excusable; but He “eateth with them,” too. How can we explain that? Is not that protecting, encouraging, and, as it were, supporting impiety? So I would perhaps have thought at the time. But now I thank Thee, O God of infinite, incomprehensible mercy; and if Thy mercy were not so great, what would have become of me long ago? Infinite thanks do I give, O God, for Thy mercy, which I cannot sufficiently praise, but which I will never cease praising, blessing, and declaring. My dear brethren, I have already spoken of this mercy, and have shown how great it is to the sinner while the latter is actually in the state of sin, and how wonderfully great it is to the repentant sinner. We have still one more point to consider; and that is the surprising goodness and mercy of God to the sinner who has done penance; and that will be the subject of

this sermon, to the eternal praise and glory of the divine mercy, and for the consolation of all those who have offended God grievously and have repented. St. Augustine supplies me with the division of my sermon; “when sinners are converted,” he says, “the past is forgotten, and future rewards are promised.”¹

Plan of Discourse.

God forgets forever all sins that have been committed; a wonderful effect of His goodness, as we shall see in the first part. He promises the sinner His favor and friendship and still more copious graces; a still more wonderful effect of His goodness, as will be explained in the second part. Innocent and pious souls, continue in your innocence. Sinners who are still in the state of sin, begin at once to repent. And all you others, who have already done penance for your sins, be all the more diligent in serving and loving, above all things, such a good, merciful, and loving God. Such shall be the conclusion.

Give us all, O merciful Saviour, the grace to practise it; we ask it of Thee through the Mother of mercy and through the intercession of our holy guardian angels.

To speak according to our way of thinking, it is a matter of surprise that the great God, who is not at all in need of our service, and who is perfectly happy in Himself, should by any possibility look with an eye of favor on him who has offended Him by mortal sin, even after the sinner has done penance. What labor and trouble it costs to reconcile two men who have been bitter enemies! And even when they are outwardly reconciled, and have given each other the hand in sign of friendship, and assured each other of forgiveness, yet it is very difficult to restore their former friendship and to establish a mutual confidence between them. Some secret spite will still remain in their hearts and will show itself now and then, notwithstanding all their protestations of friendship. And no wonder; for, as iron, when it has been cleaned, easily contracts its former stain of rust, and as a smouldering fire-brand easily bursts forth into a flame, so in the hearts of those who have once been hostile to each other there still remain the smouldering embers of their former hatred, even after they have been reconciled. At all events, grievous offences are seldom so completely forgotten that the recollection of them does not now and then cause a feeling of bitterness to arise in the heart. I appeal to all of you in testimony of the truth of this.

It is hard for men to forget an injury altogether.

¹ Quodocunque conversi fuerint, præterita obliviscitur, futura promittit.

And therefore the most difficult part of the Christian law, which the pagans thought it impossible to fulfil, is that which commands us to forgive our enemies from our hearts, to do good to them, and to love them; and that is a law which every Christian who wishes to save his soul must observe, according to the example and express command of Our Lord Jesus Christ: "But I say to you, love your enemies; do good to them that hate you."¹

Hence, they who do so are seldom to be found and are worthy of admiration.

The world wonders at men who fulfil this command exactly, as if they had performed a miracle. If we wish to extol the greatness of David's character, we do not represent him in his shepherd's cloak, with a sling in his hand, conquering the giant Goliath; nor slaying with his own hand the lion and the bear that attacked his flock; but we go in thought to the cave in which he had in his power Saul, his sworn enemy, who was actually then persecuting him, and who had already inflicted countless injuries on him, whom, nevertheless, he allowed to go scot-free, without doing him the least harm. And if we wish to show his greatness in a still stronger light, we represent him as forgetting the injuries he had received so completely, that when he heard of the death of his enemy Saul, he wept with grief, and rent his garments, and caused the messenger, who had brought him the sad news, and who thought to gain his favor thereby, to be put to death. Yet, as long as Saul was alive, David never ventured to appear in his presence, although Saul, with tears in his eyes, had promised to be his friend. Meek as David was, and readily as he forgave the insolence of Semei, who had insulted him, yet he could not forget the insult, and when he was on his death-bed (doubtless through a divine inspiration, that the sin of Semei might not go unpunished), he commanded his son Solomon, amongst other things, not to forget, when he came into power, to avenge him on Semei. There is, said he, a man named Semei, "who cursed me with a grievous curse, when I went to the camp . . . and I swore to him by the Lord, saying: I will not kill thee with the sword;" but when I am dead, do not allow his wickedness to go unpunished: "Do not thou hold him guiltless. But thou art a wise man, and knowest what to do with him, and thou shalt bring down his gray hairs with blood to the grave."²

¹ Ego autem dico vobis: diligite inimicos vestros; benefacite his qui oderunt vos.—Matt. v. 44.

² Qui maledixit mihi maledictione pessima, quando ibam ad castra: juravi ei per Dominum, dicens: non te interficiam gladio: tu noli pati eum esse innoxium. Vir autem sapiens es, ut scias quae facies ei, deducesque canos ejus cum sanguine ad inferos.—III. Kings ii. 8, 9.

So rare and difficult a thing it is, my dear brethren, completely to forget and pardon a grievous injury. And true, too, are the words of St. Augustine, "men never pardon fully,"¹ although they are offended by one like themselves.

O great God, how far more gracious and good Thou art to us ! How much more ready to forgive, and how much more complete is Thy forgiveness! I, a poor worm of the earth, may have dared to rebel against Thee, my sovereign Lord; I may have despised Thee to Thy very face, trampled Thy law under foot, and said to Thee, "I will not serve;" I will not do what Thou hast commanded; I may have done that ten, twenty, a hundred, a thousand, nay, many thousand times, until my sins have surpassed in number the hairs of my head; although Thou hast never given me the least cause to offend Thee; although hevery moment of my life I have enjoyed Thy benefits, and have had cause to love Thee above all things with my whole heart. After I had treated Thee so unbecomingly, hadst Thou not just reason to cast me away from Thy sight forever, and to hate me as Thy irreconcilable enemy? Certainly, O Lord, I acknowledge it. If I had offered a mere mortal the tenth, the twentieth, the fiftieth part of the injuries I have offered Thee, I would never have the least hope of again recovering his favor. And Thou (O good God, who could believe it, if I and many others had not had experience of it?), Thou, O God, who in Thy infinite wisdom must necessarily know all things at once, from whom nothing can be concealed, when, after having insulted Thee in countless ways and most grievously, I sigh forth for a moment from the depths of my heart, "I have sinned; I am sorry for what I have done;" and make also a firm resolution of confessing my sins, Thou receivest me again as fully into Thy friendship and love as if I had never offended Thee in the least; I again become Thy dear child, as I was when I was still innocent; nor have I any reason to fear that Thou wilt remember my presumption, or reproach me with my ingratitude, or withdraw Thy favor from me on account of it. Nay, I need not fear that Thou wilt ever remember my sins for all eternity; everything is as completely forgotten and buried as if it had never existed.

After repentance, God forgets even the greatest injuries forever, as completely as if they never had been offered Him.

I cannot, O Lord, see into Thy heart and Thy memory; but Thou hast assured me of this on Thy own infallible word, not in one merely, but in many passages of Thy Holy Scripture; so that I cannot doubt the truth of it without being untrue to Thee

Shown from Scripture.

¹ *Apud homines nunquam plena est indulgentia.*

and to my faith. "He will have mercy on us," Thou assurest us by Thy Prophet Michæas; "He will put away our iniquities, and He will cast all our sins into the bottom of the sea,"¹ like a heavy stone, so that they will never more come to the surface. "I have blotted out thy iniquities as a cloud, and thy sins as a mist,"² Thou sayest by Thy Prophet Isaias; Thou destroyest sins as a cloud is dissipated by the heat of the sun. "Give praise, O ye heavens, for the Lord hath shown mercy."³ "I will bring them back again, because I will have mercy on them," are Thy words to me by the Prophet Zachary; "and they shall be as they were when I had not cast them off . . . and their heart shall rejoice as through wine: and their children shall see and shall rejoice, and their hearts shall be joyful in the Lord, and I will multiply them as they were multiplied before,"⁴ in order to show that I do not bear the least enmity towards them on account of their past sins. Still clearer dost Thou speak by the Prophet Ezechiel: "But if the wicked do penance for all his sins, which he hath committed, I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done."⁵

He never
upbraids
the sinner
with sins
repented of.

And in fact, my dear brethren, if you read the Holy Scripture, you will find countless examples of sinners whom the Almighty has forgiven the most grievous sins, on their doing penance. In some cases you will see that, after having forgiven the guilt of sin, the Lord has sent temporal calamities and afflictions, in order to help the sinner to satisfy in this life for what he owed the divine justice; but you will not be able to point out a single instance in which the good God ever reproached a sinner with the sins He had forgiven. Magdalene was buried in sin, and was a public sinner; Matthew was a usurer; Peter denied his Master; Thomas was an obstinate unbeliever, as you may see in the New Testament; but did Christ, after having forgiven them, ever utter the least reproach on account of their former transgressions? No; not the slightest sign of displeasure ever escaped His lips on that account. And when our meek

¹ Miserebitur nostri; deponet iniquitates nostras, et projiciet in profundum maris omnia peccata nostra.—Mich. vii. 19.

² Delevi ut nubem iniquitates tuas, et quasi nebulam peccata tua.—Isa. xlv. 22.

³ Laudate cœli; quoniam misericordiam fecit Dominus.—Ibid. 23.

⁴ Convertam eos, quia miserebor eorum; et erunt, sicut fuerunt, quando non projeceram eos; et lætabitur cor eorum, quasi a vino; et filii eorum videbunt, et lætabuntur, et exultabit cor eorum in Domino. Et multiplicabo eos, sicut ante fuerant multiplicati.—Zach. x. 6, 7, 8.

⁵ Si autem impius egerit poenitentiam ab omnibus peccatis suis quæ operatus est . . . omnium iniquitatum ejus, quas operatus est, non recordabor.—Ezech. xviii. 21, 22.

Lord wished to reprove the city of Jerusalem, what words did He use? "Jerusalem, Jerusalem," He sighed, "thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee."¹ And had not many prophets been slain in Jerusalem, before Our Lord's time? Certainly. Why, then, did He not say: "thou who hast killed the prophets, and still dost continue to kill them? No, says a certain author; Our Lord did not wish to say anything of past misdeeds, in order to show that what He has once forgiven is forgiven forever and forgotten. And therefore theologians teach that if a man falls into sin, after doing penance, and is lost forever, the sins of which he repented will not be reckoned against him. "I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done."

Yes; instead of secret spite and displeasure on account of my past sins, there arises in the divine heart a joy and satisfaction on my account, all the greater in proportion to the number and malice of my sins. Nor does this require any proof. To-day's gospel makes it clear enough. How the shepherd rejoiced when he found the lost sheep and brought it home on his shoulders! How the woman exulted after having found the groat she had lost! And in order to show their joy, they both called in their neighbors, and said to them: "Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep, the groat which I had lost." "And I say to you," adds Our Lord, "that even so there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance." I can easily understand the reason of this, my dear brethren, if I do not look at the matter according to the usual way of the world; for the world judges far differently of such things; the more grievous the offence, the more bitter and inveterate the hatred it gives rise to. But when I consider the examples of the saints I can understand to a certain extent how the almighty God rejoices at the conversion of the sinner. For I read of zealous missionaries undergoing the greatest privations and labors, in the midst of relentless persecutions, deprived of the very necessaries of life, and yet filled with heavenly joy and consolation at the conversion of even one sinner. St. Francis Xavier, St. Bernardine of Siena, and St. Vincent Ferrer used to shed tears of joy when in the confessional; they called it a paradise, on account of the great consolation and almost sensible delight they experienced in it, when great sinners came to repent of and confess their sins.

Nay, He is all the more rejoiced at the conversion of the sinner.

¹ Jerusalem, Jerusalem, quæ occidis prophetas, et lapidas eos qui ad te missi sunt.—
Mat. xxiii. 37.

Our holy founder, St. Ignatius, commanded all the members of the Society whom he sent on missions to write every month to him an account of the number of sinners they converted, of the confessions they heard, and of the heretics and infidels whom they brought to the true faith. He used to read those letters with a glowing countenance, his eyes filled with tears, and they caused him such joy that he could not sleep the whole night after having read them. And when I remember what joy and consolation I myself have experienced, whenever I have had the happiness of giving absolution to a great and repentant sinner, I come to the following conclusion: missionaries, parochial clergy, preachers, and confessors are, after all, but instruments that the almighty God makes use of for the conversion of sinners; and if they feel such an indescribable joy when great sinners return to God, what joy and consolation must not Jesus Christ Himself have? For it is He who is the chief cause of their conversion; He it is who has shed His precious Blood for their souls, and has purchased them by His death on the cross; He it is who calls them His sheep, His brothers and sisters, His dear children, His crown and glory. Truly, there will be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance. And therefore Christ fills His instruments and helpers in the conversion of sinners with a heavenly joy, just as the shepherd in the Gospel calls in his friends to rejoice with him.

And for this reason alone sinners should repent.

O sinner, see how loving the great God is, although He is not at all in need of your service, and you act so ungratefully towards Him. Provided only you repent sincerely, He is ready to forget the insults you have offered Him, and to change His anger into joy and gladness, although, if you are insulted by a man like yourself, it costs you an effort to forgive him. Should not this incomprehensible meekness and goodness of God move you to speedy repentance and amendment of your vicious life? But there is another circumstance, that is still more to be wondered at. Not only does the great God forget forever all your sins after you have repented of them; not only does He lay aside all hatred and anger against you on their account; not only does He rejoice with His angels in heaven at your return; but, in addition to all that, He will take more care of you in future, give you more copious graces, and show you more love and favor, as I shall prove in the

Second Part.

When a physician has succeeded in curing his patient, the more dangerous the latter's illness has been, the more careful is the physician in future. He often visits the convalescent man, asks about his health, and if there is the least thing wrong with him he employs every means that his art supplies him with to restore him to perfect health, while his favorite topic of conversation is the successful cure he has accomplished. Why so? Because his fame and reputation are much increased by the skill he has shown in a difficult case, so that the sick man can say, after God, I owe my recovery to the doctor, who rescued me almost from the jaws of death. A gardener acts in the same way. If he succeeds in bringing round a plant or a tree that was wholly unproductive, and was almost dried up, he sets more store by it than by all the other trees in the garden; he goes to it every day; looks at it; prunes it; waters it, as if his whole business was to care for that tree alone, while every visitor that comes to the garden he brings to look at it; see, he says to them, that tree has cost me trouble enough to make it worth anything; a short time ago no one would have given a farthing for it, and now, see what a fine tree it is! Thus every one is inclined to set a high value on that which has cost him a good deal of trouble.

What costs much trouble to procure is highly valued. Shown by similes.

What was the sinner, my dear brethren, before he did penance? A sick man, nay, as far as his soul was concerned, a dead man, who was on the very brink of hell; he was an unfruitful, withered, worthless tree, that could only bring forth bad and corrupt fruit; he was one of those of whom St. John the Baptist said to the Pharisees: "For now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree, therefore, that doth not yield good fruit, shall be cut down and cast into the fire."¹ Now the sick man is restored to health; the tree is in full blossom; but what labor and skill the almighty God had to employ before he brought matters to such a pitch! How many inspirations it took; how many exhortations, and interior warnings. How the Lord was forced to disturb the sinner's conscience either by Himself, or by His angels, or preachers and confessors, before bringing him to see the unhappy state in which he was, so as to induce him to repent. Can we imagine that God would be satisfied to spend such an amount of trouble and labor in vain, or that it is a matter of indifference to Him what is the result of

God values the penitent highly, because his conversion cost so much.

¹ Jam enim securis ad radicem arborum posita est. Omnia ergo arbor, quæ non fecit fructum bonum, excidetur, et in ignem mittetur.—Matt. iii. 10.

it? I rather think that He would place His glory in pointing to and preserving such a wonderful work of His mercy and power; for, as Tertullian says, "He will value more highly him whom He has won with great trouble."¹ He will help him by more copious graces, and strengthen and protect him in temptations, that he may not fall so easily into sin. He will make him more careful and humble by the knowledge of his weakness, and will urge him to greater zeal by the recollection of his past sins. "It frequently happens," says St. Gregory, "that they who were formerly great sinners, when they become converted to God by sincere repentance, are much more zealous in the divine service, and become holier than many others who never lost their innocence."²

And re-
gards him
with as
much fa-
vor and
love, as He
does the
innocent.

With regard to the special favor and love that God shows towards such sinners, we rarely find anything like it amongst men. A father is always more affectionate to the child who has always been obedient and dutiful than to one who has been the source of trouble and annoyance to him. The sovereign shows more favor to those of his subjects who have always been loyal, than to those who have been rebellious; the latter he constantly keeps in subjection. "But it is not so with Our Lord and God," continues St. Gregory; "even the greatest sinner, if, after his conversion, he loves God with a love equal to that with which one who has been always innocent loves Him, will receive from God the same love, grace, and friendship in return, as He bestows on one who has never grievously offended him. He receives penitents as He does the just;"³ and He gives His gifts and graces to the one as to the other.

Shown by
examples.

If we compare those saints who were always innocent with those who were formerly sinners we shall see at once that such is the case. Josue, a just and innocent man, was able to command the sun to stand still, in order that he might finish the overthrow of his enemies, and, as the Holy Scripture says, God obeyed the voice of man: "And the sun and the moon stood still till the people revenged themselves of their enemies. . . . So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down the space of one day . . . the Lord obeying the voice of a man."⁴ Certainly a great favor on the part of God towards

¹ *Cariores sentiet, quem lucrificet.*

² *Sape ferventiores penitentes innocentibus.*

³ *Sic recipit penitentes sicut justos.*

⁴ *Steteruntque sol et luna, donec ulcisceretur gens de inimicis suis. Stetit itaque sol in medio caeli, et non festinavit occumbere spatio unius diei: obediente Domino voci hominis.*
—*Jos. x. 13, 14.*

His faithful servant. But open, ye deserts, and show us a murderer and highway robber, to whom God showed the same favor, after he had done penance for his sins and become a saint. This was Mutius, at whose command the sun also stood still, and that, too, under far less important circumstances than the victory of Josue, for he wished to reach, before sunset, the place to which his superior had sent him. The innocent and holy Elias had the rain, as it were, at his command; the elements were bound to obey him; but not less was the power of James the Hermit, who had committed a horrible sin in the desert, and then killed his accomplice. The innocent Daniel walked about among the fierce lions, as if they were tame dogs; but William of Aquitaine, who had been a persecutor and profaner of the Church of God, had equal command over wild beasts. If I am surprised that the innocent and holy Apostle St. John came unhurt out of the caldron of boiling oil, I am still more astonished to find St. Boniface, a penitent sinner, performing just the same miracle. How often did not Mary of Egypt, that notorious and public sinner, walk on the water after her conversion, like the innocent St. Raymond? She lived for many years without taking any nourishment, like the innocent Catherine of Siena. Time does not permit me to bring forward other similar examples of saints. Thus God receives penitent sinners as He does the just, and fulfils the promise He makes by the prophet Ezechiel: "The wickedness of the wicked shall not hurt him, in what day soever he shall turn from his wickedness."¹ O sinner, what a consolation for you and me, provided only we have a good will to be true to such a good God!

But what am I saying? I am placing innocent and penitent saints on the same level. And yet I find that there are not a few of the latter who have enjoyed the favor and grace of God in a far higher degree than the former. Who was appointed by Jesus Christ as the chief of His apostles and His Vicar on earth? Was it the innocent James or John? By no means; he who was appointed to that office was one who three times denied his Lord with an oath. Was not Paul, who was before an enemy and persecutor of Jesus Christ, that chosen vessel of God, who did more than any one else to spread God's honor and glory among the Gentiles, and convert souls? In the same way, it was not John, he that stood faithfully at the foot of the cross

Nay, generally He gives them more graces than to the innocent.

¹ Impietas impii non nocebit ei, in quacumque die conversus fuerit ab impietate sua.—Ezech. xxxiii. 12.

until Our Lord's death, who first among the disciples had the happiness and consolation of seeing Our Lord after His resurrection, but Peter, who had reason to weep so bitterly for his sin. Not Martha, but the penitent Mary Magdalene sat at the feet of Christ and heard His salutary doctrine; and she is the only woman mentioned in the holy Scripture to whom He appeared after His resurrection. And what wonderful graces God bestowed on St. Augustine, who had before been such a great sinner! And what good does He not still do in His Church by men whom He has drawn out of the mire; that is, by those whom, if we could see into their consciences, we should find to have committed many a grievous sin in their past lives.

Shown by
an exam-
ple.

Father Ambrose Cataneus of our Society, in his book called "Eternal Principles," relates the following incident of a sinner: A priest had been imprisoned in Castile, who was accused of the most enormous crimes, and was a very monster of wickedness of all sorts. Besides being a renegade from two religious Orders, he had been also the notorious leader and chief mover in the commission of certain crimes that cry to heaven for vengeance. While he was in prison he heard from a Jesuit priest who had come to see him of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, and got the idea into his head that it would be a good thing to see what they were like. He began at once, and the first meditation inspired him with such a horror of himself and of the sins he had committed, that he was completely taken up with the idea of doing penance and amending his life. Acting on the sudden zeal he had thus conceived, he put on a rough hair-shirt, scourged himself to blood every night, fasted on bread and water, and made a general confession of his whole life, shedding copious tears all the while. He made, moreover, the firm resolution not to do anything to evade the punishment he had so richly merited at the hands of human justice, nor to try to lessen it; for he knew well that, however painful or disgraceful the death he had to undergo, it would not be more than he had deserved. Truly, a most surprising grace for such a sinner to receive! But the goodness of God was not content with this; He was not satisfied with giving him the grace to repent in such a wonderful manner, but He even made use of him to convert others. The penitent sinner persevered in his pious exercises for the remaining months he spent in prison, and, besides, he preached every day most zealously to the other prisoners, as well as to the jailors; and at last, by his example and preaching, he

changed the prison into a house of prayer, so that nothing was heard therein but rosaries, litanies, and other prayers, which the prisoners said or sang in choir. The blasphemies and curses that used to form the morning and evening devotions of the place, were heard no longer. When the news of the conversion of a man who was so generally known and execrated became public in the town, many of the principal inhabitants visited the prison, in order to see this miracle of grace, and to hear this new St. Paul preaching in chains. And they all went away with tears of contrition in their eyes, and their hearts full of sorrow for their sins. In a word, the change that took place in that penitent was great and so complete that the judge came to the resolution of sparing his life, and appointing him chaplain to the prison; but the penitent priest, when he heard this, begged as earnestly that he should be degraded from his sacred office and put to a shameful death, as others would beg to be freed from a similar punishment. Finally the judge sent him to the galleys, that he might be of service to those who were sentenced to that punishment; and there the penitent was seized by such a virulent fever, that it carried him off in a few days. Thus one of the worst criminals the world ever saw died a most holy death, like one of those great saints who spend their lives in the service of God, and he left this world, shedding tears of contrition, with a cheerful countenance, an easy conscience, and sending up aspirations of love and desire to God and heaven. "But," some one asked him, as he lay on his death-bed, "do not your former sins make you uneasy?" "Not at all," he answered; "for I have laid them all on the shoulders of our dear Lord." "Does not the devil tempt you severely?" "Certainly, he does, but my God is with me, He comforts and protects me, so that I have nothing to fear." "And do you think, then, that you will go to heaven?" "I firmly hope and trust to see my God there; the penitent thief gained heaven; he is my patron after Christ and my Mother Mary, for I was like to him in wickedness, and likely enough I surpassed him." Thus, amid the greatest consolations and the most zealous practice of the highest virtues, this former apostate and monster of vice, who in a few days had been transformed from a sinner into a saint, departed peacefully out of this world. Could any innocent servant of God have expected greater graces during life, or more consolation at the hour of death?

But, O my God, cannot, then, Thy faithful and innocent ser- The innoc-

cent most
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should love
the mercif-
ul God all
the more.

vants have a holy envy at seeing that Thou givest more grace and showest more favor and love, so to speak, to sinners, than to them? Might they not complain, like the son in the Gospel, when he saw his prodigal brother so well received by his father on his return? What is the meaning of this? he said to himself, full of indignation: "And he was angry, and would not go in. Behold, for so many years do I serve thee, and I have never transgressed thy commandment, and yet thou hast never given me a kid to make merry with my friends. But as soon as this thy son is come, who hath devoured his substance with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf."¹ Every one is rejoicing at the return of the undutiful son. Is that right? But no, O good God, I do not complain of Thy mercy to sinners; if I did, I should injure my own interests! And you, too, pious, just, and innocent souls, you must be satisfied also, and should rather praise the infinite goodness and mercy of God, who is ready to receive even the worst sinner, and to save him from hell. And for that very reason you should continue to serve in your state of innocence your God, who is so worthy of love. One day you will be amongst those beloved children of His, to whom He will say, to their eternal consolation, what the father of the prodigal said to his discontented son: "Son, thou art always with me, and all I have is thine."² Thou hast always served Me faithfully, and therefore My heaven and all its joys shall be thine forever.

Conclusion
and exhor-
tation to
sinners to
repent at
once.

But you, O sinners, who have perhaps been frightened from doing penance by the number and magnitude of your sins, what are your thoughts when you consider this mercy of God? Ah, I exhort you in the words of the Wise Man: "Think of the Lord in goodness, and seek Him in simplicity of heart."³ Let your thoughts of Him be such as are becoming His infinite goodness and mercy. Even if you have all the sins of the world on your conscience, approach with confidence, do not let fear or shame keep you back; His arms are always open to receive you as His dear children, and to treat you with all the more love and goodness, as you were more ungrateful and wicked towards Him in the past. Sinners, no matter how hard-hearted

¹ Indignatus est autem, et nolebat introire. Ecce tot annis servo tibi, et nunquam mandatum tuum præterivi, et nunquam dedisti mihi hædum, ut cum amicis meis epularer. Sed postquam filius tuus hic, qui devoravit substantiam suam cum meretricibus, venit, occidisti illi vitulum saginatum. — Luke xv. 28-30.

² Fili, tu semper mecum es, et omnia mea tua sunt. — Ibid. 31.

³ Sentite de Domino in bonitate, et in simplicitate cordis quærite illum. — Wisd. i. 1.

you are, if any such are here present, does not the consideration of this wonderful mercy of God soften your hearts, and move you to repent? How unjustly and ungratefully you would act if you still continued to sin, simply because God is so good and so ready to receive you if you repent. It is looked on as infamous to insult one because he will not defend himself, but rather return good for evil. But woe to you if you abuse the goodness of God too long, and so change His patience into anger! Therefore do not delay repentance. "To-day, if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts." 1

And last of all, you penitent souls, for whom this sermon is chiefly intended, you who must acknowledge in your hearts that you have often grievously offended your God, but that now, through His goodness and mercy, you are freed from the miserable state of sin and are reckoned amongst the number of His children, when you think of how matters stand with you, you must confess that God has been as good and loving towards you as if you had never provoked His anger in the least, and therefore you must not forget the gratitude, honor, and love you owe your most merciful God. For, does He not deserve that you should be so careful in His service in future, that you will never more offend Him by the least sin? Does He not deserve that you should serve Him all the more zealously till the end of your lives, the more you acknowledge that you have offended Him in the past? I am not surprised that Magdalene wept almost continually for thirty years, although she had no reason to doubt that her sins were forgiven. I am not astonished that St. Peter could hardly be consoled, whenever he remembered his denial of his Master, although he was certain that his sin was remitted by Our Lord. Truly, the thought that one has ever been unfaithful to such a good God, who is ready to receive the penitent with fatherly kindness, and so completely to forget the injuries offered Him, that the only revenge He takes is to bestow still more benefits on the offender, this thought should soften even the hardest heart, and move it to love. And I, O Lord, am one of the hard-hearted! I have spoken in order to convince others of the greatness of Thy mercy, and I have spoken in Thy name, who wishest Thy mercy to be exalted and praised above all Thy works. As for myself, I should not require so many words to prove to myself that Thou art merciful; for I know it by experience, and I still feel the effects of it every day. Thou, O Lord,

To repentant sinners to serve God more zealously.

knowest how I have acted towards Thee. I have experienced and still experience the great graces and favors Thou bestowest even on one who has offended Thee so often. Shall I not, then, love thee, O God of meekness and goodness? Shall I not serve Thee with my whole heart? Certainly, if I did not, I should deserve a thousand hells. Therefore I will love Thee, O my God, and will constantly praise Thee to my last breath. "The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever." Amen.

Another Introduction to the same Sermon for the Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost.

Text.

Reddite ergo quæ sunt Dei, Deo.—Matt. xxii. 21.

"Render therefore to God the things that are God's."

Introduction.

Must we then, O Lord, give to Thee what is Thine? Truly, it will not take us long to find out what belongs to Thee! For, body and soul and all that we have is Thine. We are literally composed of benefits, which we receive from Thy liberal and merciful hands every moment of our lives. As to the goods of nature, Thou hast created us out of nothing, and kept us in life by Thy almighty power. As to the goods of grace, Thou hast cleansed us in holy baptism from the sin in which we were born, and hast adopted us as Thy children. And when we, by the sins we committed, treated Thee most contemptuously, and rejected that first grace, Thy mercy has again received us in the sacrament of penance to Thy favor and friendship. But what is most wonderful of all, Thou still continuest to enrich us with countless benefits, as if we had never done the least thing to displease Thee. O my Lord and my God, what are we to think of Thee? If we have to render to Thee the things that are Thine, then we must say in all humility, here I am, O Lord, body and soul; for all I have is Thine. Such is the case, my dear brethren; everything we have is a benefit we receive from God. On a future occasion we shall speak more at length of the countless benefits that God has bestowed on us; and I have already explained how good God is to pardon us our sins so often in the sacrament of penance and to re-admit us to His grace. Now I shall call your attention to the still more wonderful goodness that God shows us after we have done penance and have been converted to Him; to the eternal praise and glory, etc.—*Continues as above.*

FORTY-EIGHTH SERMON.

ON CONSTANT SORROW FOR OUR PAST SINS.

Subject.

With good reason should our sorrow for sin last our whole lives.—*Preached on the feast of SS. Peter and Paul.*

Text.

Tibi dabo claves regni cælorum.—Matt. xvi. 19.

“I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.”

Introduction.

A rich man who entrusts the care of his property to another and gives him over the keys of his room and coffers, is very careful in the selection of the person in whom he reposes such confidence; not even for half a day would any one give his keys to an utter stranger, through a well-grounded fear that the latter might betray him. He must be one whose honesty is well-known, so that his master can safely rely on him. My dear brethren, Jesus Christ, before dying for us men, sought out among His apostles one whom He was to make His plenipotentiary on earth, to whom He was to entrust all His property, that is, the Church founded by Him, and to whom He was to give the keys of the kingdom of heaven, that he might open it to men, or shut it against them, according to circumstances. And whom did He make choice of? Peter was elected to that office in preference to all the others: “I say to thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven.” But, I ask, was Peter the right man for that office? Could Our Lord rely sufficiently on his fidelity? Did He not know beforehand, by His infinite wisdom, how Peter would act; how shamefully he would deny Him three times with an oath? Was that a proof of fidelity on his part? Would not John, the beloved disciple, have been better fitted for such an office? For he, as Our Lord foreknew, was to follow his divine Master faithfully even to the cross, and publicly to testify his fidelity at the

very foot of the cross. No; Peter was the chosen one. "I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." It is true that Our Lord knew that Peter would deny Him three times; but He also knew that he would repent most sincerely, and would shed bitter tears for the sin he thus committed; nay, that during his whole life, whenever he heard the cock crow, his tears would flow in remembrance of his denial. And so, thought Our Lord, if Peter will be once unfaithful to Me, and sin thereby, he will rise again, do penance, and serve Me with all the more zeal in future. Therefore, Peter, "I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." From this, my dear brethren, we can derive three lessons of the greatest advantage to our souls: one, to our consolation and encouragement, as far as our past lives are concerned; another, to our instruction, as far as the present is concerned; and a third, to teach us how to act in future. In the first place, Christ chose Peter as His vicar on earth, although He foresaw his grievous fall. From which we can learn the wonderful goodness and mercy of God towards the penitent sinner, against whom He not only bears no hatred on account of past sins, but whom He even enriches with more copious graces and marks of His favor. What a great consolation for us, if we have sinned grievously in the past, and have done penance! In the second place, Peter sinned, but at a look from Christ he saw his fault and at once did penance for it: "And going forth he wept bitterly."¹ Sinners, who have imitated Peter in grievously offending your God, imitate him also in his penance; repent of your sins and confess them at once, and that, too, this very day; do not wait till to-morrow. Finally, Peter wept for his sin, not only once, but even after Christ had assured him of forgiveness; whenever he thought of what he had done, he wept bitterly, even to the last day of his life. From this we must all learn not to be satisfied with repenting of our sins once merely; but, after the example of St. Peter, to be sorry for them our whole lives long. And it is this last point which I now wish to develop, to the honor of the holy prince of the apostles and to the salvation of our souls.

Plan of Discourse.

With good reason should our sorrow for sin last our whole lives. Such is the whole subject of to-day's sermon. In the conclusion,

¹ Et egressus foras, flevit amare.—Matt. xxvi. 75.

we shall see how to keep up this sorrow with little trouble, and to the consolation of our souls.

Christ Jesus, we beg of Thee, through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels, to urge all penitent Christians thereto by Thy grace.

He who has met with a great misfortune, that has reduced him to a state of misery, is not satisfied with the tears and complaints with which he has bewailed his condition; his sorrow lasts as long as his misery, and is renewed as often as he remembers the unfortunate occasion of it; and that goes on until he is completely freed from it, especially if it has been brought on by his own fault. For instance, a rich merchant has through his own negligence incurred a considerable loss, which reduces himself and his family to poverty. A mother, in a fit of passion, beats her beloved child so severely, that it becomes lame and is a cripple. Both these people never cease bewailing, the one, his carelessness, the other, her anger. When his wife and children cry out for bread, alas, thinks the merchant, with sorrow at his heart, what have I done? I am the cause of this poverty. We were so well off before, and had everything in abundance; now I am hardly able to buy enough bread to keep me and mine from starving. Accursed be my sloth! Why did I not look after my affairs better? Whenever the mother sees the lame child trying to hobble about on crutches, alas, she sighs, her heart pierced with sorrow, I am the cause of my poor child's misery! I have treated him so cruelly that he is now unable to walk. Wretch that I am! why did I not conquer my anger? Both are inconsolable, nor will they cease bewailing their state, until the child is healed, and the merchant has recovered what he has lost; and even then the remembrance of the misery they brought on themselves will still cause them sorrow. Is not that so, my dear brethren?

He who has fallen into misery through his own fault is filled with regret whenever he thinks of it.

Now, O man, if you have committed even one sin by a wilful bad desire during your whole life, have you ever maturely considered what you have done, and into what a miserable, lamentable and unhappy state you have plunged yourself of your own free will? You have in a moment, as far as the matter depended on yourself, forfeited all your treasures and riches, all the gifts, graces, and merits that you had hitherto gained. You have, in order to satisfy your evil desire, not only lamed and crippled your own beloved son, that is, your precious, immortal

He who sins mortally plunges himself wilfully into the greatest misery.

soul, redeemed by the blood of Christ; but you have actually murdered it, and condemned it to eternal death among the demons in hell. I will say nothing more now of the other manifold injuries you have done yourself. Ah, unhappy man, what have you done? Where are your tears, when you think of it? Where are your contrition, and sorrow, and repentance? If you wept tears of blood, would it be too much for you to do? Nay, would it be enough, when you recall your perversity and the harm it has done you?

And is not
sure that his
sins are for-
given.

But, you think, I have settled all that already; I have told my sins in confession and performed the penance enjoined on me, so that everything is in good order again; the fire of hell is as good as extinguished, as far as I am concerned; my soul is again living; I have recovered all my losses; I am again a dear child of God and a lawful heir of the kingdom of heaven. Ah, if you only could be sure of that! Has any one given you a document to prove it? You know very well that you have sinned grievously; but are you equally certain that God has forgiven you? You remember what a mistake Joab and Semei made in imagining that David had forgiven them? Joab was guilty of having treacherously murdered two princes, Amasa and Abner, and, besides, he struck three lances through the heart of Absalom, the unhappy son of David, in spite of David's earnest warnings to spare his life. But as he had been able to render some important services to David after committing that crime, he thought that the king would forget what he had done, and forgive him for it. Semei had also grossly offended David by throwing stones at and insulting him. Some time after, when the latter returned to Jerusalem, Semei came to him and helped him to cross the Jordan, as a reward for which service the king spared his life and left him at liberty. And the king said to Semei: "Thou shalt not die."¹ This made Semei think that he had nothing more to fear on account of his former misdeeds. But both he and Joab were grievously mistaken. A few years later, in accordance with the dying injunction of David to his son Solomon, they were both put to death; and when they heard their sentence pronounced, they saw too late that they had deceived themselves in imagining that they had been fully pardoned. If they had believed that they were still in disgrace, they would doubtless have endeavored to appease the king's anger by doing zealous service for him, and gaining powerful

¹ Ait rex Semei: non morieris.—II. Kings xix. 23.

patrons to intercede for them. But as they falsely imagined they were still in favor, they neglected all these precautions, and at last lost their lives in consequence. This, O sinner, is a lively figure of what may happen to you, if you try to persuade yourself that the great King of heaven has fully pardoned and restored you to favor, and do not think any more of your past sins. You have repented of those sins and confessed them, and the priest has given you absolution, you say. I quite agree, and it is an article of faith that true sorrow, with the sacrament of penance, takes away all mortal sins, no matter how manifold and grievous they are, through the divine mercy in consideration of the infinite merits of Jesus Christ; but, tell me, who has assured you that the sorrow you then had was a true sorrow? Who has told you that your contrition then was real, supernatural, and that it extended to all your sins; that it was a sorrow greater than you would feel for any other evil, and that it embraced all your future life by an earnest resolution rather to undergo any calamity, and even death itself, under any circumstances whatever, than ever to offend God by a mortal sin in any way? But that is the sorrow you must have in order to receive the grace of repentance and to obtain forgiveness of your sins. Therefore I ask, who has assured you that, when you went to confession, the absolution you received was valid, that your soul was restored to life, and that the losses you had suffered by the lamentable state in which you were, were made good? Now, if you have not an infallible certainty of that—and you cannot have it unless by divine revelation—how can you imagine that you are no longer under the necessity of being sorry for your past sins, and that you need not trouble yourself any further about them?

O ye holy, penitent souls, I tremble when I read of your constant penitential exercises! You spent your lives in deserts and caves, in constant hunger and thirst, in heat and cold, clad in the coarse garb of penance, while you tore your flesh with scourges and bitterly bewailed your sins; and after you had spent three, ten, twenty, or more years in that manner, you did not even then dare to assure yourselves that you had recovered the grace and friendship of God. “I have seen many of these men with my own eyes” (so writes St. John Climacus), “and if I had not seen them, I should not have believed it possible for them to have lived as they did. Some of them stood with outstretched hands, looking towards heaven, bathed in tears of contrition, nor could you hear any sound from them but the groans

Hence
many saints
spent their
lives doing
severe pen-
ance.

and sighs with which they implored the mercy of heaven for their sins. Others, like the public sinner in the Gospel, did not dare to raise their eyes to heaven, but stood quite still, trembling with fear and anxiety, with grief and sorrow. Others, again, clad in rough sackcloth, beat their own countenances rudely with their clenched hands, and watered the earth with their tears. Others would roar like lions and refuse to eat bread, deeming themselves unworthy of human food, since they had formerly lived like unreasoning animals. Others beat their breasts so violently that the blood gushed out from their mouths. Others were so worn out by their constant weeping, that they seemed as if they had been burnt up, and their unceasing cry was: 'O Lord, have mercy on me, a wretched sinner.'¹ If they sometimes happened to converse with each other, their first question was, who knows whether the sentence of eternal damnation that was pronounced against us, has been revoked? Who knows whether our sins have been forgiven? Who knows whether we are reconciled to the God whom we have offended?' The slothful and careless look on such things as incredible,"² concludes St. John Climacus. But not they who realize the wretched state to which mortal sin reduces the soul, and who understand what it is to offend grievously and despise the almighty God. St. Jerome writes of St. Paula of Rome, that after the death of her husband she gave all her goods to the poor, left her daughters and her country, went to Bethlehem, and spent her life in such strict penance, that she lost her strength from constant fasting; her eyes were ruined by continual weeping, and she never, even in the heat of a violent fever, left off a hair-shirt that she wore. When she was advised to moderate her tears, lest she should injure her sight, and to mitigate the rigor of her penances, that she might not shorten her life, she answered with a deep sigh: ah, let me weep and destroy the countenance that in former days, while I was in Rome, led me so often into sin by extravagance in dress and following the fashions of the world. My body must now be unceasingly mortified, since it formerly indulged so much in sensuality and love of pleasure. The laughter and dissipation of former years must be atoned for by constant floods of tears, and my vanity in dress by the rough sackcloth. St. Bernard, who was so innocent, and had only small faults to repent of, acknowledges with regard to himself:

¹ Heu me miserum. Ignosce Domine.

² Hæc omnia incredibilia quidem iudicabit pius et negligens.

“I am firmly resolved never to laugh, until I hear from the mouth of God those words: “Come, ye blessed,” and not to cease weeping until I have escaped the sentence: “Depart from Me, you cursed.”¹

O ye holy penitents! I must again exclaim; I tremble with fear, when I consider your penitential and mortified lives, which still could not inspire you with full confidence that God had forgiven you your sins! And I, who, from my childhood, have committed so many grievous sins; who have so often alternated between sin and confession, confession and sin; who before confession awakened some kind of a sorrow either by reciting a few words out of a prayer-book, or by repeating, in a cold, half-hearted manner, an act of contrition I had learned off by heart; I, after a repentance of that kind, which should justly inspire me with distrust, and the earnestness of which I have good reason for doubting, dare to persuade myself that I have no further cause for fear, as if I were innocence itself, and to lead a comfortable, easy, and pleasant life! Oh, no, sinner, that will not do! As St. John Chrysostom reminds us, “a penitent must not forget his sins, but rather beg of God to forget them, and to remember himself.”² The true penitent, says St. Augustine, who wishes to be assured of the salvation of his soul, must be sorry for his sins as long as he lives.”³ Whenever the sins he has committed occur to his memory, he must be sorry for them; for he knows that he has sinned and lost the grace of God, but he is never infallibly certain that he has been forgiven and has been again received into favor by God. He should always be contrite, so that amongst repeated acts of contrition at least one may be found which is truly supernatural, and which will merit forgiveness. But, you might object, there are learned, prudent, and pious confessors, who frequently advise and command their penitents not to think of the sins of their past lives, nor to make another general confession of them, but to be satisfied with the confession they have made. That is true; but to what kind of penitents do they say that? under what circumstances? and what is their reason for saying it? They do not give advice of that kind to those who go to confession once or twice a year only, or on the

Therefore
the sinner
should
never cease
repenting of
his sins.

¹ Firmum est mihi propositum, nunquam ridendi quousque audiam ex ore Dei illa verba: venite benedicti; neque a fletu desistam, donec liber sim ab illa sententia: ire maledicti.

² Penitentem non oportet oblivioni tradere peccatum suum, sed Deum deprecari ut Deus quidem peccati ejus non meminerit, ipsum autem non obliviscat.—St. Chrysos. Hom. 31 in Hebr. x.

³ Penitens semper doleat.

principal feasts; much less to those who come to confession burdened with mortal sins; but rather to those pious, but troubled and fearful souls, who, after having carefully prepared themselves, examined their consciences, and awakened a true sorrow to the best of their ability, make a general confession of their whole lives, and still refuse to be comforted, but trouble and annoy themselves with scruples and doubts as to whether they, perhaps, have not left out some circumstance that it was necessary to confess, etc. Confessors prudently advise penitents of this kind to think no more of the sins of their past lives; not that they should forget that they were sinners, or that they should cease repenting of their sins; but that they may not fatigue their imaginations by re-considering sins that they have already validly confessed and that they are not bound to confess again. And confessors have just reason for giving that advice in the case of sins against holy purity, the recollection of which is apt to fill the mind with impure thoughts, so that there may be a danger of relapsing into the same sins of which one has already repented. Otherwise no one is forbidden to remember that he has often sinned, or to repent of his sins in a general way, or to confess them in general, in his ordinary confessions, in order to be more sure of having a proper sorrow and of making a good confession. Thus it still remains true that he who is really penitent must be always sorry that he has offended God.

Even if he
is assured
that his
sins are for-
given.

But suppose, O sinner, you are quite certain that the confession you made of your former sins was a good one, that your sorrow was truly supernatural, and your purpose of amendment an earnest one, so that you really amended your life afterwards; and hence that you are quite sure that God has forgiven you: and a human certainty of the kind may exist when one has abstained for a long time from the grievous sins which he was formerly in the habit of committing, and still abstains from them; I will even suppose that you have had a divine revelation assuring you of the remission of your sins; yet there is still not the least doubt that you have grievously offended God. And is not that a most deplorable fact? I have aroused the anger of my God. I have lost the Supreme Good. I have made the Almighty my enemy. I have insulted, before His very face, God, who is most worthy of all love, a fact that cannot be blotted out, even by tears of blood copious enough to fill the ocean. For it is true, and will be true for all eternity, that I have grievously offended the almighty God, so that I have just reason for bewailing my

sins all my life long. Alexander the Great, although he had attained the very summit of earthly honors and prosperity, could never forget the shameful deed he had been guilty of in killing Callisthenes, his tutor, whom he formerly loved most dearly. "This," says the historian, "was the undying crime of Alexander, which no subsequent virtuous act, and no military success, could obliterate from his memory."¹ For it always remains true that "he has slain Callisthenes."² Posterity will be amazed at the prodigious exploits of this king, who surpassed all the sovereigns of the earth; but it will always condemn him for the murder of Callisthenes. People will say of him, he was a great monarch, for whose victorious arms the world was too small; but nevertheless he was an unjust and blood-thirsty tyrant, for he slew the innocent Callisthenes, his own preceptor. Truly, an undying crime, which can never fade from the memory!

It was a thought of this kind, my dear brethren, that forced hot tears of repentance from David, Magdalene, Peter, Paul, and others penitents, down to their latest moments. "My tears have been my bread day and night," says David: "whilst it is said to me daily: Where is thy God?"³ Alas, I have abandoned my God; I have slain the innocent Urias; I have committed the abominable crime of adultery! Alas, what have I done! "These things I remembered, and poured out my soul in me."⁴ But why, David, why art thou so troubled? Thou hast found thy God again, and hast heard from the lips of the Prophet, speaking on the part of God, that thy sin has been taken away (Ah, would that I, wretched sinner that I am, had a similar assurance!). True, David might answer; that is, indeed, a great consolation for me, but it does not destroy the fact that I have sinned; for it will remain true for all eternity that I have abandoned my God, slain an innocent man, and committed a horrible adultery. Posterity may read of me that I was a model of meekness, a man after God's own heart, who did His will in all things; but it will read also that I was guilty of murder and adultery, and that I rebelled against God. Truly, that is an undying shame for me. And therefore I will not cease to shed tears of sorrow: "Every night I will wash my bed; I will water my couch with

After the
example of
the penitent
David.

¹ Hoc est Alexandri crimen æternum, quod nulla virtus, nulla bellorum felicitas redimet.

² Callisthenem occidit.

³ Fuerunt mihi lacrymæ meæ panes die ac nocte: dum dicitur mihi quotidie: ubi est Deus tuus?—Ps. xli. 4.

⁴ Hæc recordatus sum, et effudi in me animam meam.—Ibid. 5.

my tears.”¹ Therefore, “my sorrow is continually before me for I will declare my iniquity, and I will think for my sin,”² that my repentance for it may be continual, and thus at last fully wash it out.

The penitent Magdalene.

Enter in spirit, my dear brethren, the cave into which Magdalene crept after the ascension of Our Lord, and in which she spent the remainder of her life. Consider that holy penitent, cut off from all human society, observing constant silence, clad in a rough camel-hair garment, a discipline in her hand, streaming with blood, raising her eyes to heaven, and continually weeping for her sins. Ask her why she does penance for such a long time; for she has heard, not from a prophet, but from Jesus Christ Himself, the words: “Thy sins are forgiven thee.”³ Ah, she would reply, why should I cease to weep, although my sins are forgiven? Can I ever contradict that deplorable fact, “And behold a woman that was in the city a sinner”?⁴ I am the one who have so often and so grievously offended my Saviour. But remember, Magdalene, that thou wert afterwards inflamed with a burning love for the same Saviour; and that to thee was given the privilege, before many others, of receiving Him as thy guest. True; but remember also what I was before, “a woman that was in the city a sinner.” Remember how Christ loved thee after thy conversion; how He defended thee against the unjust suspicions of the Pharisees; thou art the one to whom, according to the Gospel, He first appeared after His resurrection; and now, in thy cave, thou art often visited by angels, and comforted by heavenly consolations. That is all true; but, “a woman that was in the city a sinner,” that is a crime I cannot forget.

St. Peter and Paul.

The same answer would be given by St. Peter, if he were asked why, during the remainder of his life, he wept whenever he heard the cock crow; although he, too, was assured that his sin was forgiven by Our Lord. Alas, he would say, do you not hear how the cock accuses me of having denied my master, and of having said publicly with an oath that I knew Him not? This accusation I can never deny; how, then, can I refrain from weeping when I think of it? The same answer, too, would be given

¹ *Lavabo per singulas noctes lectum meum; lacrymis meis stratum meum rigabo.*—Ps. vi 7.

² *Dolor meus in conspectu meo semper: quoniam iniquitatem meam annuntiabo et cogitabo pro peccato meo.*—*Ibid.* xxxvii. 18, 19.

³ *Remittuntur tibi peccata.*—Luke vii. 48.

⁴ *Ecce mulier quæ erat in civitate peccatrix.*—*Ibid.* 37.

by the great St. Paul, the vessel of election. Although he had labored so much for the honor and glory of Christ; although he had for Christ's sake suffered imprisonment, chains, scourging, banishment, and countless trials; although he had been rapt up to the third heaven, and had there seen the joys that God has prepared for those who love Him; yet he acknowledges: "I speak the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost: that I have great sadness and continual sorrow in my heart."¹ And why? O great Saint. Alas, why do you ask me? Shall I not be troubled when I think of the obstinacy of the Jews, who refuse to believe in Christ? But that is the least; for when I consider myself, I find cause enough for continual sorrow, "because I persecuted the Church of God."² And therefore I am not worthy to be called an apostle. Alas, I have persecuted the Church of God; I can never forget that! It is an eternal crime, that no tears can wash away from my memory.

O sinner, what must you and I think? Have you, like those saints, received a revelation from God to assure you that your sins are forgiven? For my part, I have not. And yet, as if the sins we have committed were of no account, we reduce our repentance to such narrow limits, that we are satisfied with the sorrow we awakened before confessing those sins, and now think no more of them. Alas! we do not know what it is to offend the majesty of God, and to crucify anew by sin Jesus Christ, our Saviour; so that we have good reason for fearing that we do not belong to the number of true penitents, who repent of their sins through the fear and love of God, but rather to those false penitents, whom a slavish fear of punishment alone induces to repent.

Do you wish to understand more clearly the difference between those two? Imagine that you see two men confined in prison; the one has killed his enemy, whom he had long hated and pursued vindictively; the other got drunk, and in a sudden fit of anger, which reason was unable to control, took a knife and killed his own father. The sentence of death is pronounced on both; they tremble with fear; they weep, and wail, and curse the wicked deed that is the only cause of the violent and shameful death that is in store for them; so troubled are they, that they can neither eat, drink, nor sleep. Suppose, now, that both are

He who seldom repents of his sins shows that his sorrow for them is hardly sincere.

Shown by a simile.

¹ Veritatem dico in Christo, non mentior; testimonium mihi perhibente conscientia mea in Spiritu Sancto: quoniam tristitia mihi magna est, et continuus dolor cordi meo.—Rom. ix. 1, 2.

² Quoniam persecutus sum Ecclesiam Dei.—I. Cor. xv. 9.

pardoned by their sovereign. The first, who is of a rich and noble family, owes his pardon to the intercession of powerful friends; the second is set free, because he committed the murder while in a state of drunkenness, so that it was more the result of misfortune on his part than of design. Now, when these two men are released from prison, how do they act? The first, in the excess of his joy, prepares a great banquet and invites his friends to rejoice with him; all his former trouble and sorrow are forgotten; and no wonder, for they were caused, not by the fact that he had killed his enemy, but rather by his imprisonment and condemnation to death; in fact, he is still secretly glad that his enemy is out of the way, and since he has nothing more to fear on account of having killed him, his sorrow has quite disappeared. But does the man who killed his father act in the same way? Is he as joyful and gay as the other? Not by any means. If his friends congratulate him on his release, alas, he sighs, my dear father, where are you? why was I so wicked as to take away your life? He has neither peace nor rest; he is inconsolable whenever he hears his father's name; the very sight of a knife fills him with remorse; if he enters the room in which the crime was committed, or sees his relatives clad in mourning, the remembrance of his father fills his eyes with tears, nor will he ever forget him as long as he lives. And why? Because it was not the prison in which he was confined, nor the death that threatened him, but the unhappy murder of his father that was the cause of all his trouble; and, therefore, although he is now at liberty and freed from all danger, he still continues to deplore what has happened, with deep sorrow of heart.

But arose
from a mere
natural,
slavish fear.

O sinner, you who, as you imagine, are now converted, you may see from this to a certain extent what was the nature of the sorrow you had for your sins. As St. Paul assures us, you have, by every mortal sin you committed, crucified and murdered Jesus Christ, your heavenly Father, your Redeemer and your Supreme Good; and that you have done for many years, perhaps, by sins that you have committed hundreds and thousands of times. Thus you came into the slavery of the devil, and were over and over again condemned to eternal death. Through fear of that you have confessed your sins, after having repented of them, and the priest has given you absolution. Oh, you think, now I am all right; now I have recovered the grace of God. I am freed from prison and from the danger of eternal death. Now I can laugh

and enjoy myself as before; eat and drink, sleep and amuse myself; and make merry with my companions, as I did before (I will not say, sin as I did before); but you think no more of repenting of your former sins, than if you were innocence itself. Now consider the matter reasonably; is that not treating the almighty God as your enemy? Is it not as if you had killed some one against whom you had a grudge, or whom you deemed of little account? Is it not a dangerous sign that your repentance and sorrow arose not from the love of God, nor from the detestation of the insults you offered Him, nor from the fear of God, who could condemn you to hell, nor from hatred of your sins, on account of which you deserved hell (for all these truths remain as certain now as they ever were, and they will be so for all eternity); but simply from a mere slavish fear of being lost forever? But, supposing even that your sorrow was truly supernatural, and that you detested your sins because they deserved eternal damnation, that is in itself a sign that you do not really love God as a child should love his father.

No; quite different are the dispositions of a truly repentant soul, that has a real love of God, and sees clearly what a great Lord, worthy of all fear and love, has been offended by sin. He who is in those dispositions is not satisfied with the tears he has shed the first or second time; and although he has a human certainty that his sins have been taken away in the sacrament of penance, and that he has recovered the grace of God, yet he can never think without sorrow of heart of the sins by which he has offended the God whom he loves; everything that was an occasion of sin to him causes him displeasure. If he passes by the house in which the sin was committed; if he hears of the person who was his accomplice; alas, he thinks, what have I done? O my Lord and my God, forgive me! Would that I had never seen that person! Would that I had broken my leg before setting foot in that house! Would that a grievous illness had prevented me from going into that company; and then I would not have offended the good God, whom I now love above all things. There you have a true, supernatural sorrow, springing from the fear and love of God; a sorrow which ends only with life itself. For a true penitent must never cease deploring his sins.

But, you think, if that is the case, one must have a very sad time of it, indeed. There will be no such thing as saying a pleasant word to another, and one's life must be spent in con-

He who truly loves God is always sorry for having offended Him.

This constant sorrow is a great consolation.

lation for a
soul that
loves God

stant melancholy and sadness; for it appears that we must shut ourselves up and devote our time to weeping and lamentation. And how, then, can we serve God with child-like confidence and with joyful hearts, as He wishes to be served even by those who have been great sinners? But, my dear brethren, that conclusion is altogether erroneous. You must know that to do penance and be sorry for our sins is not to lead a sad, moping, melancholy life; it is rather to serve God with joy and confidence. Tears of sorrow are bitter in themselves; but what a sweet consolation they leave behind in the heart of the penitent! "The penitent must always be sorry," says St. Augustine, "and he must always rejoice at his sorrow."¹ He experiences a true heavenly joy and consolation, of which worldlings know nothing. Such is the promise made by God to his penitent children in these words: "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted,"² not merely hereafter, in the eternal joys of heaven, but they will be comforted also in this life, and they will feel consoled in the midst of, nay, on account of the tears they shed; because their constant sorrow assures them all the more of forgiveness, and they have the testimony of their conscience that they are true children of God, who love their heavenly Father with their whole hearts. I ask all those who have had experience of this, whether it is not true. What a special relish, and consolation, and joy of heart is caused by shedding copious tears, as it were, through a sensible sorrow for sin! Those who know what it is, desire nothing more than to have that great and tearful sorrow; and it is only the absence of it that can really trouble them.

How to
practise this
constant
sorrow for
sin.

Let us put the matter to the test of experience, my dear brethren, and in future, when we think of our past sins, awaken a deep contrition and sorrow for them. We can find abundant opportunities for that every day; for instance, I can always begin my prayers by making an act of contrition, and think to myself: O great God, I am not worthy to appear before Thee, on account of the many and grievous sins by which I have offended Thy infinite majesty during my life. I am sorry for them from the bottom of my heart! Forgive me, O God, according to Thy great mercy! Before beginning my work, I can say, it is for Thy sake, O God, that I do this. Ah, would that I never had done anything in my life, but for Thee! Alas, the contrary was only too often the case with me, for I have offended

¹ *Pœnitens semper doleat, et de dolore gaudeat.*

² *Beati qui lugent, quoniam ipsi consolabuntur.—Matt. v. 5.*

Thee by my actions! I am sorrow for it, O Lord! I hate and detest all I have ever done to displease Thee! And, as a matter of course, sorrow for sin must be awakened at the evening examen of conscience, and when preparing for confession, which should be frequent; moreover, it is the custom of all good Christians to accuse themselves in every confession of all the sins of their lives in a general manner. When I see or hear of others sinning grievously, I can think: O my God, I, too, have offended Thee often and grievously. I am heartily sorry for it; be merciful to me and to all poor sinners. When I read spiritual books, or hear in a sermon examples of people who are lost forever, I can say: alas, I have long ago deserved to be among the demons in hell! Perhaps those people have not committed so much sin as I. I am sorry, O Lord, for my sins; and I will praise forever the mercy with which Thou hast borne with me until now. On occasions of public calamity, or great misfortune, you can say: O my God, perhaps I am the cause of this, on account of my former sins. Ah, would that I had never sinned! If you prosper in your affairs, or things go well with you, you can say: ah, God of goodness! what have I done to deserve this? I, who have so often and so grievously offended Thee? Should I not shed bitter tears, when I think how wickedly I have acted towards Thee, while Thou dost not cease heaping benefits on me? Whenever I sit down to table, I can say: Oh, what a merciful God Thou art! Thou givest me food and drink, although I have merited to suffer eternal hunger and thirst among the demons in hell, on account of my sins. Forgive me, O Lord, I am sorry for them, from the bottom of my heart. When dressing or undressing: O Lord, I am not worthy of this clothing, since I have so often lost the beautiful garment of sanctifying grace by my sins. When I go to bed: O my God, I should by rights be now in hell, with flames for my covering; I am sorry for my sins. When tempted to sin: ah, my God, have I not, then, offended Thee enough? Ah, would that I had never sinned! I would now rather die a thousand times, than consent to sin. And especially, as I have often said already, in crosses, and trials, whether they come from other men, or from any cause whatever, and whenever I mortify myself, and undertake to do some work of penance, I must think: O my God, it serves me quite right; I have deserved this cross, this misfortune, this loss, this pain; I have deserved a thousand times, nay, infinitely worse, on account of my manifold sins. But I

am sorry for them now; do Thou only be gracious to me; and so on, in other circumstances. Truly, "blessed are they that mourn," and thus continually bewail their sins; "for they shall be comforted," here on earth, with a sweet and consoling repentance, and in heaven, with eternal consolation. In that way, then, I, a poor sinner, will now begin with St. Peter, and will continue to repent of my sins. May you all imitate me herein. **Amen.**

ON RELAPSE INTO SIN.

FORTY-NINTH SERMON.

ON THE DEFORMITY AND DANGER OF RELAPSE INTO SIN.

Subject.

To break by a relapse into sin the peace that has been established with God, is, 1. a wicked and an intolerable thing; 2. it is a very dangerous and desperate thing.—*Preached on Easter Tuesday.*

Text.

Pax vobis.—Luke xxiv. 36.

“Peace be to you.”

Introduction.

Praised be God, we are at last in the enjoyment of a most desirable peace! They who were formerly on the side of the devil and were waging war against God have now thrown down their rebellious arms, and have made an eternal peace with Him; and I hope that all here present have done so by a good Easter confession. I congratulate you with all my heart. And my words, or rather those of Our Lord Himself to you to-day, are, “Peace be to you,” just souls, that you may persevere in justice, and never violate, by a relapse into sin, the happy peace you have now established. Ah, my dear brethren, there is only one consideration that can now in any way disturb my joy: the fear lest this peace may not be of long duration with some; lest many may turn away again from God, and go over to the devil. For that wicked tempter will not fail to persecute those runaway soldiers of his; he will put occasions of sin in their way, and will try to tempt them by the allurements of the flesh to

give way to an inordinate love of creatures. Ah, Christians, "Peace be to you," I say again. And will you break that peace, and sin again, after having made a good confession? Ah, what a wicked, intolerable, and most dangerous thing that would be; as I shall now show.

Plan of Discourse.

To break by a relapse into sin the peace that has been established with God is a wicked and an intolerable thing; so that, if we wish to act honorably, we should rather die than sin again; such will be the subject of the first part. To break by a relapse into sin the peace that has been established with God is a most dangerous and desperate thing, so that, if we are prudent and desirous of our eternal salvation, we should rather die than sin again; as we shall see in the second part. This sermon, that it may be profitable to all, will serve the good and pious to conceive a greater horror of sin, and to persevere in their innocence; while it will help those who have been accustomed to relapse into sin after confession to have a salutary fear of falling again, and those who have not yet done penance it will supply with motives that may induce them speedily to amend their lives.

Would to God that I could effect all this! It is Thou, O almighty God, who must do it; without Thy grace my words are but empty sounds. Penetrate, then, the hearts of all of us with Thy grace, and strengthen our purpose in good, that we may never desert Thee for all eternity. This we ask of Thee through that Virgin Mother of Thine, and ours, too, whom Thou canst not and wilt not refuse anything, and through the intercession of our holy guardian angels.

The name
of perjurer
is hateful to
every one.

It is easy to persuade those who are men of honor and probity that it is a shameful, wicked, and disgraceful thing to break an established peace; for what can be more disgraceful in the sight of all honorable men than to have the name of being perjured and faithless? Even among powerful monarchs, who have the sword in their hands, it is reckoned such a holy and sacred thing to observe a truce that has once been signed and agreed to, that, although a good opportunity may offer of ravaging the enemies' country, and subduing it, yet they shrink from an open violation of the contract entered into, and seek out for all sorts of pretexts to justify their action before renewing the war. Even amongst Turks and heathens he who violates a truce is looked on as dishonorable. And amongst private individuals, what

more disgraceful thing can be said of a man, than that he is a faithless, untrustworthy person, who does not keep his word, and whom no one can rely on? In fact, if a person asks anything from you that you have already promised to another, you say at once that you cannot give it, as you do not wish to break your word. But still, you have your free will to do as you please; and perhaps the person who asks you is one of high position, so that you would benefit yourself by doing him a service. No matter, you say; I have already given my word to another, and I must keep it. Is not that so?

Now you, whoever you may be, who have laid down the burden of your sins during this Easter season, do you know what you have done? You have given your word to the all-seeing and all-knowing God, who neither can nor will ever forget it; and you have entered into an eternal contract of peace with Him. The conditions to which you have agreed are as follows: I hereby renounce the devil and all his works, and will serve Thee, my Lord and my God alone, will love Thee with all my heart above all creatures; and I furthermore bind myself in the most sacred manner to keep Thy holy law inviolably; never more will I curse or swear, as I have hitherto done, nor do any one the least wrong, nor entertain hatred and enmity against my neighbor, nor vilify, nor detract from any one's good name, nor wilfully admit an unclean thought into my mind, or allow an impure word to fall from my lips, or give way to impure looks or touches; I will avoid that house, that company, which placed me in the dangerous occasion of sin; nor, as long as I live, will I commit any sin against Thy holy law. See, that is the promise you have made to God; and I presume that you meant it honestly when making it, or else your confession was bad, your penance worthless, and you have not made peace with God. On the other side, God has signed with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, in the sacrament of penance, the following promises: all the sins you have committed are forgiven you; you are freed from the eternal pains of hell; I look upon you as My dear friend, and adopt you as My child, and as heir to My kingdom of heaven, and I will make you the object of My special care, as long as you remain faithful to Me. To all that God has bound Himself. As witnesses of this agreement, there are the angels and saints of heaven, who rejoiced and exulted at your conversion; and there are the devils, too, who ran away from you, full of rage and vexation, when you signed that contract with God.

The converted sinner has made a peace with God.

Now, the question is, which of you two will first break the agreement? You know well that God cannot be unfaithful to His word, so that it depends altogether on you, O man, whether you will keep your word, or not.

Which he breaks, perjuring himself therein, by relapsing into sin.

If you go back to your former wicked ways, to your injustice, or your impurity, even in desire, you are a faithless and perjured violator of the peace. What a disgraceful name that is to have before God and the world! How shameful for you to do such a thing! An honorable man keeps his word. Is it honorable to say, God has now received what belonged to Him; peace is concluded between us; but I do not wish to observe it any longer; I will go back to where I came from; I was better off in the service of the devil than in that of the almighty God; I did wrong to leave the former and to desert him for the sake of making peace with God; I will give back to the devil what I took from him, and again declare war on God? Would any honorable man, I ask, approve of such conduct? Shameless man, that you are, were you really better off in the service of the devil than in the friendship of God? Was that what you said when you repented of your sins? "The sinner who has done penance," says Tertullian, "can now make a comparison between God and the devil," for he has been in the service of both; "and whose service he again adopts, him he judges to be the best."¹ So that you judge the devil and his intolerable yoke to be better and more agreeable for you than your sovereign God and His service, if, after having received the grace of repentance, you again make up your mind to sin and to go back to the devil. What a shameful and unjust thing to do!

The injustice of this. Shown by a simile.

In former times there were certain idolatrous Indians in Peru, who were addicted to the following superstition: On a certain day of the year, they went out of their houses and left them wide open, for the sole purpose of allowing the devil to enter them for the short time of their absence. Let him only come, they said, and stop in our houses for this day if he wishes to do so, provided he leaves us in peace for the rest of the year. And these poor, ignorant people imagined that they could not occupy their dwellings with safety unless they allowed the devil to enter them for a short time. I pity them sincerely; but far more pitiable is the condition of those Christians who, after having made a good confession, fall again into their former sins; for

¹ Comparationem videtur egisse, qui utrumque cognoverit, et judicato pronuntiasse eum meliorem, cujus se rursus esse maluerit.

they drive the devil out of their hearts, indeed, but only for a day, when they again invite him to enter and spend almost the whole year with them. For a few days they open the door of their hearts to the almighty God, but on the condition that He leaves them again, so that they can indulge their wicked desires and passions without restraint. For at Easter and on the greater feasts of the year they repent of and confess their sins, thus driving away the devil under whose tyranny they had been groaning; but this tyranny pleases those unfortunate people in their blindness, and they prefer it to the sweet yoke of Jesus Christ; therefore, when Easter-tide or the feast day is past, they recall the infernal serpent, and willingly cast themselves at his feet again as his bond-slaves. How the devil must laugh at such confessions and repentance! Let that man, he says to himself, turn me away and execrate me on Easter Sunday; it makes little matter to me: "I will return into my house from whence I came out."¹ Shameless sinner, who so easily relapse into your former sins, how can you refrain from regarding your inconstancy with horror and aversion? Is it possible that you can resolve thus coolly to insult your God, who has been so good to you, and who, when He might have condemned you to hell on account of your former sins, has, of His own accord, freely admitted you to His friendship and peace? And in this consists the deformity and inconceivable malice of the ingratitude of which you are guilty, when you relapse into sin. "He is ungrateful for the pardon bestowed on him," says St. John Chrysostom, "who sins again after having been forgiven."²

In order to see this more clearly, try now to recall with me, briefly, the great benefit that you received from the mercy of God, when, in your last confession, provided it was a good one, absolution was given you. You know what a wicked life you had been leading; how often and grievously you had sinned, by thought, word, deed, and desire, insulting God without shame before His very face for the sake of some worthless creature; trampling His holy law under foot, and treating Him so disrespectfully, that, if you had treated a man like yourself in the same way, you would never hope to regain his friendship, while, if you had been guilty of it towards your temporal superiors, you would certainly be condemned to the gallows. On account of those sins of yours, if the patient God had only permitted it,

He who has made a good confession has received a very great benefit from God.

¹ Revertar in domum meam, unde exivi.—Matt. xii. 44.

² Indulgentiæ ingratus est, qui post veniam peccat.

and had given but one sign of consent, all creatures would have risen up in arms against you to revenge the insult you offered their Creator; the earth was ready to swallow you up; the air, to strike you with a thunder-bolt; the devil, to break your neck and hurry you off to hell, body and soul. But the same God who was so ill-treated by you, who is not at all in need of you, who has nothing to fear or hope from you, looked on patiently for so many years or months at your dissolute conduct, allowed you to act towards Him as if He were a poor, despicable beggar, showed the greatest patience in bearing with you, and never ceased for a moment to do good to you. Moreover, He whom you offended was the first to beg, so to speak, for pardon, by the inspirations of His grace, without which you could not have repented; He it was who invited you to return to Him, and received you, His prodigal son, with such friendship and fatherly love; made an eternal peace with you, and forgave you your sins, by offering His own blood for you, so completely, that He resolved never during eternity to remember the insults you offered Him. While you were at war with God, you were lamentably stripped by the enemies of your soul, and deprived of all merits and graces; thus naked and miserable you came to confession, and the God whom you despised received you again, and clothed you with the precious robe of sanctifying grace. While you were under the yoke of the raging demon, you were racked and tortured for so many unhappy days and nights by your own bad conscience; and must you not acknowledge that such was the case? Oh, what bitter morsels you often had to swallow while you were in the wretched state of sin! How the worm gnawed at you! How your mad desires plagued you! What fear and anguish you often experienced! For, whether you wish to acknowledge it or not, it still remains true, as the God of truth Himself says: "Know thou and see that it is an evil and a bitter thing for thee, to have left the Lord thy God."¹ Such is the experience of all sinners, unless they are already immersed in the depths of obduracy. From this miserable state the merciful God has drawn you, and placed you under His sweet yoke in the freedom of His dear children, so that you can live in the enjoyment of repose of conscience, which (no matter what any one says to the contrary) far surpasses all the joys of the vain world, and you can see what a difference there is between a ser-

¹ Scito, et vide quia malum et amarum est reliquisse te Dominum Deum tuum.—Jerem. 41. 19.

vant of God and a slave of the devil. Formerly you were a child of eternal damnation; you were already doomed to hell; to whom do you owe it that you are not now there, amongst the demons? To whom do you owe that great benefit? To no one but the merciful God Himself, who bore with you so patiently while you were in the wretched state of sin, and kept you in life. How many there were in the world who committed the same sins at the same time as you? how many who perhaps sinned in the same house or company? how many who sinned far less than you, nay, who then, perhaps, committed the first mortal sin of their lives; and yet they were surprised by the justice of God and hurled into hell, where they now burn without hope for all eternity? Could not the same fate have been yours? What had God to expect from you more than from them? If you had died then, where would you be now? Consider this well, O sinner, and you will see what an inestimable benefit it is. The good God has had patience with you in preference to many others, although you deserved a more severe punishment than they, and has saved you from the jaws of the infernal wolf, from the pains of hell, and has now concluded a peace with you, selecting you as one of His favorite children. What an exceeding great grace!

Now, He who has done all this for you, what does He deserve? I ask all men of honor and probity; does He deserve to be again insulted and offended by you? Is He not worthy of all the honor, love, and service you can show Him in the fulness of your gratitude? It was this consideration that moved David, after his sins had been forgiven, to make a resolution and cry out aloud: "Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity; for the Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping: the Lord hath heard my supplication."¹ That is, as St. Jerome explains it, because I have received mercy from the Lord; because the good God has had regard to my tears of penance, has forgiven me my sins, and admitted me again to His favor and friendship; therefore I now renounce all sin; and, that I may never commit another during my whole life, "depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity:" depart from me, all dangers and occasions of sin, and everything that could even remotely lead me into sin, lest I should ever again in the least offend such a good God, who has conferred so great a benefit on me.

For which
he owes
God a most
constant
love.

¹ *Discedite a me omnes qui operamini iniquitatem, quoniam exaudivit Dominus vocem fletus mei: exaudivit Dominus deprecationem meam.*—Ps. vi. 9, 10.

By relaps-
ing into
sin he is
guilty of
the blackest
ingratitude.

But you, O sinner, on whom the same grace and mercy have been bestowed, what do you do by way of acknowledging the great benefit you have received? Or, rather, what are you thinking of doing, if you have made up your mind to return to your old evil ways, and to fall into sin again? O accursed ingratitude! See, O God, you say, by your acts at least, I have with repentance and sorrow of heart begged forgiveness of Thee; but now I retract my words. Thou hast shown Thy mercy to me; but I do not care for it. Thou hast given me Thy grace; but I do not want it, take it back. Thou hast admitted me into the number of Thy soldiers and friends; I hereby renounce Thy service and Thy friendship, for, I wish to enroll myself again in the army of the devil, to fight against Thee. Thou hast freely forgiven me many great debts I owed Thee; now I am going to contract fresh ones. Thou hast liberated me, in preference to many others, from eternal damnation; but I am not afraid of that any more; Thou canst keep Thy heaven and its joys; the broad road to hell is more pleasing to me. I have hitherto offended and insulted Thee by impure thoughts and desires, and Thou hast pardoned me; now I am about to repeat the offence. I have often aroused Thee to anger by unchaste and slanderous talk; yet that matters little, as Thou hast forgiven me; so I am now about to repeat the same kind of sinful language. By my scandalous and wicked actions I have crucified anew Thee, my Saviour, who didst die for the love of me; but I am absolved now, and Thou wilt have somewhat more to suffer from me. Thou hast hitherto been, O God, extremely patient in bearing with me; I am glad to have that to say, for I am going to try Thy patience farther, as I do not intend to leave off sinning. Hear, ye men of honor, what do you think of conduct like that? Be amazed, O ye angels and saints in heaven, who a short time ago rejoiced at this sinner's conversion; see how he acts now. And you, ye demons and lost souls in hell, be filled with astonishment; if God were to do one of you the grace and favor of releasing him from his fiery prison and giving him time for repentance, what would you think of it? And would not the favored one bow down before the Almighty and serve Him in the severest penance, even till the Day of Judgment? Ye lions, and tigers, and beasts of the wilderness, who are grateful in your own way, well may you wonder at the ingratitude of reasoning man, who makes such a base return to his greatest Benefactor! See, O God, such are the

thanks Thou receivest from the sinner whom Thou hast re-admitted to Thy favor. Didst Thou institute the holy sacrament of penance only that men might have an opportunity of provoking Thee still more to anger? Hast Thou forgiven this sinner all his sins, only that he may sin and insult Thee still more grievously?

O mortals, if you still have human hearts, think, for God's sake, what a hateful thing it is to fall back into sin after having repented. Christian soul, see how unjustly and odiously you act when you repeat your former sins. "How exceeding base art thou become," I must say to you, in the words of the Prophet Jeremias, "going the same ways over again."¹ And the words of St. Peter may well be applied to you: "For that of the true proverb has happened to them: The dog is returned to his vomit: and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."² O my good God, how is it possible that I should offend Thee again? No, O Lord, I acknowledge the great benefit Thou hast bestowed on me, and I return Thee infinite thanks that Thou hast not condemned me to hell, as Thou mightest have done, and that Thou hast borne with me so patiently for so many years, and received me again with fatherly love into Thy favor. I will keep my word, and honorably fulfil my promise to Thee. "Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity;" away with all that could lead me away from Thee. Away with all occasions and companions that might be the cause of sin to me. I will be faithful to my God to the end, I will be grateful to Him forever, and I will rather give up my life itself, than offend my generous Benefactor again. Such, O Lord, is the resolution I mean to keep unalterably, with the help of Thy grace. But I am afraid that there are some whose unmortified desires and inclinations, whose inveterate bad habits, and deep-rooted love for creatures, have deprived them of all sense of shame, and who, therefore, have little scruple in committing a dishonorable action, so that, like dumb animals, they must be impelled by fear and stripes to do their duty. Have patience now for a little while longer, and consider with me the exceeding great danger in which they are who, after confession, fall back into their former sins, in order that they who cannot be moved by a sense of shame may be at least

Conclusion
to be always
faithful to
God.

¹ *Quam vilis facta es nimis, iterans vias tuas.*—Jerem. ii. 36.

² *Contigit enim eis illud veri proverbii: canis reversus est ad suum vomitum; et sus lota in volutabro luti.*—11, Pet. ii. 22.

frightened from a relapse by the fear of eternal ruin. This we shall see in the

Second Part.

Similes showing the danger the sinner incurs by relapsing.

Imagine that a citizen of this town, while travelling yesterday through a forest, was assaulted by a band of robbers, who stripped him of all he had, so that he barely escaped with his life. But, nevertheless, this very morning he dresses himself in a new suit of clothes, fills his purse with money, and is on the point of setting out to travel through the same forest, although he knows well that the robbers are still there. What would you think of that? Would it not be a most fool-hardy, senseless thing to do? Again, a merchant has lost all his goods in a shipwreck, and has with difficulty saved his life by clinging to a broken plank; but hardly has he reached home, when he purchases new wares, and puts them into an old, leaky vessel. Is he not a rash and foolish man? That rashness and fool-hardiness are yours, O sinner! You know into what a band of robbers you fell, when you entered on the way of vice; how deplorably your poor soul was stripped of all merits and graces. You know in what a stormy sea you suffered the most unfortunate of shipwrecks, and how you seized the plank of penance, "the second plank after shipwreck," the second haven of refuge. It was the means of bringing you to God, so that in a short time you recovered your spiritual life, and your soul was filled with graces. But if you intend again to travel the same road, to embark on the same sea, what can you expect but that the same fate as before is in store for you? Where is your common sense? Can you not see the certain and eternal danger, and the almost unavoidable ruin that threatens your soul?

He runs the risk of never being forgiven.

Yes, you say, I know all about that; but I will escape it as I did before. Next Easter I will go to confession again; in a few months' time I will do penance again, and make peace anew with God. What an idea! Is that the talk of a sensible man? If the citizen or the merchant were to say: I will let myself be robbed again, and will be sorry for it afterwards; I will suffer shipwreck again, and will save my life by means of a plank, and then regret my misfortune; could anything more foolish be imagined? And what is it you say, presumptuous man, when you maintain that you will repent again and make peace? With whom will you make peace? With God? What? With the God whom you have so often deceived and betrayed? Will

He, to whom you have so often broken your plighted word, believe you again, await you, and, as soon as you present yourself, admit you to His friendship? How can you expect such a thing? If you had to deal with a man like yourself, and had proved untrue to him as often as you have to God, you would not dare to entertain the faintest hope of regaining his friendship; or, at all events, you would have a severe punishment to expect from him. Many have experienced to their cost what it is to violate an established peace. The Turks still smart under the effects of the want of faith they were guilty of in violating the peace made with the Roman emperor, and Christians, too, have found out that they cannot with impunity violate a treaty of peace made even with the hereditary foes of the Christian name. But let us speak of ourselves. Suppose your servant does something wrong; the first time you pass it over; but if the next day the fault is repeated, you look on it as a much more serious matter, and it requires a great deal more patience on your part to allow it to go unpunished. But if the servant commits the same fault three, four, five, or six times; O! you think, with just anger, this is too much! I cannot keep a servant of that kind in my house; away with him at once! Now, O sinner, such and far worse is the way in which you act, not towards a mere mortal, but towards the almighty God Himself, when, after repeated confessions, you return to your former sins; how, then, can you flatter yourself that you will easily find grace again with the same God. Do you think you have to deal with one whom you can befool as you please?

Ah, believe me, it is not so easy as you imagine! “Be not deceived,” is the warning given us by St. Paul; “God is not mocked.”¹ He has patience with weak mortals for a long time; but, if they abuse it too much, His patience will be wearied out, and will be changed into a just anger. We have a most merciful God, my dear brethren, who bears with the sinner with the utmost long-suffering and in silence, and who is always ready, at any moment, to receive him who wishes to return to Him by true penance; but when there is no sign of amendment, and the sinner acts towards Him as if he wished to mock Him, then He is an inexorable and most just God. Jesus Christ, our most meek Saviour, who, on account of His mildness, received the name of being a protector and harbinger of sinners, forgave all her sins to the repentant Magdalene; but it was the first time

For at last the patience of God may turn to anger.

¹ *Nolite errare: Deus non irridetur.—Gal. vi. 7.*

she repented of them. The Father in the Gospel, to whom God likens Himself, went out to welcome the prodigal son, after the latter had spent all his substance in riotous living, but it was the first time the prodigal returned. Christ forgave the woman taken in adultery, and said to her: "Neither will I condemn thee:" but it was the first time with her, and therefore He added: "Go, and now sin no more."¹ He pardoned the thief on the cross at the latter's first prayer for mercy, and brought him to paradise; but it was the first time that the thief confessed and repented of his sins. If Magdalene had gone back to her former sinful life; if the prodigal had returned to herd swine; if the adulterous woman had fallen into sin again; if the thief had again blasphemed Christ; and if they had done that for the second, third, and tenth time, as you, O sinner, do nowadays for the twentieth and hundredth time, do you think they would be received with just as much grace and love? Oh, no! far different is the lesson taught us by the Holy Scripture; far different the experience of many sinners who are continually alternating between repentance and sin.

Shown from
Scripture.

The same merciful God, who had borne with the murmurings and repeated revolts of His people in the desert, punished them with sudden death, and sent them to hell, because they had rebelled against Him too often. The same God, who had been so patient with Absalom the first time he had sinned by murdering his brother, allowed him to be pierced with three lances, and to die impenitent, when he revolted against his father David. The same God, who pardoned Achab, on his repenting of having coveted Naboth's vineyard, gave him up to death when he threw the Prophet Michæas into prison. The same God, who had resolved to pardon the inhabitants of Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, and Edom, for the third time, had also determined not to forgive them the fourth sin. "For three crimes of Damascus and for four I will not convert it."² The Scripture is full of similar threats. What the Prophet David says of God is therefore true, "God shall break the heads of His enemies, the hairy crown of them that walk in their sins."³ So great is His hatred of those who, as it were, walk up and down in their sins, changing sins with confession, and confessions with sins, that,

¹ Nec ego te condemnabo: vade et jam amplius noli peccare.—John viii. 11.

² Super tribus sceleribus Damasci, et super quatuor non convertam eum.—Amos i. 3.

³ Deus confringet capita inimicorum suorum; verticem capilli perambulantium in delictis suis.—Ps. lxxvii. 22.

while He will break the heads of those who declare continual war on Him, yet He will not leave a hair on the heads of the others. O sinners, who, not merely for the fourth or fifth time, but so often, have trodden the ways of sin, have you a greater certainty of pardon than those others had? What promise, or document, have you to prove that? Ah, cease sinning at last! You have played with the divine mercy more than enough already. If you have now made a good confession, and have been admitted to pardon, grace, and favor, thank God for that; but let what you have now received hold good forever. "Be careful," is the warning St. Gregory gives you, "not to die again; for it is uncertain whether you will be awakened again to life."¹ It is at least exceedingly dangerous. If, then, a sense of decency does not keep you from relapsing into sin, at all events you should fear the evident danger of eternal ruin.

But suppose, O sinner, that your hopes are realized, and that the merciful God will be ready, when it suits you again to repent after having offended Him, to receive you into His friendship—and, indeed, He has promised, in His goodness, that He will not repel the sinner for the seventy-seventh time—how do you know that you will do penance again, especially since God must impel you thereto by His forestalling grace? How do you know that you will have time to repent? In a few days you will again gratify your brutal passions, and next Easter, or in some months' time, you will again go to confession; now, who has told you that you will live till next Easter, or for a few months? May you not die in the meantime? Who can promise you that you will live to-morrow, or even for one hour more? Has not Our Lord expressly said: "It is not for you to know the times or moments, which the Father hath put in His own power?"² But if no one is sure of a single moment, how much less can you dispose of the future time? "He," says St. Augustine, "who has promised to pardon the repentant sinner, has not promised to give the sinner the morrow for repentance." Again, I ask you, do you not see the manifest danger you run into when you relapse into sin? Do you not see how presumptuous you are to trust your eternal salvation to a matter that is quite uncertain, namely, the future time? Ah, unhappy man, who say or think that you will do penance hereafter, perhaps hereafter, when you

He runs the risk of never doing penance again.

¹ Cave ne rursus emoriaris; incertum est enim, an rursus ad vitam excitandus sis.

² Non est vestrum nosse tempora vel momenta, quae Pater posuit in sua potestate.—Acts 1. 7.

shall have again fallen into sin, you will be in your grave! For God's sake, then, consider well what you are doing. It is not money or temporal goods that depend on it; it is your own soul, your happiness or misery for eternity.

Shown by a
simile.

A soldier has deserted, and is therefore condemned to the gallows. While lying in prison, he conceives a plan of escape, which he manages to carry into execution; and as his guards are sleeping, he makes a hole in the wall of his cell, and gets out. He is running away at top speed, when suddenly a thought strikes him: ha, he says, I have forgotten my night-cap in the cell; I will go back for it, and I can get away again the next night. What would you think of him, my dear brethren? Would you not cry out to him, fool that you are! have you lost your senses? Will you risk your life for a worthless thing like that? Run off as hard as you can, so that no one may see you. You have now a good chance of escape, and if you throw it away you may never get another. No, the soldier answers, I must have my night-cap; I cannot do without it. Well, then, you would say to him, go and get it, and in a few days you can take it to the gallows with you and wear it there. O sinner! you have been hitherto kept in prison by the devil, chained hand and foot; you were on the point of eternal death. Sentence was already pronounced on you and would have been carried into execution, but by your Easter confession, you managed to escape from your prison; do not be so foolish as to enter it again for a worthless thing. Do not say, I will go again to that house; I have left there something I am very fond of; I will go into that company in order to gratify my passions, etc., and afterwards I will repent, and leave my prison, by the open door of penance. O senseless man! you are now on the right road to heaven. Go on, in God's name, or else you will perhaps be imprisoned forever in hell! Do you not see that these ideas of yours are mere deceits of the devil, who says: "I will return into my house from whence I came out." ¹

He will
afterwards
fruitlessly
bemoan his
misery.

Oh, woe to you, if you allow him to return! "Woe to you, apostate children," ² says the Lord. Woe to you, O man; I warn you for the last time; woe to you, if you fall again into sin! Woe to you during life, for you will have no blessing from God! Woe to you on your death-bed, for you will seek the Lord, and you will hardly find him, but die in your sins! Woe to you in

¹ Revertar in domum meam unde, exlvi?—Matt. xii. 41.

² Vm. nulli desertores.—Isa. xxx. 1.

judgment! The angels, to whom you now are a source of joy by your conversion, will condemn you; the very Easter confession you have made, the graces you have received, in preference to so many others, will be a reproach to you. Woe to you for all eternity in hell, if you should be condemned to go there, than which there is nothing more reasonable or natural to expect for one who refuses to amend. Oh, how you will there bewail your folly when it is too late! Foolish man that I am, you will say, what have I done? Was I not well off, after I made my confession? Did not the good God do me the favor of pardoning me my many sins, and receiving me into the number of His beloved children? I was an heir of the kingdom of heaven! Blind mortal that I was! What demon was it that drove me again into sin! What madness brought me again into that company! Oh, would that I had sinned not more! Would that I had not gone near that house, that person! If I had kept on in the way of justice, I should now be amongst the elect in heaven! As it is, I am lying in the flames of hell, where I shall have to remain forever! Oh, accursed and foolish man that I am! what have I done?

My dear brethren, that none of us may have to utter those howls of a tardy and useless repentance, let us now follow the advice of St. Paul: "Stand fast, and be not held again under the yoke of bondage."¹ You have now made peace with God and given Him your word; "stand fast," and be not the first to break the contract. "Peace be to you;" may the peace of God be with you always. Carefully avoid all occasions of sin. Every morning, when you rise, renew your good resolutions, and remind yourselves of what you promised God in your last confession. Say to yourselves: shall I then be untrue to God? Shall I repay with the blackest ingratitude the great benefit He has conferred on me? Shall I again place myself in evident danger of eternal damnation? Oh, woe to me, if I should this evening again become an enemy of God, a bond-slave of the devil, and go to bed with a mortal sin on my soul! It would be better for me to drop down dead, than to become again a slave to sin! Better for me to be stone-blind, than to look on an unchaste object! Better for me to be deaf, than to listen to impure conversation! Better for me to be dumb, than to indulge in the usual uncharitable or scandalous talk! Better for me to break both legs, than to put foot in that house, or to go into that company

Conclusion
and resolution
to be
constant in
good.

¹ *Stare, et nolite iterum jugo servitutis contineri.*—Gal. v. 1.

again! Better for me to lose both hands, than to stretch them forth to seize unjust gains, or to indulge in unlawful touches! Better for me to be lamed in my whole body, than to abuse it to gratify my brutal passions! Better for me that my house and all I have should be burned to the ground, than that I should lose heaven by sin! Better for me to die and be thrown out this very evening, than that I should again offend God! Oh, no, my God! with Thy help, that shall not be! I will henceforth honorably keep my word. “My justification, which I have begun to hold, I will not forsake,”¹ I will say with Thy servant Job. Let who will come, and say, or flatter, or threaten what and how he wishes, I will not forsake Thee. I have been unfaithful to Thee often enough already! Often enough, alas! too often, have I angered Thee! Henceforth I will atone for those insults by greater zeal in Thy love and service. “My justification, which I have begun to hold, I will not forsake;” such is my unalterable resolution. Rather any misfortune, than sin! Rather death, than sin! Rather hell, than sin! Almighty God, strengthen, by Thy grace, this resolution of mine, and, I hope, of us all! And so I say again in Thy name, “peace be to you;” peace be with you forever. Amen.

FIFTIETH SERMON.

ON THE EVILS OF WHICH A RELAPSE INTO SIN IS A SIGN.

Subject.

To fall back easily into one's former sins, 1. is a certain sign that one is not really arisen from sin by confession, as Christ arose from the dead; 2. it is an almost infallible sign that one has not done true penance.—*Preached on the first Sunday after Easter.*

Text.

Gavisi sunt ergo discipuli, viso Domino.—John xx. 20.

“The disciples therefore were glad, when they saw the Lord.”

Introduction.

Again there is joy and exultation amongst the disciples!

¹ *Justificationem meam, quam cœpi tenere, non deseram.*—Job xxvii. 6.

They have seen the Lord, and they know that He is really risen from the dead. Again, too, there is joy and exultation in the Church of God at this season. The faithful children of the Church have arisen from the death of sin, with Christ, by the Easter confession. God grant that such may be really the case with all of them! I hope for the best, my dear brethren; let us rejoice in the Lord. But there is one thing that still troubles me, as it did on a former occasion; namely, that this joyful feast will be spoiled in a short time by some who, in a few weeks or days, will return to their former evil ways. How wicked and ungrateful it is thus to act towards the good God, and what imminent danger it places the soul in, I have shown in my last sermon. To-day, I shall confine myself to Our Lord's resurrection and to our moral resurrection; and I say:

Plan of Discourse.

If you, O Christian, habitually and easily fall back into your former sins, it is a certain sign that you are not truly risen by your Easter confession, as Christ rose from the dead; this I shall show briefly in the first part. It is an almost infallible sign that you did not truly repent when making your Easter confession; as I shall show more at length in the second part. Therefore, be constant in the divine service; such shall be the conclusion.

Give us all Thy grace, O Lord, to make a firm resolution to that effect. We ask it of Thee, through the intercession of Thy holy Mother and of our holy guardian angels.

For our moral resurrection, from the death of sin to the life of grace, to be real, it must in all respects be conformable to the resurrection of Christ; for this latter is the proper model and pattern of ours, as St. Paul expressly teaches: "For we are buried together with Him by baptism into death," he writes to the Romans, "that, as Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life. For, if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection."¹ Here we might ask, why does the Apostle put before us the resurrection of Christ as an example of the conversion of the sinner? Did not Lazarus rise from the dead? And could he not have said that we must begin a new life, just as Lazarus did after his resurrection?

Christ, after rising from the dead, did not die again.

¹ *Consepulti enim sumus cum illo per baptismum in mortem; ut quomodo Christus surrexit a mortuis per gloriam Patris, ita et nos in novitate vitæ ambulemus. Si enim compantati facti sumus similitudini mortis ejus: simul et resurrectionis erimus.—Rom. vi. 4, 5.*

There is a great difference, my dear brethren, between the one case and the other. It is true that Lazarus rose from the dead; but it is also true that he died again. Such was not the case with Our Lord and Saviour. "Knowing," continues the Apostle, "that Christ rising again from the dead dieth now no more, death shall no more have dominion over Him;" having once left the grave, He returns to it no more. "For in that He died to sin, He died once; but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God."¹

There is no trace of this in one who easily relapses into sin after confession.

In the same way should the truly penitent Christian rise from the grave of sin; not like Lazarus, who died again; but like Jesus Christ, so that he must persevere in the life of sanctifying grace, and never more return wilfully to the tomb of his former sins. "Thus," says the Abbot Guericus, "the Christian rising with Christ no longer dies by mortal sin; sin will no more have power over him."² And that is also what the Apostle says: "That the body of sin may be destroyed, to the end that we may serve sin no longer."³ And he even asks how it is possible that we should again be the servants of sin: "For we that are dead to sin, how shall we live any longer therein?"⁴ These words at once suggest the question, if it is not likely that he who is really risen with Christ to life will fall back again into the death of sin, how can we believe that he is really risen from the death of sin to the life of grace, who so easily returns to his former wicked ways; who, a few days after his Easter confession, buries himself in the grave in which he was before, and who almost always brings the same mortal sins to confession? How can we believe that? No; it cannot be. He who relapses into sin gives clear proof that he did not rise with Christ.

Christ arose unbound, leaving his grave-clothes behind.

Again, how do we know that Lazarus after his resurrection was to die again, but not Christ, and, therefore, that Our Lord arose to a perfect, eternal life? Eusebius Emissenus answers this question: "Christ left His grave-clothes in the sepulchre; but Lazarus did not."⁵ When a galley comes to port, all the galley-slaves and passengers land at once; the former, to pur-

¹ *Scientes quod Christus resurgens ex mortuis jam non moritur, mors illi ultra non dominabitur: quod enim mortuus est peccato, mortuus est semel; quod autem vivit, vivit Deo.*—Rom. vi. 9, 10.

² *Sic Christianus conresurgens Christo jam non peccat ad mortem, nec ei peccatum ultra dominatur.*

³ *Ut destruat corpus peccati, et ultra non serviamus peccato.*—Rom. vi. 6.

⁴ *Qui enim mortui sumus peccato, quomodo adhuc vivemus in illo?*—Ibid. 2.

⁵ *Christus linteamina in sepulchro reliquit; non ita Lazarus prodrens cum sudario.*—Euseb. Emissen. de resurrect.

chase provisions; the latter, to stay there. Any one accustomed to the habits of seafaring people could say at once who have left the ship for good, and who intend returning to her; for the former are quite free, while the latter are chained, as a sign of their slavery.

Sinner, you who have at this Easter time confessed your sins and received holy Comunion! tell me, in what manner have you risen from the death of sin? Like Christ, leaving behind you all the tokens of sin; or like Lazarus, still bound with the grave-clothes? Have you left the grave, as you would a ship, with all the marks of freedom about you; or do you still wear the chains on your limbs, as a sign of slavery? Are you unable to answer that question? And yet, you must know most about it; for, if you soon fall back into sin as before, if you again return to the galleys, to the slavery of the devil, you can look on it as a sure sign that in outward appearance you have risen from the grave of your sins, but you are still, like Lazarus, actually bound hand and foot with the marks of your slavery; and, therefore, that you are not really risen to life with Christ.

The contrary is the case with the relapsing sinner

Finally, the Gospel says, that whenever Our Lord appeared after His resurrection, He always stood: "Jesus stood in the midst of them,"¹ in order to show, as commentators remark, that a penitent who is truly converted must stand fast in the state of grace; and therefore, according to an old custom in the Catholic Church, when the bell rings three times a day during Easter time, the prayers are recited, not kneeling, but standing. The holy martyr, St. Justin, who lived in the first ages of the Church, asks the question: "whence arises that custom in the Church?"² Would it not be more becoming to pray to God and to His holy Mother on bended knees, than standing? No, he answers, it is not always more becoming; when we kneel, we signify thereby that we have fallen to earth by our sins, and therefore, during Paschal time, we stand, in order to show that by the resurrection of Christ and by penance we have risen from our unhappy fall, and, being awakened from the death of the soul, must now persevere in our good resolutions. Such, too, is the meaning of the words of the Apostle to the Galatians: "Stand fast, and be not held again under the yoke of bondage."³ And to the Philippians: "Therefore, my dearly beloved breth-

After His resurrection, Christ always appeared standing.

¹ Stetit Jesus in medio eorum.—Luke xxiv. 36.

² Unde talis in Ecclesia consuetudo?

³ State, et nolite iterum iugo servitutis contineri.—Gal. v. 1.

ren, and most desired, my joy and my crown: so stand fast in the Lord. And the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,"¹ who stood amongst His disciples, and said to them: "Peace be to you."

The contrary is the case with the relapsing sinner.

On the other hand, it is a sure sign of wickedness to be always unsteady, as the Prophet David says: "The wicked walk round about."² He who walks round and round soon gets giddy and falls; or else he comes back to the place he started from. Inconstant Christian, who so easily fall into sin after confession, and run, as it were, in a circle from sin to confession, and confession to sin! learn from this that you are not of the number of the truly penitent, but rather of that of the wicked; and therefore your quick relapse into sin proves clearly that you are not really risen with Christ from the death of the soul; or, to leave similes aside, and to strike at the root of the matter, that, with all your confessions, you have not done true penance. And this is the second part of my sermon.

Second Part.

He who relapses into sin appears to have had none of those things that are required for true repentance.

True penance and the forgiveness of sin require, besides confession, when we have an opportunity of going, firstly, a real, supernatural sorrow and detestation of sin, and secondly, a firm resolution of amendment; and these are required on the part of him who does penance. On the part of God, it is necessary that He should give to the sinner thus repentant copious graces and helps in the sacrament of penance, in order to strengthen him to resist temptations, and to avoid sin in future. But if we consider the matter reasonably, as it is in itself, not one of these three things is to be found in him who speedily relapses into his former sins. I am not now speaking of venial sin, my dear brethren, and much less of those half voluntary daily faults and failings, into which people fall from human weakness, and from which even the holiest servants of God are not free. But that they who go to confession frequently in the month, and always come with the same sins and faults, since they have nothing else to confess, may be all the more certain of having a true sorrow and purpose of amendment, it is advisable that each time they should mention some sin of their past lives, and awaken sorrow

¹ *Itaque fratres mei carissimi et desideratissimi, gaudium meum et corona mea: sic state in Domino: et pax Dei, quæ exsuperat omnem sensum, custodiat corda vestra et intelligentias vestras.*—Philipp. iv. 1, 7.

² *In circuitu impij ambulant.*—Ps. xi. 9.

for it, as I have often said before. Neither is it my intention to assert that all those have not had true contrition, who after a considerable interval of time, during which they have kept in the grace of God, again fall now and then into their former grievous sins. Christian charity obliges me to pronounce a more favorable judgment in their case. No, penance does not confirm us in grace; that happiness is reserved only for the blessed in heaven, who never during all eternity can offend the God whom they love perfectly. But we, poor, frail mortals, as long as we are on this earth, exposed to so many temptations, dangers, and occasions of sin, if we are so firmly resolved to remain faithful to God that it seems an impossibility for us ever to provoke Him to anger, even then we must be filled with the spirit of humility and child-like fear, and be always on our guard, lest we should fall. Nor do I wish to say that it is always and in every case an infallible sign of a bad confession when one relapses into sin immediately after; for it may be that one who has truly repented is immediately afterwards exposed to an extraordinarily dangerous occasion, or that, through weakness and inconstancy, he changes his mind, and allows himself to be led into sin again. I am speaking only of those sinners who generally fall back into their former sins, after confession, and whose lives are an almost constant relapse; who, when the great feasts of the year come round, keep from sin for a few days, and go to the sacraments, but fall back again into their evil habits of cursing, swearing, drinking, injustice, and impurity. Of these I say, that, generally speaking, it is hardly probable that they have had a true sorrow and resolution of amendment, when they were making their confession, and that they have received the grace of God, along with the forgiveness of their sins, and the other helps of the sacrament. I will prove this in detail.

In the first place, then, all theologians are agreed that the sorrow required for true repentance must be in its intensity and efficacy necessarily "above everything," *super omnia*; that is, it must surpass all sorrow which natural causes can inspire one with to such an extent, that nothing in the world can cause the reasoning will to have such sorrow as the offence offered to God by sin. To make this clearer, imagine the case of a young widow, who has but one, beautiful, dearly loved son; this child of hers is killed by some one; who can explain the grief of the mother's heart at the cruel murder? The mere sight of the dagger that did the deed is enough to make her faint away; she cannot bear

For the sorrow required in repentance must be greater than all natural sorrow.

the sight of her son's blood-stained clothes, or of anything that can remind her of her misfortune. Her heart is ready to break with sorrow; she cannot pass by the place in which the crime was committed; the murderer's wife, his children, his servants, his friends, although they are quite innocent, are objects of such hatred to her, that she cannot bear to have anything to do with them. If she passes by his house, her blood runs cold; if she hears his name mentioned, she is ready to lose her senses with horror and grief. Perhaps, my dear brethren, that sorrow and grief is "above everything"? No, answer theologians; it is but a sensible and natural sorrow. The sorrow for sin which is required for penance must be much greater and more powerful. A rich merchant has sent all his goods to an agent in a foreign country; at an appointed time he sets out to receive his money, but he finds out that all his debtors have gone away and left the place without paying him. Thus the unfortunate man is reduced to beggary; he has neither goods, nor money, nor bread, nor counsel, nor hope; he tears his hair through sorrow and desperation; neither in heaven nor on earth can he find any consolation. This grief and sorrow, which torments him day and night, perhaps it is above all? Oh, no; it is like the other, a mere natural and sensible sorrow.

In its appreciative power.

Your sorrow and contrition, O sinner, whenever you come to the sacred tribunal of penance laden with mortal sin, must be in its intensity and efficacy, and in its appreciative power, far greater than that of the merchant and the mother; otherwise, it is of no avail for the forgiveness of sin. Mark well the words, "in its appreciative power;" for it is natural that the murder of her child should cause the mother to feel a more keen sensible sorrow, and the unexpected loss of his goods should affect the merchant in the same way. This sensitiveness is not required for the supernatural sorrow that one must have for sin; and yet I say that the latter must in its appreciative power and in its efficacy be greater than the former; that is, I must look on the loss of heaven as greater than the loss of all temporal goods in the whole world, and I must regret the death of my soul more than that of the dearest friends I have on earth; further, I must abhor offending God more than the worst accident that can happen to me in any way, more than any pain or trouble that can afflict me. My sorrow must be of such a kind that, if I were in the place of the mother or the merchant, and had it in my power either to prevent the murder or the loss, or to offend God by sin, by virtue

of my sorrow, I would prefer that the sin should not be committed, rather than the murder or the loss should be avoided; and if the sin were to be committed, that I would rather suffer any trouble, pain, and grief, than offend God by mortal sin.

Now I ask you, my dear brethren, is it likely that a man who is thus sincere in repenting of his sins should at once, at the first attack and without offering any opposition, relapse into the same sins that he has just repented of and detested? If the widow, whose grief at the death of her only son was so great that she could not bear to look at the murderer or at any one belonging to him, if she were to marry him after four, five, or six days, what would all sensible men think of her? They would say that she has either lost her reason, or that her sorrow was merely apparent and not real. Now, since the sorrow for sin must be much greater than the grief of that mother, nay, than all the natural sorrow of all men, tell me, O sinner, you who so easily fall back into your former sins after confession, and constantly alternate between sin and confession, confession and sin, can you persuade any reasonable man that you detested and hated your sins, when you were making your confession, with that powerful sorrow and contrition I have just described? You will never persuade me of it; I would not and could not believe it. Could you, perhaps, make the holy Fathers, Ambrose, Augustine, Bernard, Gregory, Jerome, believe it? Still less, for they say that a penitent of that kind is a mere juggler and trickster. Not even yourself, if you have common sense, could you persuade of such a thing, for your own conscience would contradict you, and show that you could not have had such a very earnest horror and detestation of your sins, since, otherwise, it would not be likely that you would fall so easily into them again. Nay, the very house, the amusement, the person, the drink, the company that led you into sin, would inspire you with horror and aversion, if your repentance were sincere. Alas! you would say, with a deep sigh, there, O my God, is the unhappy snare that caught me and led me astray from Thee! There is the place in which I lost heaven and its joys! There is the house in which I fell into the flames of hell! There is the company in which I sold my soul to the devil! O my God, what have I done? Have I not been mad and foolish? Such should be your thoughts. But instead of abhorring and avoiding them, you go back at once to that house, that company, that person, and commit the same sins over again. so that, in spite of your asseverations that you have repented of

Generally speaking, he who easily relapses has not had that sorrow.

your sins above every other evil, I do not believe you; your sorrow and repentance had not the qualities that are necessary to stamp them as genuine. Still less had you a firm purpose of amendment. Mark what I am about to say.

The purpose of amendment required for confession.

The purpose required for true repentance must be a heart-felt, earnest one, far stronger than all other human resolutions; it must consist of a firm and general determination of the will not, under any circumstances or for any reason whatever, to offend God by mortal sin. The holy Fathers call it a vow, *votum*, by which a man binds himself, as it were on oath, to observe for the future the law of God inviolably. Nor does this purpose admit of any condition; that is, I must be prepared to resist sin, even if all the joys and pleasures of the world were enticing me to commit it; or if I could thereby gain all the treasures and riches of the world; or if all men were urging me to sin with the most severe threats. No matter how lasting or how importunate the allurements to sin may be, I must be firmly resolved, and that sincerely, rather to lose my wealth and property, my honor and good name, my health and life itself, and to undergo all possible torments, than consent to a single mortal sin; and this resolution must be general, that is, it must be for all future time, even if I had a thousand years of life still before me; it must be extended to all places and all circumstances, whether we can foresee them or not. It must be such a firm purpose, that I am determined to avoid all occasions and dangers which, as far as I can reasonably foresee, are likely to lead me into sin, and to use every means in my power in order not to sin again. If I have not this earnest resolution, my purpose, and therefore my repentance, have not the qualities they should have, and it would be better for me not to go to confession under the circumstances.

Nor has he had that.

Now I ask again, is it likely, nay, is it possible that a man who has such a purpose will again abandon his God by sin at the first opportunity, at the least temptation, for the sake of gratifying some brutal passion, or for some worthless thing? Judge yourselves, my dear brethren, of the matter. Do you think that a penitent, who the day after he has been to confession, or a few days after, goes back to his former evil ways; or, what is still worse, always comes back to confession with the same mortal sins, without showing the least sign of improvement,—is it likely, I ask, that he has that firm purpose, that earnest determination never again to commit a mortal sin? For my part, I

do not believe that when he was reading the words of the purpose out of his prayer-book, or was repeating them by heart, he was really in earnest in what he was saying to God; at all events, no sensible man could find any sufficient reason for believing such a thing.

Suppose that in this town (as is unfortunately the case in many parts of our dear native land) the Lutherans or Calvinists were allowed as much freedom as Catholics in the practice of their false religion, and that they could hold their so-called divine service publicly (which will certainly never be tolerated by the inhabitants of Treves, whose bravery and constancy in defending the one, true, Catholic faith is attested from ancient times by the blood of countless martyrs), suppose, I say, that such were the case, and that the good God had given me the grace to convince a sensible and aged Lutheran of the truth of our religion, so that he made a public profession of faith in the church, before the assembled congregation, confessed his sins, and received the Blessed Eucharist, showing thereby that he was ready to live and die in the faith and to give his life for it, if necessary, truly I would congratulate him with all my heart. But three or four days after this public profession I find him again in the Lutheran church, after having thrown away his prayer-book and rosary, receiving the Lutheran communion, that is, a piece of bread. I wait until he comes out of the church, and say to him: "ah, my dear son, what is this? How is it that you have changed so suddenly? Have you forgotten what you so publicly professed a few days ago? How is it that I find you here now?" "Ah, Father," he exclaims, falling at my feet, "forgive me this time; I acknowledge that I have done wrong, and very wrong. My companions persuaded me to take this step. I am very sorry for it now, and I promise to be faithful during the rest of my life." And so he becomes a Catholic again. Four or five days later on I see him again going to the Lutheran church, and perjuring himself as before. Oh! I think; this is too bad; and I accuse him of acting dishonorably. "You have deceived and betrayed me," I say to him; "if the Catholic Church is the only true and infallible Church, in which alone salvation can be found, as you have recently acknowledged, why have you left it now, and that, too, in such a short time? And on the other hand, if you did not look on it as the true Church, why did you enter it?" "Ah, Father," he says again I must say that I have acted shamelessly; but I am heartily sorr

Shown by a
smile.

for it; forgive me my inconstancy and weakness this once, and I will never have anything to do with Lutheranism again; I swear it most solemnly, and I renounce forever all false doctrine! Henceforth I will live as a good Catholic." But in spite of all this protestation, hardly four and twenty hours have elapsed, when he falls again as before; and thus he goes on for two, three, or more years, changing from Catholicism to Lutheranism, and from Lutheranism to Catholicism. Each time he renews his promise of fidelity, and as invariably breaks his word. What would you think of the promise of such a man, my dear brethren? Eh? you would say without hesitation, the fellow does not mean what he says; he never intended to be a Catholic; he was only wanting to play a trick on you. Such would be my opinion, too, and if he came to me a third time, I would refuse to listen to him.

But shows
that he was
only mak-
ing a mock-
ery of God.

Sinner, whenever you went to confession, you made a firm resolution, and publicly protested, before the Church and in the presence of God, that you would never again allow yourself to be separated from Him by mortal sin; you renounced your former wicked life, with the promise of beginning to live as a real Christian in future; and that promise you have, perhaps, renewed for many years. The priest, who did not rightly know you and your conscience, believed you at first, and looking on you as a true penitent, pronounced the words of absolution over you with much secret joy of heart, for he imagined that he had brought back a stray sheep to the fold, and had done a great work indeed. But, after the lapse of a few days, you broke your promise by committing the same sin over again; you went again to confession, repeated the same promises, and after a short time again perjured yourself. For the third, fourth, tenth time you said in confession that you would never sin again! I am sorry, you exclaimed, with my whole heart that I have offended God; henceforth I will show that I am a true servant of His; I would rather die a thousand times than offend Him again. But you never kept your word. And this change from sin to confession and from confession to sin has been going on now perhaps for some years. Is that the way you mock the almighty God? Do you think you can persuade Him that you have had a real, earnest purpose of amendment? No; no reasonable man could believe that, much less the all-seeing God. Arguing from the lamentable ease with which you relapsed into sin, it is evident that all your confessions were invalid, because you had not a

true and firm purpose of amendment, and therefore, which is the third and last proof of your false repentance, that you never obtained the forgiveness of your sins nor the helps and graces of the sacrament from God.

The effects of the sacrament of penance in souls that are properly disposed are, according to the teaching of theologians, besides sanctifying grace, which makes us friends and children of God, the copious helps and actual graces which our heavenly Father bestows on the souls of His beloved children, in order to make them terrible to the demon, so that he can no longer so easily attack and overcome them, and also to arm and strengthen those souls against their own evil inclinations and the temptations that assail them, so that they may easily overcome them. Hence the best advice to give one who has fallen into mortal sin through natural weakness and frailty is, not to defer repentance and confession for a long time, but as soon as possible to be sorry for his sin and to free his conscience from it by confession. For while a man is at enmity with God, he is like a fortress whose walls and fortifications are thrown down, and which has fallen into the possession of the devil, so that it is easy for the Evil Spirit to garrison it with as many soldiers of his as he pleases. The Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas of Aquin, expressly teaches that a mortal sin cannot long remain alone in the conscience, but keeps on attracting more and more to it; while, on the other hand, a soul in the state of grace and in the friendship of God can, in the midst of the most violent temptations and the greatest dangers, keep itself from sin far easier, than one in the state of sin can avoid committing a new sin, although the latter may be free from all assaults of temptation; and this on account of the great weakness and frailty which come from the loss of the grace and favor of God.

From this certain fundamental truth I draw the following almost indisputable twofold conclusion: timid souls! who are so often filled with dread at the thought,—ah! am I really in the grace of God? Have I truly repented of all the sins of my past life, and confessed them as I ought? Ah! if I only knew that I was among the number of the friends and children of God! I have often and grievously sinned, and deserved hell-fire, of that I am certain; but whether my sins are forgiven or not, I cannot say; and this is what makes me anxious and uneasy. Hear what I am about to say; truly, I have not seen the great account-book of the almighty God, and no man can be infallibly certain as to

The effects of true penance are the graces of God, which help to overcome temptations.

Therefore, they who keep from mortal sin for a long time have good proof that they are in the state of grace.

whether He is deserving of love or hatred; yet I can give you a probable, and, to speak of it humanly, an almost certain assurance in the matter which causes your anxiety. One thing only I ask you; have you or have you not continued to commit grievous sins? Answer that question honestly according to your conscience. If you say: no, Father, thanks be to God; I do my best to avoid mortal sin; months and years have now elapsed since I made a general confession of all my sins, and during that time I do not remember having deliberately committed a grievous sin; as far as I can, too, I avoid all dangerous occasions, and everything that could lead me into sin is an object of horror to me,—is that the case? Oh, then be of good heart, beloved souls! that is a good, and, as far as is possible on this earth, it is an infallible sign that you are in the grace of God! If no new sins have found room in your conscience, then the old ones are thrown out of it, and therefore you are beloved children and friends of God; you are in the state of grace. For if you were not, it would be most unlikely, humanly speaking, that you could keep so long from committing new sins. “Therefore, my dearly beloved, so stand fast in the Lord,” I say to you, in the words of the Apostle. Dearest brethren and sisters, only be constant in serving the Lord in that way, and love him most ardently.

On the other hand, they who easily relapse have an evident proof that they did not get the graces of the sacrament of penance.

But you, insensate sinners, who so easily relapse into your former sins after confession, and continually alternate between confession and sin, you, perhaps, will try to ascribe your relapse to human frailty and weakness; but what I fear, and am persuaded of, is this, that you have perhaps never really repented of your sins with a supernatural sorrow; these frequent relapses into sin are the consequences of your former misdeeds, which are in reality still on your conscience. “The sin,” says St. Gregory, “which is not blotted out by penance presently attracts another to it by its own weight;”¹ while St. Thomas says that “by the least grace one may resist all the attacks of concupiscence, and avoid all sin.”² Hence I conclude that you, who so easily relapse into your former sins, have neither the courage nor the power to overcome your evil inclinations, or to resist temptation; and, therefore, you have probably not received the grace of God in the sacrament of penance; you add sin to sin, and consequently your former sins are presumably still on your

¹ Peccatum quod poenitentia non deletur, mox suo pondere ad aliud trahit.

² Minima gratia potest resistere cullibet concupiscentiæ, et vitare omne peccatum.

conscience; you do not find any effects of the sacrament of penance in your lives, and therefore your repentance was probably not a true but a false one. It certainly sometimes occurs that a man who has truly repented of and candidly confessed his sins, and so received the grace of the sacrament, again falls into his former sins; but it does not happen at once, nor at the first attack of temptation. It takes some time for such a deep-seated sorrow to be forgotten, and for that firm purpose and determination to be changed, so that the treasures of grace that God has bestowed in the sacrament lose their power. A man of that kind does not fall at once into mortal sin, but gradually loses devotion and zeal in the service of God; he becomes more and more careless, and ventures more recklessly into the dangerous occasions of sin, thus opening the door to the attacks of the devil. He falls a hundred times, but in small things; until his conscience becomes dulled, the good inspirations of God are neglected and despised, and at last, when the occasion is at hand, mortal sin is committed. But that within a week after doing penance, nay, sometimes on the very day after, mortal sin should be again admitted into the soul, in spite of its having been so heartily detested and repented of; that a man should at once become weak and perverse, as if the almighty God had never conquered his heart by grace, and that this change between confession and sin should grow into a sort of habit; I cannot for the life of me see how that can consist with true repentance preceding. No, no matter who you are, and what protestations you make, no one of common sense can believe, and it is, humanly speaking, impossible, that you have had a true sorrow for your sins, such as is required for the validity of the sacrament of penance. True contrition was wanting to you, as well as the firm purpose of amendment; nor have you received the graces that God is wont to give in the sacrament; your old sins are still on your conscience, and you have not freed yourself from the yoke and the slavery of the devil. Hence, if you have been in the habit of relapsing for years past, you have good reason, provided you wish to repent sincerely, to make a general confession of all your sins, mentioning also the number of times you have been to confession and holy Communion meanwhile, and taking good care to prepare yourself better than hitherto by exciting yourself to true sorrow and a firm purpose of amendment.

But if, as I earnestly hope, you have in this Easter confession truly repented of and detested your sins, so that you are now

Conclusion
and resolu-

tion to be
constant in
good.

in the state of sanctifying grace and in the friendship of God, oh, what a great and priceless blessing it is for you that the long-suffering and merciful God has borne with you for so many years, and has at last admitted you to His favor! But now I beg of you, for the sake of that heaven in which you hope and desire one day to see and love God, your supreme Good, be steadfast for the future, and see that you do not, by relapsing into sin, turn the patient mercy of God into implacable hatred, so that you can have no hope of being again forgiven. This carefulness on your part and your efforts to avoid sin will be the surest sign that you have risen with Christ from the grave of sin, and by true penance have gained the freedom of the children of God, so that you will be able to rejoice as the disciples did when they saw the Lord, and to comfort yourself, as I shall show on a future occasion for the encouragement of those who persevere after having made a good confession, with the assurance that you will see the Lord in heaven, and rejoice with Him there forever. A blessing I wish you and myself from my heart. Amen.

FIFTY-FIRST SERMON.

ON THE WICKEDNESS OF THOSE WHO COMMIT SIN, BECAUSE
THEY HOPE TO BE FORGIVEN IN CONFESSION.

Subject.

They who sin because they hope to be forgiven in confession are in evident danger of eternal damnation. For, 1. they hardly ever become really converted to God; 2. God will hardly ever give them the grace of true repentance.—*Preached on the twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Iratus dominus ejus, tradidit eum tortoribus.—Matt. xviii. 34.
“And his lord, being angry, delivered him to the torturers.”

Introduction.

This parable represents in a striking manner what takes place nowadays between God and the sinner. In the first place, the king grants his servant's humble prayer, and forgives him the

debt altogether: "And the Lord of that servant, being moved to pity, let him go, and forgave him the debt." There you have an image of the infinite goodness of God towards the sinner who returns to Him; for, at his first repentant prayer for forgiveness, and the humble confession of his sins, God blots out all the guilt of his sins, even if they were more numerous than the sands on the sea-shore, and forgets them forever. In the second place, how did the servant act after his lord had been so good to him? "But when that servant was gone out, he found one of his fellow-servants that owed him a hundred pence, and laying hold of him, he throttled him, saying: Pay what thou owest." What shameful conduct! But mark the inconceivable ingratitude of many sinners, who, depending on the goodness and mercy with which God is ready to receive them in the sacrament of penance, sin all the more boldly, instead of showing the greatest thankfulness to God, as I have said in my last sermon. "Sin away," they say, "provided you only make a good confession afterwards." Or else: "what harm is it to commit sin? I can venture to do it, as I can go to confession afterwards, and God will then forgive me." Or else, when they are already in the state of sin: "I can go on a while longer, and the one confession will make all right by-and-by." Thus they continually alternate between confession and sin, sin and confession, profaning the holy sacrament of penance by their wicked lives. Against those sinners I direct my sermon to-day; and I tell them beforehand that they will fare like the wicked servant in to-day's gospel: "And his lord, being angry, delivered him to the torturers;" such will be the fate of those sinners.

Plan of Discourse.

They who are in such dispositions, and sin because they have the intention of confessing their sins afterwards, are in the greatest and most evident danger of being delivered over by an angry God to the torturers, to their eternal damnation. And why so? Because they will never be really converted to God, as I shall show in the first part. Because God will hardly ever give them the grace of true repentance, as I shall show in the second part. My object is to warn those who are perhaps in error on this point, so that they may not find out their mistake too late.

Give us Thy light and grace thereto, O Holy Ghost; we beg this of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

He who sins because he hopes to be forgiven in confession does not understand what is required for true penance.

He who does not know what is required for a certain business will not perform it rightly. So, also, he who does not know nor understand what is necessary for true repentance and conversion to God will never be really converted, nor will he obtain forgiveness of his sins. Now, presumptuous man, who fall into grievous sin without scruple or shame, and at the same time think to yourself, I will commit this sin; it does not make much matter, as I can confess it afterwards; or, I have mortal sins on my conscience already, so I can go on for a while longer gratifying my passions, and then the one confession will make it all right; it comes to the same thing whether I have to say that I have committed the sin once or twenty times; and so you go on from one confession to another. Presumptuous man that you are, I ask you, do you know what is required for true repentance and conversion to God in the sacrament of penance? I believe you do not; for otherwise you would not act as you do. You think it is enough for you merely to confess your sins? If that were the case, although you act most dishonorably towards God by abusing, in order to offend Him further, the easy means He has appointed for the forgiveness of sin, you might have some chance of carrying out your plans, provided death does not anticipate you before you have time to make your confession. But you must know that the declaration of one's sins to the priest in confession is the least of the things that are required for true repentance, as we have seen already.

The most necessary condition is true sorrow.

That which is most necessary for the sinner to be really converted, and to obtain forgiveness of his sins, is contrition and sorrow for his sins; and as I have often told you, and cannot too often repeat, that sorrow must be sincere from the bottom of the heart; it must proceed from a supernatural motive; it must be extended to every mortal sin, without exception; in its strength and efficacy it must surpass all other natural sorrow, and sin must be hated far more than any earthly evil that one can suffer under any circumstances; it must include also a firm purpose and determination of the will rather to endure all the miseries of the world than to offend God again by one mortal sin. Do you now understand what it is? And do you firmly believe that sorrow of that kind is necessary for repentance and a good confession; or that, seeing the way in which you have been going on, sinning in the hope of obtaining pardon in the sacrament of penance, you have always had that sorrow when you went to confession; or that you will have such a sorrow the next

time you go to confession? Say what you will, I do not think any of these three things is, humanly speaking, possible.

For, in the first place, do you believe that such a sorrow is required for the validity of your confession? If so, you act against all the laws of common sense, and are utterly incapable of having a sorrow of the kind, when you say to yourself, I will commit this sin, or I will continue committing it, as I can confess and repent of it afterwards. What is the meaning of that? Is it not the same as saying, I will sin and be sorry afterwards that I have sinned? I will sin, and afterwards my sin shall cause me greater grief than if I had lost everything I possess, or had become blind and lame, or were exposed to the ridicule of the whole world, or had to suffer all the torments that man can bear. I will sin, and afterwards I will wish with all my heart that I had died a sudden death before sinning. I will sin, and be so sorry for it afterwards, that I would wish to shed my blood even, if by so doing I could recall the time in which I offended God, and undo what I have done. That is the meaning of your conduct. And is it not foolish and devoid of common sense? Who ever heard a man say, I will throw myself down from the top of this wall and break my arms and legs; but afterwards I will be sorry for my folly, and will condemn it with bitter tears, and will send for an experienced doctor to heal my wounds? I will set fire to my house, but will regret afterwards that I have done so, and, with great expense, will build a new one. I will marry that notorious, wicked woman; and afterwards will wish sincerely that I had never seen her. Would not any one look on a man who speaks in that way as a fool fit for Bedlam? But such and even greater is the folly you are guilty of, O sinner! when you commit mortal sin, because you think that you will afterwards be able to repent of and confess it.

Again, do you believe that, considering your mode of action, you are able to awaken that true sorrow and repentance, as I have described it, or that you will be able to awaken it later on? And what will be your motives? What have they been hitherto? It is well-known that the sorrow for sin is twofold, namely, perfect and imperfect. Perfect sorrow comes from a perfect love of God, arising from the knowledge given us by faith that God is of and in Himself the infinite and supreme Good, and of Himself is worthy of infinite love and esteem, and therefore it grieves us above all things that we have offended such a God

He does not believe that, or else he acts foolishly.

He has no motive to excite himself to true contrition.

who is worthy of all love. Imperfect sorrow comes either from the fear of God, whose strict justice we dread, because faith teaches us that He has threatened to punish even one mortal sin with hell fire; and therefore it grieves us above all things to have ever despised, by transgressing His commands, a God who punishes so justly and so severely; or else it comes from the recollection of the many benefits God has bestowed on us, and from the hope of an exceeding great reward in the life to come, which we know we lose by committing mortal sin; and therefore it grieves us above all things that we have been so ungrateful to our good God, and have bartered away the eternal joys of heaven for some wretched thing; or else it arises from the consideration of the deformity of sin, which inspires us with such horror, that we wish from our hearts rather to suffer death or any other evil, than again to be guilty of sin. None of these motives is capable of exciting you to be truly sorry for your sins and to detest them; because you do not love God sincerely, nor fear Him as you ought, nor do you acknowledge the benefits you have received from Him, nor do you esteem as you should and must the rewards He has promised, nor have you a horror of sin.

For he nei-
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You do not love your God; for from one confession to another you thrust Him out of your heart, without fear or shame, for some miserable thing, and that with the deliberate intention that He shall afterwards love you and admit you to His friendship. You love your God as little as the wicked son loves his father when he attacks him with a drawn sword, saying at the same time, I will now inflict a mortal wound on you, and afterwards I shall regret it with all my heart, because I shall then love you more than any one in the world. You do not fear your God nor the punishments He has threatened; for you offend and insult Him most recklessly, because you think and hope He will not punish you, but be reconciled with you each time you go to confession. Imagine that I am standing on a high tower, holding you fast to a pillar, and saying to you with a threatening countenance, wretched man! be careful not to say a single word against me! I have you now in my power; if I let you go, you will fall down and break your neck; and that will certainly be your fate, if you utter the least syllable to displease me, or show the least sign of contempt towards me. But meanwhile you laugh and mock at my threats, you struggle against me and even spit in my face. Could any one say that you are really afraid of me? Oh! you exclaim, I am behaving in this way only

for a short time; afterwards I will act more respectfully towards you, and you will not let me fall. Ah, rash man, you are only making a fool of me; you are not at all afraid of me! Even so little do you fear your God, O rash sinner! Even so little do you dread His justice. At all times, in all places, He has you in His hand, holding you over the abyss of hell, and giving you due warning that, if you transgress His law and offend Him grievously, He will open His hand and let you fall. But all that does not make you a whit afraid. I laugh at you, is the answer you give Him by your actions; I will now offend you, and trample your law under foot, but afterwards I will atone for the insult. Thus you have not the least fear of His punishments. Nor do you regard His rewards or benefits, for you barter the eternal joys of heaven for a worthless thing, and contemptuously reject God Himself, in spite of the benefits He has hitherto bestowed on you, consoling yourself meanwhile with the hope that, when you go to confession, He will again give you that priceless blessing, the forgiveness of your sins, and will make you His dear friend. And, finally, you have no horror of sin on account of its innate deformity, for you are continually defiling yourself with it, intending afterwards to cleanse your soul from its filth. So that there is no motive capable of arousing in you a true sorrow, and since you go on from one confession to another, saying, I will commit this sin, and confess it afterwards, you are hardly ever capable of having a real sorrow and of being truly converted to God.

But suppose your presumptuous hope is realized, for the human will may change at any moment; suppose that, moved by some special light to a real love or fear of God, you repent of your sins, and make a good confession, how long will your conversion last? As I presume, you will never really and constantly amend your sinful ways, seeing how you have for such a long time profaned the sacrament of penance; for, on the one hand, by frequent relapses into sin, your evil habits grow stronger and stronger, and make it easier for you to fall again; and on the other hand, the demon gets more power over you on account of the weakening of your spiritual strength, so that repentance and conversion become more and more difficult for you. As I said when commencing to speak of this subject, by a good confession the penitent recovers all he had lost by sin, so that the merciful God takes away all guilt from his soul, and makes him just as rich in merits and graces as he was before his fall; but, as we

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sins he ac-
quires bad
habits.

must not forget, and as experience unfortunately reminds us every day, the relics of sin still remain, although we have done penance with all our hearts; that is, besides the punishment still due to our sins, there are the strong and evil inclinations that impel man to sin, and that grow stronger and stronger the more the sinful habit is indulged in. Hence it is no wonder if a great sinner is tempted far more violently to commit his habitual sins after he has made a good confession, than before his conversion, and while he was still in the state of sin.

Which at last brings him to final impotence.

And now, rash man, who heap sin on sin, depending on the chance of making a good confession, how will you be able to resist to the end the effects of inveterate habit, and those inclinations which, being already implanted in your nature, have acquired additional violence by long indulgence; how will you be able to resist them, even supposing that you are truly converted and make a good confession? Ah, innocent and pious servants of God, who have never tasted forbidden pleasure, are often obliged to scourge themselves even to blood, in order to avoid giving consent to impure temptations! And how can you promise yourself a victory over them, after all the time you have spent between sin and confession, confession and sin, making a second nature out of your evil habits? How will you be able to overcome them, when the devil will come with his suggestions and temptations, thus strengthening your natural inclinations to sin? "Promising them liberty," says St. Peter in his Second Epistle, "whereas they themselves are the slaves of corruption: for by whom a man is overcome, of the same also he is the slave."¹ The oftener, O sinner, you have allowed yourself to be overcome by the devil, the more are you enslaved by him, the greater the command he has over you and your evil desires; and what will that lead to? To what the Apostle speaks of in the same place: "For if, flying from the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they be again entangled in them, and overcome, their latter state is become unto them worse than the former."² I will commit sin, you say to yourself, and afterwards I will repent of and confess it; or, I will gratify my passions this once, and then one confession will make it all right. Ah! all that is nothing but a

¹ Libertatem illis promittentes, cum ipsi servi sint corruptionis: a quo enim quis superatus est, hujus et servus est.—II. Pet. II. 19.

² Si enim refugientes coinquinationes mundi in cognitione Domini nostri et Salvatoris Jesu Christi, his rursus implicati superantur: facta sunt eis posteriora deteriora prioribus. *ibid.* 20.

deceit of the Evil One! Do not trust him, poor mortal! The crafty tempter acts like a general who, having obtained permission to pass through the enemy's country with one or two companies of soldiers, promising to remain but a day or two, as soon as he has effected an entry, fortifies himself and is not easily dislodged. So the devil, our sworn enemy, seems to be satisfied in the beginning if we grant him simply a right of way; that is to say, he suggests to a man that he ought to try this pleasure; he can repent of it afterwards; and if the suggestion is acted on, he persuades his victim to try the same pleasure once more, trusting again in a future confession. But, poor soul, you must be on your guard! or else he will bring matters so far with his suggestions that, keeping fast hold of you as his bond-slave, he will at last cause you to die impenitent, so that all your confessions and all the penance you intended doing will be of no avail to you.

A terrible incident is recorded in the English Annals by the Bishop of Syracuse. A young man, who was addicted to the vice of impurity, and was continuing recklessly in sin, trusting to obtaining pardon in the sacrament of penance, was suddenly overtaken by a grievous illness. He thought it was then high time for him to carry into effect his long deferred intention of repenting, and to declare his sins in confession; and he actually did so. (O good God! how great Thy mercy and goodness, since Thou dost not reject the sinner even at the last moment!) So heartfelt was his sorrow, so bitter the tears with which he confessed his sins, so earnest his devotion in receiving the last sacraments, so continual his sighs of sorrow and love of God, that no one of those who were around him but felt a sort of holy envy towards him and wished that he, too, could die such a good death. There was no doubt entertained of his salvation. After his death the soul of the young man appeared to one of his nearest relations, and said, with horrible howls of despair, that it was in hell. His friend, surprised at this unexpected news, asked in amazement how that was possible. "Did you not," he said, "make a good confession?" "Yes," answered the soul; "my confession was good." "Perhaps you had not a true sorrow?" "My sorrow was heartfelt and sincere, was the reply; not the least thing was wanting to my repentance; all my sins were washed away by it, and I was a dear child and friend of God, expecting the heavenly glory that belonged to me by right; but, alas, unhappy me! just before I breathed my last, the devil represent-

Shown by
an example.

ed to my imagination the carnal pleasures I had so frequently enjoyed, and through force of habit I consented to a desire for them, whereupon I immediately breathed my last and was condemned to hell.”

Therefore
he will
hardly ever
truly re-
pent.

Think of this, O sinner! If the long-continued and inveterate habit of sin and the temptations of the devil have such power that they can lead again into mortal sin a man who had just repented perfectly of his sins and detested them, a man whom illness had deprived of all bodily strength, a man who was on the threshold of eternity and was about to enter heaven; what sort of conversion and amendment can you hope to have after that confession on the strength of which you now go on adding sin to sin? For, you are still strong and healthy; you are in the midst of temptations, outward as well as inward, and are surrounded by occasions of sin; you do not even dream of death as yet, and therefore you sin without scruple, because you hope to be able to confess your sins later on. Oh, no! if you go on in that way you can hardly ever hope to be truly converted and to amend your wicked life. Nay, even if you happen to make your confession with a good will, as a general rule the good God will not give you the grace of true repentance, so that your conversion will not be real, and your sins will not be forgiven, owing to your presumption, which has made it, humanly speaking, impossible for you to enjoy the benefit of the sacrament, as we shall see in the

Second Part.

And even if
he wished
for it, he
will hardly
receive
from God
the extra-
ordinary
grace of
true re-
pentance.

I base what I am now about to say on that truth, that article of faith, which I explained some time ago, when I showed that the sinner who wishes to be converted must humbly and fervently pray to God for help; for man, by his own unassisted strength, can do no supernaturally good work, and much less can he free himself from the state of sin, repent of his evil deeds, and do penance as he ought, unless God helps him by preventing and co-operating grace. This is the first point for which I claim your attention. This preventing and co-operating grace, which is necessary for true repentance, God is not bound to give to any sinner after the latter has abandoned and grievously offended Him; and furthermore, He can withdraw all other graces and helps as He pleases, so that the sinner, according to his deserts, must necessarily be lost forever. This is the second point. Further, the greater the malice and number of sins that one

has committed, and the more inveterate his habit of sinning, so also the greater, more powerful, and extraordinary must be the helps and graces he receives from God in order to be converted; and consequently the less, too, is God obliged to help him in such a special manner. This is the third point. Do you understand this clearly, presumptuous man, when you sin without scruple, and heap sin on sin, trusting to a future confession? How can you reasonably hope that God will give you such a special grace of repentance, I do not say every time you go to confession, but at any time at all? No, that is not likely; for, you neither deserve that grace, nor is it becoming, so to speak, for God to give it you.

In the first place, you do not deserve that grace, but rather compel the just God to withdraw it from you. It is generally acknowledged amongst men in the world that he who is ungrateful to his benefactor deserves to be deprived of the benefits he has received; and much more so if he has misused those benefits to insult and injure his benefactor. Thus, for instance, a thief who has robbed the church can find no refuge in it from arrest. But that is the special feature of your sin, when you offend God relying on the hope of a future confession. The holy sacrament of penance is founded on the precious blood of Jesus Christ, and is instituted as a special benefit and a necessary help for us poor, frail mortals, by means of which, if we commit a mortal sin, we can free ourselves from it, and more easily avoid a relapse; but you abuse this very benefit as a reason and a means of sinning all the more shamelessly and of offending God, your sovereign Benefactor. For, if there was no confession, if you knew for certain that, should you commit a grievous sin, there is no means of freeing your conscience from it, you would surely be more on your guard against mortal sin, and would not allow yourself to be so easily overcome by temptation; since, however, the good and merciful God has appointed this easy means of procuring pardon, you contemn Him without scruple and add sin to sin. I will commit sin, you think, because I can tell it in confession afterwards; that is to say, I will offend my God, because He has given me a means of freeing myself from the state of sin; I will offend my God, because He will forgive me afterwards. In a word, your meaning is: I will despise my God, and defy Him, because He is so good and merciful that He will afterwards receive me into His grace and friendship. Is not that making an abuse of the benefit to insult the Benefactor?

For he makes himself utterly unworthy of it.

And pre-
sumptuous-
ly relies on
it.

And yet you expect from the God whom you treat so shamefully such a great benefit? On what do you found this presumptuous hope of yours? The holiest friends of God were often obliged to beg for years and years before obtaining certain favors from Him. The great Apostle of the Gentiles, St. Paul, a chosen vessel of the Holy Ghost, prayed, while constantly chastising and mortifying his body, for the grace to be freed from the assaults of the flesh; and yet, as he himself acknowledges, he did not receive it. Pious souls, who seek for nothing in the world but to please God more and more, and to fulfil His holy will in all things, how long have they not to pray sometimes for a certain virtue, such as angelic purity, patience under adversity, love of crosses and humiliations, before they obtain from God the favor they long for so earnestly? And you, shameless sinner! after having so audaciously and for such a long time abused the benefits of God, the holy sacrament of penance, to heap sin on sin, you are not afraid to promise yourself that you will obtain a far greater favor, namely, the grace of true repentance, whenever you may be pleased to accept it! A grace that must be an extraordinarily powerful one, to enable you to be truly converted! A grace of which you are more unworthy than all other sinners! And God must be ready at your nod and beck, to prepare for you a grace that He is bound to give to no man who has sinned mortally even once and through frailty! No! no! pearls are not to be cast before swine in that way. It is true that the mercy of God in receiving sinners is exceeding great; but He has not entrusted it to any one to do with it what he likes, as you seem to be presumptuous enough to imagine; for you act as if you had a document in your possession assuring you of the grace of conversion whenever you are willing to claim it. But that is not the case: "I will have mercy on whom I will," said God to His servant Moses, "and I will be merciful to whom it shall please Me."¹ To you, I say, He will not at all times give the grace of true repentance, since you make a bad use of it to commit sin; nay, He cannot, so to speak, give it to you, as a general rule, for that would not be becoming His infinite Majesty.

And, as a
general
rule, it is
unbecom-
ing the Al-
mighty to
give such a

I repeat that our God is infinitely generous; His goodness and mercy have neither limit nor end, and the treasures of His grace are inexhaustible, that is true (blessed forever be Thy mercy, O good God!); but it is also infallibly certain that He dispenses His favors with the greatest judgment, as becomes such a great

¹ Miserebor cui voluero, et clemens ero in quem mihi placuerit.—Exod. xxxiii. 19.

Lord, and always with a view to His own honor and glory, that men may praise and magnify Him all the more. Moreover, He wishes that His benefits should be recognized and prized, as is only just; and for this reason He often refuses for a long time to grant the favors asked of Him by His holiest servants, in order that they may attach more value to them; for what is easily procured is, generally speaking, little valued. He has decreed an eternal punishment for every mortal sin, so that the fear of it may act as a check on men, to keep them from offending Him, and to make them be faithful in His service. Now, all this would go for nothing, if God, as a general rule, were to give the grace of true repentance and conversion to those who go on sinning because they hope to be able to confess their sins afterwards; for, what would become of the public honor and glory of God in the world in that case? Would He not seem to expose Himself and His honor to mockery and contempt? Who would value the grace of repentance and forgiveness, if it were to be had whenever one wishes, even after it has been shamefully abused? Who would fear the fire of hell, if every one could say, hell is not for me, I can sin as much as I please, and tomorrow, or the next day, confess my sins, so that I need not fear hell?

And what wicked lives the impious would then lead in the world! How infidels would mock and despise God! What scandal would be given the innocent! What cause for murmurs and complaints the good and righteous would have, at seeing the kingdom of heaven thrown before swine, that is, offered at such a cheap price to those who are wantonly wicked, while they themselves have to work so hard for it, and not even then can get rid of the fear of losing it! What would they think if they saw that others could indulge their passions without restraint, trusting to a future confession? Eh? Religious might say: what is the use of our shutting ourselves up in a convent? Why do we bury ourselves in the desert to avoid the occasions of sin? To what purpose do we fast and pray so much? What is the good of our constant mortification in order to keep our unruly flesh in subjection? We should live like other men, and indulge our sensuality! And if we now and then fall in grievous sin, what harm is that? We can confess it so easily! Nay, we may sin for the third, the tenth, the hundredth time; all we have to do is to go to confession the third, the tenth, or hundredth time; the good and merciful God will give us the grace of true

grace to such a man.

For it would be an encouragement for people to lead bad lives.

repentance as often as we wish; there is no difficulty about it. Indeed? You had better try if such is really the case, (yet I do not mean you to take this as advice), and see whether things will always turn out as you say! For I can assure you that the contrary is the case, and that the just God, as a general rule, cannot give the grace of true repentance to such sinners. "Be not deceived," is the warning given by St. Paul, "God is not mocked. For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap."¹ Have you sinned against the divine commands, even grievously, even for year after year? No matter, only return with confidence; repent sincerely and confess your sins; the merciful God does not desire the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live forever. But to rely on this confession and this mercy of God, in order to sin all the more boldly, because there is such an easy means at hand as the sacrament of penance, and God is always ready to forgive the sinner, that, I say, is a presumption that the God of justice and holiness cannot bear; His honor and glory and the welfare of souls are concerned in the matter, and He must refuse such sinners the grace of true repentance.

Therefore
he will prob-
ably be re-
jected.
Shown by a
simile.

It will be with them, as the royal Prophet foretold: "They shall return at evening, and shall suffer hunger like dogs, and shall go round about the city."² Mark the comparison, my dear brethren; dogs, when they find the door open in the morning, run out at once; they play, and jump about, and fight with each other, and carry on their games all over the town, till evening. Sometimes, indeed, they come home, when they find the door open and see the table laid; but, as soon as they have swallowed a mouthful, they are away again, until nightfall, when they return; and if they happen to find the door closed, they bark and howl their loudest in order to get admittance; but their master is too sensible to pay any attention to the noise they make; he lets them howl away until they are tired, so that they have to suffer the pangs of hunger all night on the doorstep. "They shall suffer hunger like dogs." There you have a picture of the unhappy state of those sinners of whom I am speaking. They see the door of God's mercy open for them in the holy sacrament of penance, which is a necessary and at the same time an easy means for them to be reconciled to God and to blot out their sins; but what do they do? They run about wildly all the days of their

¹ Nolite errare: Deus non irridetur. Quæ enim seminaverit homo, hæc et metet.—Gal. vi. 7, 8.

² Convertentur ad vespem, et famem patientur ut canes, et circumbunt civitatem.—Ps. lviil. 7.

lives, falling from one sin into another; sometimes they come back and confess their sins, but after confession they recommence their wicked lives as before. But let them have their way; "they shall return at evening;" when the day is past, and the night, that is, the end of their lives is drawing nigh, then they will wish to return as usual; but, "they shall suffer hunger like dogs;" they will fare like the foolish virgins in the Gospel, who wished to return to the marriage feast after having purchased oil for their lamps; the door of grace will be closed against them. "Lord, Lord, open to us;"¹ they will exclaim; but the only answer they will get, will be, "I know you not."² "Without are dogs;"³ outside the door, with those dogs, who have wasted the day of grace, and have made a mockery of Me, "they shall suffer hunger like dogs."

"Be not deceived," is my conclusion in the words of St. Paul; "God is not mocked." Do not make the mistake of being too confident, O sinner! God will not long suffer you to mock Him. At all events, do not be so presumptuous as to find a foundation and a reason for your wickedness in the salutary and necessary means that the goodness and mercy of God has provided for the forgiveness of your sins. For, if you abuse even the holy sacrament of penance to help you in your wickedness, what can you expect to find salvation in at last? Ah, my dear Lord and God, I have often hitherto been guilty of this presumption and audacity; for I have thought to myself, what does it matter? I can sin a little longer; one confession will make all right afterwards. I acknowledge, O Lord, that I am altogether unworthy of the grace of forgiveness. Still, infinitely good and merciful God, grant me mercy and grace this once! I have never before realized the injustice and presumption of which I have been guilty, as I do now; I repent with my whole heart of it. The confession, which I am now seriously resolved to make, after diligent preparation, shall, with Thy grace, be the end of my sins! I shall never more say, as formerly, I will commit this sin now and confess it afterwards, but I shall firmly resolve to do my best not to offend in the least by any deliberate sin the infinitely good and merciful God, who in spite of my countless offences has again admitted me to His grace and friendship. Him shall I serve henceforth with all my strength; never shall I

Exhortation
and resolve
never to sin,
relying on
confession.

¹ Domine, domine, aperi nobis.—Matt. xxv. 11.

² Nescio vos.—Ibid. 12.

³ Foris canes.—Apoc. xxii. 15.

forget the great and undeserved mercy shown me, for which I will ever praise and bless God during the time that still remains to me on this earth; and afterwards, as I hope and trust, I will continue to praise Him for all eternity in the kingdom of heaven. **Amen.**

MOTIVES AND MEANS OF PERSEVERING IN GOOD AFTER PENANCE.

FIFTY-SECOND SERMON.

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF PERSEVERANCE.

Subject.

Perseverance in good after penance is the surest sign and means of rising once with Christ to eternal glory.—*Preached on the second Sunday after Easter.*

Text.

Videt lupum venientem, et dimittit oves, et fugit.—John x. 12.
“He seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fieth.”

Introduction.

It is not right for a shepherd to run away at the moment when his presence is most required for the safety of his flock. Nor is it right for a sheep to leave the flock at the approach of the wolf, to wantonly separate itself from the watchful shepherd and to run into the jaws of the ravening wolf, at the moment when it should most of all remain at its shepherd's side. Foolish and stray sheep of the kind, my dear brethren, are those penitents who, after having laid aside the burden of their sins in the sacrament of penance run away from God again at the first assault of temptation, go back to their sins, and thus fall again into the jaws of the hellish wolf. I have shown recently that to relapse quickly and through habit into one's former sins is generally a sign that one did not really rise with Christ from the death of sin to the life of grace, and did not do true penance. Constancy in good is the best proof of

that moral resurrection from death to the life of grace. To encourage us still further to this constancy, I say now :

Plan of Discourse.

Perseverance in good after penance is the surest sign and means of rising once with Christ to eternal glory. Therefore he who earnestly desires to go to heaven must never run back to his former sins. There you have the whole subject of this sermon.

Christ Jesus, true Shepherd of our souls ! impel us all to this perseverance in Thy holy service ; we ask this of Thee through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

The surest
sign of pre-
destination
is persever-
ance in
good.

That which causes the greatest trouble and anguish to souls who are really desirous of salvation is the inscrutable secret of eternal predestination to glory, and the constant uncertainty as to whether God has elected us for heaven, or whether we are to be among the number of the reprobate. On the great day of the general judgment we shall all rise again from the dead, as our faith infallibly teaches us ; but whether I shall stand on the right side of the Judge, with the sheep of the fold of Christ, or on the left hand, amongst the accursed goats that belong to the devil ; whether I shall rise with the former to eternal glory, or with the latter to eternal damnation, that is and will remain completely hidden from us all during this life. This it is that often forces people to sigh : ah ! if I only knew what will become of me during eternity ! If I were only certain of being amongst the elect ! Providence of God ! we adore Thee with the most profound humility ! Thou hast ordained everything well and wisely ! To Thee be honor and glory, since it is Thy wish to keep that secret from us ! And how mild and merciful Thou art therein towards the wicked ! What a wretched, miserable state would theirs be, if they knew beforehand that they would be lost forever ! And how wisely and advantageously Thou actest therein towards the just and pious ! For, otherwise, what would become of Christian humility, of child-like fear, of watchfulness and modesty, of horror of sin, of zeal in Thy holy service, if the good were already sure of their eternal salvation ? No, my dear brethren, that knowledge would not be good for any one. Let us, then, take to heart, encourage, and console ourselves with that exhortation of the Apostle : “ Wherefore, brethren, labor the more, that by good works you may make sure your calling and election ; for so an entrance shall be ministered to you abun-

dantly into the everlasting kingdom of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”¹ Still, there are different signs from which we may reasonably conclude, nay, from which we may derive a human certainty and assurance that we shall rise to eternal glory. I will explain them more in detail as occasion offers. Meanwhile, one of them is, and one of the chief of them, as St. Augustine says, “to hear the word of God willingly.”² But all those signs of predestination, whatever their name may be, are, according to theologians, so called, because they help man in a special manner to persevere in good and to be constant and zealous in the divine service. From this I conclude that perseverance and constancy in good that one has begun to do is of itself the surest sign of a future resurrection to everlasting glory.

And to go to the root of the matter, in the first place, this perseverance places a man, even during this life, in almost the same state as that in which the glorified bodies of the blessed will be in heaven. For, in what does their exceeding great happiness consist? Amongst other perfections is the fact that they are immortal, incapable of suffering or corruption, and not subject to any change; their life, glory, and happiness will last as long as God is God; and as they are to-day, so they will be for all eternity, as St. Paul writes of the glorious body of Jesus Christ after the resurrection, which the bodies of the just and elect will resemble on the last day. There you have a true picture of a just man, who never offended God by a mortal sin, and also of a converted sinner, who, after having done penance, remains constant in his good resolutions, and has still the same earnest will to observe eternal fidelity to his God. Human respect, that frightens so many from good! vain usages and deceitful maxims of the perverse world, that find as many adorers as if they were gods! point of honor, for the sake of which so many give up their lives as well as their souls! money and wealth, for which so many sell themselves to the devil! vile pleasures of the flesh! impure love of creatures, that bewitches the hearts of most men! you are the lords and masters of the children of the world, who, according to your good will and pleasure, change a thousand times a day, like a fragile reed that is blown hither and thither by the wind; and you can move your

So that it places a man almost in the same state as the blessed in heaven.

¹ Quapropter, fratres, magis satagite ut per bona opera certam vestram vocationem et electionem faciatis: sic enim abundanter ministrabitur vobis introitus in eternum regnum Domini nostri, et Salvatoris Jesu Christi.—II. Pet. i. 10, 11.

² Libenter audire verbum Dei.

subjects to anger and displeasure, to trouble and impatience, to immoderate joy, to love and hatred; to-day you fill them with exultation, to-morrow with despair; and you drive them on to all sorts of vice. But with the servant of God you can do nothing! For he has once for all firmly resolved, no matter what happens, to keep the faith he has sworn to the God whom he loves, and never to depart from Him by a deliberate sin. This is his firm determination, and what he is to-day in that respect he was yesterday, and will be to-morrow what he is to-day. "Who, then, shall separate us from the love of Christ?"¹ he can say with St. Paul; neither joy, nor sorrow, nor hunger, nor thirst, nor honor, nor disgrace, nor life, nor death; no man in the world will be so dear to me, no pleasure so enticing, no wealth or riches so great, as to induce me to do anything against God and what I owe Him. Temptations, horrible and formidable though you be, come upon me if you choose; you will never find the least place in my heart! My chief refuge and help against your attacks will be that God who is everywhere present, and whom I am resolved to serve till the end of my life. I am ready to die a thousand times, rather than consent to a single mortal sin; and I am assured that my God will not forsake me, provided I only remain faithful to Him and His service, as I am now determined to do. Oh, truly happy the state of one who, while still on earth, is an emblem of the unchanging state of the glorified bodies of the blessed in heaven!

Hence, he who is constant in good can already count himself amongst the elect.

This is the reason why St. Cyprian congratulates so heartily those Christian virgins who devote themselves entirely to the service of Jesus Christ. Chosen souls, he says to them, "already in this life you possess the glory of the resurrection,"² which you expect in the life to come. The chastity you have publicly vowed to God to observe forever already effects in your souls something like what the future resurrection will effect in the bodies of the saints and chosen children of God. Your constancy in the love of your heavenly Bridegroom; whom you have chosen, already begins to portray in you that which the future glory of heaven will perfect! And the same words I say to you, Christians, whoever you may be, "if you be risen with Christ"³ to a life of persevering piety; if you are now really, earnestly, and firmly resolved to keep henceforth on the right

¹ Quid ergo nos separabit a caritate Christi?—Rom. viii. 35

² Vos resurrectionis gloriam in hoc sæculo jam tenetis.

³ Si consurrexistis cum Christo.—Col. iii. 1.

way, on which you have entered by penance; to you I say, with St. Cyprian, this constancy of yours in the service of God, or your earnest resolve to persevere in good, is one of the surest signs which, according to St. John, will be marked on the foreheads of the elect in heaven. Rejoice, then, in the Lord: you possess already in this world a share of that glory which will adorn your bodies forever in heaven!

But you, “changeable Christians,”¹ as St. Prosper calls you with reason; you who are like the moon, ever changing, who always run round in the same circle to your former state, which you had left; who are constantly alternating between confession and sin, and hardly ever amend your lives after repentance; what, I ask, have you to expect? I will tell you straight out, though I pity and compassionate your poor souls: you have reason to fear, nay, it is probable, that you are not amongst the number of those who on the last day will rise with Christ to glory, and, therefore, that you will have no share in His kingdom. If I venture to prophesy this to you on my own authority alone, you would have good reason for attaching slight credence to it, and for appealing to a more reliable source of information; but it is the Apostle St. Jude, speaking as the infallible mouthpiece of the Holy Ghost, who assigns to you your place in eternity. “Wandering stars,” such are his words, “to whom the storm of darkness is reserved forever.”² Our Saviour Himself, in the Gospel of St. Luke, excludes you from heaven, when He says to him who wishes to bid adieu to his friends before following Him, “No man putting his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”³

But he who easily relapses into sin must look on himself as among the reprobate.

And how else could it be? is the question asked by St. John Chrysostom on these words. How can an inconstant, dissolute, unfaithful man be apt for the kingdom of God, since he is not of any value even for the world? No private individual would keep a servant in his house, unless he can rely on his fidelity. How could you entrust with an important business a man who is of an inconstant disposition, who is one way to-day, and another to-morrow, so that you can never be sure of him? No, a man of that kind is looked on as a good-for-nothing even by the world, that is otherwise foolish enough in its judgments. How,

Shown by similes.

¹ *Temporarii Christiani.*

² *Sidera errantia, quibus procella tenebrarum servata est in æternum.*—Epist. Judæ, 13.

³ *Nemo mittens manum suam ad aratrum, et respiciens retro, aptus est regno Dei.*—Luke ix. 62.

then, could the God of infinite majesty tolerate in His kingdom a servant who to the same thing says a hundred times "yes," and a hundred times "no;" who is full of promises that he never fulfils; who serves him to-day, and to-morrow will take sides with the devil? No one who looks back, and returns to his old ways, is fit for the kingdom of God. Remember, as Our Saviour exhorts us, the case of Lot's wife. The angel who brought her and her family out of Sodom, that they might be saved from the fire that was to consume the other inhabitants, had forbidden them to look back on the doomed city; but the woman's curiosity was excited by the noise of the falling flames and the cries of the perishing people; she turned round for a moment, and in that moment she was punished by the almighty God by being turned into a pillar of salt, as a monument to all time, says St. Augustine, to warn all men "not to look back;" so that, when they are once saved from Sodom, that is, from the state of sin, by penance, they must never more seek the place of their former sins even by a wilful desire, if they wish to gain eternal life, which is prefigured by perseverance in good; and this perseverance is also the surest means of rising gloriously and gaining eternal life. This is another proof of my proposition.

Election to heaven depends on the last grace of final perseverance.

No matter how theologians describe predestination, or the eternal selection of the chosen children of God for heaven, it is infallibly true that it is perfected by final perseverance, which is a gift of God enabling a man to continue in the state of sanctifying grace in the last moment of his life, and to die in that state. It is, according to the Council of Trent, "that great gift of perseverance,"¹ without which salvation cannot be hoped for; it is a grace that we must often humbly pray for, but which no man can merit; a grace that the merciful God bestows out of generosity on whom He wills, but which He refuses to no one, unless to those who render themselves unworthy of it during life; a grace of which no one can be sure as long as he lives, because it is given only at the end of life; and if I am so unfortunate as not to receive that grace, everything else that I may have done during my life will not help me to salvation. If I spent a hundred years in the strictest penance, and in all perfection and sanctity, but gave way for a moment to a mortal sin even of thought, and the just God allowed me to die in that sin,

¹ *Magnum illud perseverantiæ donum.*

I should be lost forever. Not he who begins well, nor he who continues well, but he who ends well, will be crowned. Therefore, we cannot promise heaven with certainty to any one, no matter how holy he is, as long as he is on this earth. What is the reason, my dear brethren, that in the beginning of creation God praised all He had made, and called it good, man alone excepted, although He had placed him over all other creatures? He had created the light. "And God saw the light, that it was good,"¹ says the Holy Scripture. He had created the firmament, and divided the waters: "And God saw that it was good," and so on after the creation of the dry land and the animals, "God saw that it was good." Finally the Blessed Trinity, as it were, held a council and resolved to create man: "Let us make man to Our own image and likeness; and God created man to His own image."² Now, since God said of all the creatures that they were good, surely He will praise man as the best of them? But He says not a word of him; not a syllable of approbation. Why so? St. Ambrose answers this question: "His praise is not to be given beforehand, but afterwards. It belongs not to the beginning, but to the end."³ Adam was then holy and a child of God; by sanctifying grace he had a right to Paradise, and was worthy of being beloved by God; but it was not yet time to call him good; and, in fact, in a very short time he became a very wicked sinner. Yet he was not immediately condemned to hell for his sin; he did penance, persevered in the state of grace till death, and is now reigning in the glory of heaven with God. "His praise does not belong to the beginning, but to the end." Sinner, no matter how wicked you have been hitherto, do not despair of salvation; only do real penance, amend your sinful life, and your praise will be at the end. Just, innocent, and now beloved children of God! be not elated on account of the pious lives you have been living hitherto, and of the virtues you have acquired; but keep yourselves continually in humility and child-like fear of God; for even you, as long as you are in this valley of tears, this dangerous exile, may fall and come to an unhappy end; your praise and salvation do not belong to the beginning, but to the end. Paul made a bad beginning, but a good end; Judas began well, but ended badly; therefore Judas

¹ Et vidit Deus lucem quod esset bona.—Gen. i. 4.

² Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram: et creavit Deus hominem ad imaginem suam.—Ibid. 26. 27.

³ Istius laudatio non præmittitur, sed reservatur. Laudatio ejus non in exordio, sed in fine est.—St. Ambr. Instit. Virg. c. 3.

was condemned to hell, while Paul was elected to eternal glory. Therefore the resurrection to life for every one depends on the last grace of final perseverance.

The best means of obtaining this grace is constancy in good.

But, you will exclaim, what are you saying? You pretended that you wished to console us and encourage us to persevere in our good resolutions, and not to relapse into our former sins; and you assured us that, if we did so, we should have a human certainty of rising with Christ to everlasting glory. But now you make the whole thing depend on the last grace of final perseverance. What reason, then, have I to feel consoled, even if I continue faithful in the service of God; since I cannot be sure of the grace of perseverance, on which my salvation depends? That is quite true, my dear brethren; a Roman lady once went to St. Gregory, in a great state of anxiety, and proposed the same difficulty to him, in order to hear what he had to say to it. "Holy Father," said she, "help me in my trouble! How will I fare at the end?" "Ah," answered Gregory, "you ask a difficult and a useless question." It is difficult, because I know as little about it as you do; it is useless, because the knowledge of it would do neither you nor me any good. Still, if you wish me to tell you with full certainty what fate is in store for me and you, you must know that, if we both remain constant in good till the end, we shall surely receive the grace of final perseverance, and die happily." The same answer I make to your objection, Christian souls; my salvation and yours depend on the last grace of final perseverance; there is no doubt about that; but whether we receive that grace or not, depends, in the present arrangements of divine Providence, and according to God's own promise, on ourselves principally, namely, on how we spend the time of our lives. Therefore we should endeavor with all diligence to continue on the right path and not relapse into sin; for this constancy is the true and most certain means of obtaining from God the last grace of final perseverance. "He that shall persevere unto the end," says Our Lord Jesus Christ, "he shall be saved."² These words, as St. John Chrysostom remarks with reason, are not to be understood of the grace of final perseverance; otherwise, their meaning would simply be: he to whom I shall give that final grace shall be saved. No, Our Lord's object was to exhort us all to labor for our salvation, and therefore He urges us to do a thing that is fully in our power if we wish to do it.

¹ Rem difficilem et inutilem postulasti.

² Qui autem perseveraverit usque in finem, hic salvus erit.—Matt. x. 22.

Hence, he who perseveres in good during his life, and avoids sin constantly till the end, to him, says Our Lord, I will give the final grace of perseverance, so that he will surely die a happy death. From this it is clear that the most certain means of obtaining that grace is to have a firm resolution of being always faithful to God.

But, you say again, no one, as we have seen already, can merit this grace, even by any amount of previous constancy in good works, so that the uncertainty is just as great as before. True again, my dear brethren; with all our good works we could not merit this grace, according to the full sense of the word merit, so that God would be bound in justice to give it to us, or that we should have a right to claim it from Him as our due; for in the present disposition of God's Providence the whole merit of our good works in the state of grace is exhausted by the increase of sanctifying grace, and the eternal glory which arises from it. However, we can merit this grace by a merit which is founded on the generosity and mercy of God; that is, God, who never allows Himself to be outdone by His creatures in generosity, when He sees a man of good will trying to keep His law, to overcome and mortify his own evil inclinations, to avoid as far as possible all sin and all occasions and dangers of sin, and to be faithful to his good resolutions to the end, so that, although he now and then commits a fault through frailty and weakness, yet he repents of it at once and continues to persevere in good, then the almighty God is, as it were, forced by His infinite goodness and mercy to give to such a man the grace of final perseverance; and it will hardly ever happen that a man of that kind will die an unhappy death.

God will not refuse it to one who continues faithful to Him.

Such was the assured hope of the elder Tobias, in the Old Testament, when, filled with consolation, he said to his friends: "We look for that life which God will give to them that never change their faith from Him." ¹ And in the New Law the same assurance was a source of joy to the holy apostle St. Paul, when he said, "There is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord, the just judge, will render to me in that day." ² I have not the least doubt of that. How so, great Apostle? Why are you so certain about it? Did God, perhaps, reveal it to you,

Shown from Scripture.

¹ *Vitam illam expectamus, quam Deus daturus est his qui fidem suam numquam mutant ab eo.*—Tob. ii. 18.

² *Reposita est mihi corona justitiæ, quam reddet mihi Dominus in illa die, justus iudex.*—II. Tim. iv. 8.

when you were taken up to the third heaven? When you were there, did you see your crown prepared for you? That can hardly be the case; for afterwards you frequently trembled with fear, lest you should be amongst the reprobate. In what doubtful terms you often spoke of your salvation! And how severely you chastised your body! What was your reason for doing that? "I chastise my body," you say, "and bring it into subjection; lest perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a cast-away."¹ How often did you not examine your conscience, and, although you could not find the least fault to accuse yourself of, yet you did not dare to promise yourself salvation! "I am not conscious to myself of anything," you said, "yet, am I not hereby justified; but He that judgeth me is the Lord."² But in spite of all that, you now speak without the least doubt or fear of the crown of justice that is in store for you, as if you had a document in your hand to secure you possession of it. On what is this assurance of yours grounded? I am certain of it," he answers, "because I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."³ I persevered after my conversion, and therefore it now remains for me to receive the crown of justice, which the just God will give me. But you are not yet in danger of death. This crown of yours depends on the last grace of final perseverance. And how do you know what will become of you at the end? That is a matter that does not cause me any more anxiety; the merciful and faithful God, to whom I have been true hitherto, will not refuse me this last grace; He will give it to me, and then crown me; "and not only to me, but to them also that love His coming,"⁴ and persevere in His service to the end.

We, too, my dear brethren, as experience teaches, give evidence of a similar assurance in our judgments. If we see or hear of a man dying a particularly peaceful, holy, and pious death, our thoughts revert at once to the life he led, and if we find that he lived as a good, pious, and zealous Christian, and was steadfast in keeping the commandments for many years, oh, we think without the least hesitation, what wonder is it that he should die such a happy death! As a man lives, so will he die. As life is,

We all expect him who lives well to die well.

¹ Castigo corpus meum, et in servitutem redigo; ne forte cum aliis prædicaverim, ipse reprobus efficiar.—1. Cor. ix. 27.

² Nihil enim mihi conscius sum, sed non in hoc justificatus sum; qui autem judicat me Dominus est.—Ibid. iv. 4.

³ Bonum certamen certavi, cursum consummavi, fidem servavi.—II. Tim. iv. 7.

⁴ Non solum autem mihi, sed et iis, qui diligunt adventum ejus.—Ibid. 8.

so will death be. The man led a pious and holy life, and, of course, his death must be pious and holy, too; he was always faithful and zealous in the service of God, and therefore the divine goodness could not permit him to die otherwise than in the state of grace. On the other hand, if we hear of one (and similar examples are often to be found in books) who led a good, holy, and even miraculous life, but became perverted at the end, and died an unhappy death, and was lost forever, then we shudder with horror, and know not what to think. No, we say at last, that cannot be; God is too good and merciful to allow one of His own beloved children, who has done his best to serve him during life, to be cast away from His fatherly love at the last moment, when the gates of eternity were just opening for Him. No, that cannot be the case! For my part, my dear brethren, I do not believe examples of the kind, and I look on them as mere inventions, or, else, if they are really true, then I think, and no doubt you all agree with me, that there must be some secret in the matter that we are not aware of. He whom we look on as having led such a holy life must have been holy in outward appearance, or else, along with his corporal austerities, he gave way to secret pride, or he had the guilt of other hidden sins on his conscience, which we could know nothing of, and which were evident only to the all-seeing eye of God, who, on account of them, deprived that man of the grace of final perseverance, of which he had rendered himself unworthy during life. However that may be, we do not know what to make of such cases; we are horrified at the thought of a man who has served God faithfully during life becoming perverted at the last moment and losing his soul. But this very wonder and horror of ours is a clear and an almost infallible proof of our firm conviction that a good life can be followed only by a happy death, and, therefore, that constancy in good during life is the surest means of obtaining the last grace of final perseverance and what follows thereon, namely, a glorious resurrection and the kingdom of heaven.

Sinners! you who nearly always return to your former sins after confession, see what a sad conclusion you have to draw from this, and what sort of a death you have to expect! Judge yourselves whether you deserve that great grace of final perseverance, which God gives out of pure generosity, and which, as a general rule, He has prepared only for His beloved and faithful children; judge, I say, whether you deserve it, after having

Hence, they who always relapse cannot expect to die a happy death.

spent your lives wandering on the broad way of vice! We are not surprised that a good Christian should die a happy death; and I would feel just as little surprise if I saw one of you going into eternity in a despairing and unrepentant state; I should look on it as a miracle of the divine mercy, if, after such a vicious life and such constant changing from sin to confession, and confession to sin, you died a happy death.

Shown by
an example.

In the annals of the old Fathers we read an account of a young Religious, who, although he was not addicted to any great vice, was tepid and slothful in the divine service. He fell into a dangerous illness, and while expecting death, gave every sign of great trouble and anxiety. A pious abbot, Mutius by name, who was well versed in spiritual matters, assisted him at his death-bed, and encouraged him as well as he could. "Have confidence, my dear brother," he said to him; "let hope console you!" "And on what shall I found my hope?" asked the dying man. "On the infinite mercy of God, who is now calling you to your reward for having served Him," was the answer of the abbot. "The mercy of God!" replied the sick man; "it is that very mercy that almost drives me to despair, because I have so often misused it during life." "How did you misuse it?" asked the abbot. "Did you not leave the world in order to serve God in religion?" "Ah!" sighed the other, "would that I had served Him well! But my service was a very wretched one!" "What? Put away at once those cowardly thoughts! they are only an inspiration of the devil, who wishes to drive you to despair. I have often seen you going to confession and holy Communion according to the rule of your Order, and, judging from your outward actions, I can only conclude that you are in the grace of God." "Alas! confession and Communion!" exclaimed the dying man. "I cannot trust one of my confessions, for I never found any trace of amendment of my vicious life after them. I lived as I did when I was in the world, and continued to live so during my whole time in religion. Of all my confessions, God knows that there is perhaps hardly one that was really valid, since I fell back into the same sins always. Alas! woe to me! how will it be with me when I appear before the judgment-seat of God! I dare not despair, but neither can I promise myself eternal salvation. Dear Father, pray that my life may be spared, that I may have time to do penance! The holy man prayed as desired, and his prayers were heard, so that the young Religious obtained a respite of three years, during

which time he did penance for his sins with most extraordinary fervor.

My reflections on this incident, my dear brethren, are as follows: a Religious who did not live according to the vain and dangerous ways of the world; who was not exposed to the dangerous occasions of sin by carnal lust or improper intimacy; who was not given to unjust practices, and was freed from the risk of committing many other grievous sins; who had so many excellent means at hand in religion to attain the perfection of his state, and who so often received the holy sacraments; he at the hour of death must almost despair of a glorious resurrection, because he found no improvement in his mode of life after his confessions, although he had probably only venial sins to accuse himself of; and he was obliged to beg a respite of three years from God, in order to do true penance. Then, alas! I must think, how will it be with so many Christians, who daily and with the utmost recklessness commit mortal sins, bringing the same sins to confession every Easter, or whenever they go, and not making any effort to leave the proximate occasion of sin, to restore ill-gotten goods, to lay aside their hatred of their neighbor, or to give up the improper intimacy in which they are living? Oh, I repeat, truly a miracle of the divine mercy must be wrought, in order to enable such Christians to console themselves on their death-beds with the hope of receiving the grace of final perseverance and rising gloriously with Christ to eternal happiness!

Especially when they remain in the habit of sin.

I conclude, my dear brethren, with the beautiful exhortation given by St. Jerome to a certain layman, who had renounced the vanities of the world, and had gone to Bethlehem to live there in solitude, in order to devote his whole time unhindered to the service of God and the salvation of his soul; an exhortation that I wish were deeply engraved on the hearts of you all, so that you would never lose sight of it. "I beseech thee, brother, and advise thee with a father's affection, not to turn back to look at the Sodom you have abandoned." ¹ Sinner! you who now have left the city of sin by your Easter Confession, if it was a good one, and are now re-admitted among the number of the children of God, I beg and implore of you, by the love you owe yourself and your immortal soul, ah! do not look back again! You have laid aside the garment of sin; do not put it on again. You are now in a good state, and if you wish to be sure of salvation, keep on

Conclusion and exhortation to persevere in good after doing penance.

¹ Obsecro te, frater, et moneo parentis affectu, ut qui Sodomam reliquisti, post tergum ne respicias.

the way that leads to heaven, and do not go back to the broad road of hell, to the great danger of your soul. If it were revealed by God that every one who dies in this town of Treves will be saved, is there any one of us who would venture to leave it? Suppose that, under such circumstances, one of the members of the clergy of this town were called to Rome by the Pope to receive the cardinal's hat; would he go, do you think? Eh? If he loved his soul and its salvation he would, in my opinion, say to himself: I can go to heaven without the cardinal's hat; I prefer remaining here as a simple priest, with the assurance of my salvation, to going to Rome and perhaps losing my soul. And even if the plague broke out in our midst, so that it became extremely risky to life to remain here, do you think any one would run away out of the town? I should think not; for my part, at least, I should not on any account go away, knowing that such a good chance of salvation is secured to me by remaining. But, my dear brethren, we have the infallible assurance from God Himself that all those who persevere in His service till the end will be saved, and all who do not will be lost; let us, then, remain in that city of safety, and never leave the good state in which we are, no matter what happens.

And not to
be led astray
by any diffi-
culties.

And let no one be disheartened by imaginary difficulties; for the very difficulties we meet with in the divine service should incite us to all the greater fervor in our determination to persevere in it. Have you ever remarked how a boatman acts on the Moselle, when going against the current? If he comes to a place where the water eddies and whirls round with the force of the tide, and hinders the boat in her progress, he puts out all the more strength and works all the harder with the oars, in order to overcome the resistance of the water; nor does he cease his efforts until he is past the difficulty. So must we act in the stormy sea of the world; when difficulties and dangers are the greatest, then must we be more diligent and earnest, trusting in the help of God to come through successfully; and if we fall now and then through weakness and frailty, we must not lose heart, or cease persevering. The boatman is sometimes, in spite of his efforts, driven back by the opposing current; still, he does not lose courage, but labors all the more diligently, until he has made up for lost time. If a merchant were to give up business when he experiences a slight loss, he would never be a rich man. If a peasant ceased tilling his land when an unfruitful season comes and renders his labor vain, when would the land be tilled?

Now, these people do not allow slight difficulties to deter them from their usual labor and toil; much less, then, should the servant of God be frightened by difficulties, since he has an infinitely greater gain and reward to hope for, if he labors assiduously.

As I told you on another occasion, my dear brethren, by way of New-year's greeting, each one of you should not look in half-dazed fashion at the number of years he has still to live on earth, as if it were almost an impossibility to abstain from forbidden pleasures for all that time; but he should fix his eyes on the present time, as if this were to be his last day on earth (and as a matter of fact, this very hour could be the last for each one of us), and let him say to himself: can I not keep the good resolutions I made in confession for this day, at all events? Who knows whether the Lord will not knock at my door this evening and call me into eternity? And woe to me if this day should find me untrue to my resolutions and perverted, so as to barter my eternal salvation! what would it help me in that case that I have so often overcome myself, and resisted my evil inclinations, if I cease persevering now, and consent to a mortal sin, when perhaps my last moment is at hand? Let each one remember the firm purpose he made in confession, and say to himself daily: how? my soul! thou hast acknowledged the injustice of thy conduct; thou hast repented of thy wickedness and promised eternal fidelity to thy God; is not that acknowledgment, are not the motives you had then, as valid to-day as they were then? Why shouldst thou, then, go back on thy word, and break thy resolution? No, I will act like the patient Job, in joy and sorrow, in prosperity and adversity, in consolation and temptation: "My justification, which I have begun to hold, I will not forsake."¹ The fidelity I have once sworn to God, when He bestowed on me the great grace of forgiveness of my sins, I will observe inviolably; the document I now hold in my hand, and can, if I will, continue to hold, I will never throw away by falling into sin. "He that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved." I wish to be saved, and therefore I will persevere to the end in the service of God, and I shall certainly fulfil my wish. Such should be your resolve. Amen.

But daily to
renew the
firm pur-
pose.

¹ *Justificationem meam, quam cepi tenere, non deseram.*—Job. xxvii. 6.

FIFTY-THIRD SERMON.

ON FREQUENT CONFESSION, AS A MEANS OF PERSEVERING IN GOOD.

Subject.

The best means of avoiding sin and persevering in good is frequent and contrite confession.—*Preached on the twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost, on which day falls the feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin.*

Text.

Beati qui audiunt verbum Dei, et custodiunt illud.—Luke ii. 28.

“Blessed are they who hear the word of God, and keep it.”

Introduction.

To hear willingly and constantly the word of God in sermons is a good thing, necessary for many, and useful to all, and, as I shall show on another occasion, it is one of the surest signs of predestination to the kingdom of heaven. Yet, to be satisfied with merely hearing the word of God, and not to endeavor to practise the truths taught in it, only makes one more responsible to the divine justice. Hitherto, my dear brethren, I have explained in sufficient detail a subject that is of the greatest importance, and that all must have a clear knowledge of, namely, the holy sacrament of penance; and I have shown that which is required to receive it, how and in what manner the penitent must examine his conscience, repent of his sins, confess them, satisfy for them, and steadfastly amend his life. I trust that the good God has effected by the light of His grace, that some, at least, of those who have heard what I had to say about this subject will have profited by it. To the almighty God alone be the honor, glory, and thanksgiving, if such is the case! I hope, too, that they who have heard me will not forget what they have learned, but always derive more and more fruit from it. “Blessed are they who hear the word of God, and keep it,” in order to act on it and arrange their lives according to it. There is still one point to be considered by those who, after diligent preparation, have laid aside their sins in confession; and that is, how they are to avoid a relapse in future, so as to continue in the grace of

God. It is not my intention now to repeat the motives which should put us on our guard against a relapse, and make us persevere in good; only one means will I suggest which can best help us to this end. And that is confession, frequent confession with due preparation, as I shall now show, and I say:

Plan of Discourse.

The best means of avoiding sin and persevering in good is frequent and contrite confession. Therefore he who loves his soul and its salvation will often have recourse to the sacrament of penance. Such is the whole subject of this exhortation.

That it may not be fruitless, give us Thy grace, O generous God! We beg it of Thee through the merits of that Immaculate Virgin, who from her earliest years gave herself up altogether to Thy service, and persevered in it to the end, without the least stain of sin. Help us, you, too, holy guardian angels!

If you wish to keep your room always free from dust, you must have it swept out frequently during the week. It is easy to see whether the servant is lazy, or the master or mistress careless in this respect; for, if the room which one occupies daily is allowed to go for even a fortnight, not to say a month, without being swept out, is it any wonder if it should be found in a filthy condition at the end of that time? Those who go in and out leave some dust behind them on the floor; cobwebs hang here and there on the walls, and the furniture is covered with a thick layer of dust. Therefore they who love cleanliness have their rooms swept every day, nay, sometimes often during the day. The same care must be observed with regard to one's hair; if it is not frequently combed, it will get quite disordered and dirty, as we see to be the case with those who are careless in the use of the comb.

A room that is seldom swept out must be full of dust.

It is the same with a man's conscience. We poor mortals are naturally so frail and inclined to evil, that we cannot long keep ourselves free from faults and sins, surrounded as we are by temptations and occasions of sin. No matter how careful we are, before we have time to look round, as the saying is, we go wrong, either by a thought in the imagination, or by a word that escapes us, or even in action. Even the just man falls seven times a day; how often, then, does he fall in the week? and how often in a month? And how will it be with one who consents to a mortal sin? for while he is in that unhappy state he cannot,

So, too, he who seldom goes to confession must have a bad conscience.

humanly speaking, long refrain from other sins, on account of the loss of sanctifying grace and the want of other special helps from God. Now, if one who is in that condition goes to confession, I will not say once or twice a year, as, alas! is the case with so many, but once a month, or every two months (and if I said weeks, it would still be too long to wait), what a number of sins he will have committed! His conscience must necessarily be full of filth. He will find that he has fared like the field of the lazy husbandman, who leaves it unploughed for a long time, and like the vineyard of the foolish man, who allows it to go to ruin. "I passed by the field of the slothful man," says the wise Solomon, "and by the vineyard of the foolish man: and behold, it was all filled with nettles, and thorns had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall was broken down."¹ And what else is the reason why many, after they have made their confession with heartfelt sorrow and with an earnest purpose of amendment, so soon relapse into their old sins, if not because they seldom go to confession? Well did Paul of Granada understand this, when, considering those words of Our Lord in the Gospel of St. Luke, "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through places without water, seeking rest; and not finding, he saith: I will return into my house whence I came out;"² and when he finds the house well swept and garnished, he takes with him other seven spirits, worse than himself; "and entering in, they dwell there. And the last state of that man becomes worse than the first."³ Can the evil spirit, then, enter a soul that has been cleansed and purified in the sacrament of penance? Certainly, answers Paul of Granada, and that, too, because it has been cleansed but once; for if one is satisfied with that, and does not frequently purify his conscience, it will not be long before it will again be sullied, and the evil spirit, having once been enabled to enter it, will take up his abode there, and dwell in it as in his own house. Hence the conscience must often be cleansed, if it is to be kept free from stain for a long time.

While he
who con-
fesses well
and fre-

On the other hand, it would be an almost prodigious thing for one who goes to confession with due preparation frequently during the month, to lead a bad life. For, on the one hand, the oft-

¹ Per agrum hominis pigri transivi, et per vineam viri stulti: et ecce totum repleverant urticæ, et operuerant superficiem ejus spinæ, et inaceria lapidum destructa erat.—Prov. xxiv. 30, 31.

² Cum immundus spiritus exierit de homine, ambulat per loca inaquosa, quærens requiem, et non inveniens, dicit: revertar in domum meam, unde exivi.—Luke xi. 24.

³ Et ingressi habitant ibi. Et fiunt novissima hominis illius pejora prioribus.—Ibid. 26.

repeated, diligent examen of conscience; the frequent **acts** of sorrow and detestation of the sins that one commits; **the firm** purpose, so often repeated, never to sin again; and, on the other hand, the frequent reception and increase of sanctifying grace, and of the special helping graces of God that strengthen the soul in the sacrament of penance against the temptations and dangers of sin, make it, humanly speaking, a half impossibility for a man to be addicted at all events to grievous sin.

quently cannot be addicted to mortal sins.

And even if such a man does fall through weakness and frailty in a violent temptation, or in some particularly alluring occasion, his sin cannot find a resting-place long in his soul; for his next confession will banish it. It is true that his conscience has been sullied; but the soul is there at once with the broom to sweep out the filth. He has, indeed, fallen grievously; but he soon rises again by a good confession, and stands firm on his feet. It is with him as with the workman, who gets a thorn or a splinter into his finger while at work; he at once lays aside what he is doing, and does not rest until he has forced out the thorn or splinter, so as to leave it no time to make the wound worse and cause it to fester. "When he shall fall," says the Prophet David of the just and pious, "he shall not be bruised; for the Lord putteth His hand under him."¹ What? He shall not be bruised? Does not mortal sin inflict a severe injury on the soul? Yes; but, as Origen says, speaking of this text, there is a great difference between a pious and just man who sins, but goes frequently to confession, and a careless, wicked sinner, who seldom receives the sacraments. The latter falls, and does himself woful injury by his fall, because he lies there for a long time, like one who is grievously wounded, and whose wounds being neglected, begin to fester and to eat into the flesh, so that it is very difficult to cure them. The former falls, indeed, but he does not hurt himself so badly, for he rises at once, and by speedy penance heals his wound immediately. He acts like the brave soldier who, when fighting with his adversary, slips and falls to the earth, but springs up again in all haste, and, filled with new courage, overthrows his opponent.

For, even if he falls now and then, he rises again at once.

Strange are the words that St. Paul makes use of when speaking of the sin of Adam. "By one man," he says, "sin entered into this world, and by sin death, and so death passed upon all men."² There is a hidden meaning in those words, my dear

So that sin has no firm footing in him.

¹ Cum ceciderit, non collidetur; quia Dominus supponit manum suam.—Ps. cxxvi. 24.

² Stetit per unum hominem peccatum in hunc mundum intravit, et per peccatum mors, et ita in omnes homines mors pertransiit.—Rom. v. 12.

20 Confession as a Means of Persevering in Good.

brethren; speaking of the world, he says that death and sin entered into it. But speaking of men, he says that death passed upon them all. Why so? Does not the world mean the men who are in it? Have not all men, with the exception of the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of God, really sinned in Adam? Why, then, does the Apostle make a distinction between the world and men? Origen gives us a beautiful explanation of this difficulty. By the world, he says, the Apostle understands the vain children of the world, who live according to the world and its perverse maxims and usages; but by men he understands those souls who immediately after a fall enter into themselves, and endeavor in the main to lead pious lives. "Into those, then, who are called the world, that is, worldly people," tepid, inconstant men, "sin enters," when they commit it, "for they remain a long time in the state of sin;" but in the case of the others, who do not live according to the world, and try to lead pious lives, "sin merely passes upon them, when they commit it, that is, they are, indeed, in the state of sin, but they free themselves from it at once by doing penance immediately." Sin in the just and pious is like a traveller in an inn, in which he rests but for a short time; but in the wicked it is like one who has taken up his permanent dwelling in a house. In the former case sin merely passes by; but in the latter it remains constantly.

Nor does he lose the name of a just man.

Therefore the latter are properly called sinners; a hateful name, that they who often go to confession do not even deserve, although they sometimes fall through weakness and frailty. "He who rises at once by penance," says St. Jerome, "does not lose the name of a just man."¹ If a man loses some money at play, but wins it back again, he cannot be called a loser. A general who flies with his troops from the field of battle, but soon collects the fugitives, rushes at the foe with renewed courage, and puts them completely to flight, cannot be said to have lost the battle, for he has rather gained it, like a valiant general, and has conquered the enemy. "He who rises at once by penance, does not lose the name of a just man." Nor is he overcome by the arch-enemy; nor does he lose his right to be called a just man, who now and then succumbs to a violent temptation, and consents to sin, but rises at once after his fall, by penance.

The devil does not dare to tempt him.

Let, then, the crafty demon come on with secret attacks and suggestions, with which he is constantly trying to lead souls astray; and what great harm can he do one who goes to con-

¹ *Justi vocabulum non amittit, qui per poenitentiam resurgit.*—S. Hieron. Ep. 46.

feſſion often in the month? Truly, in the ſoul of ſuch a perſon he does not find a dwelling in which he can hope to remain for a long time. In the houſes of the rich you will not often ſee cobwebs on the walls or the windows; for the ſpider knows that its work would be in vain, and that it would be always in danger of ſeeing its web deſtroyed by the maid's broom. Swallows do not eaſily return to a houſe in which their neſts have been diſturbed a few times. In the ſame way the devil has no hopes of gaining a firm footing, of building his neſt and ſpinning his poiſonous webs, in the ſoul from which he is at once driven out when he enters it; for he knows well that his plans will be foiled, and that he will be expelled, to his own great confuſion, from the dwelling he had begun to occupy. One of thoſe accuſed ſpirits, who had taken poſſeſſion of a perſon, was once conjured and forced in the name of God to ſay what cauſed him the greateſt damage. There is nothing, he answered, that we demons hate more in Catholic Chriſtians, nothing that fruſtrates more fully our efforts, than frequent and contrite confeſſion, and the habit of receiving the ſacraments often.

ſo quickly
again.

Truly, if the father of lies, who is otherwiſe not at all to be believed, ever told the truth, he did ſo on that occaſion. “Every one that doth evil, hateth the light;”¹ he who intends committing a crime ſhuns and flies the light, that his wickedneſs may not be known. A traitor in a fortreſs is always uneaſy and ſuſpicious; he is continually in dread that his treachery will be found out; if he has the leaſt cauſe to fear that there is any ſuſpicion about him, he thinks at once: this is no place for me, and he betakes himſelf to flight without delay. A diſſolute man, who is ſeeking to lead an innocent perſon aſtray with his flattery and caresses, cannot bear to have her ſay a word to her parents of the attempt ſhe is making on her virtue; whereas, if ſhe keeps ſilent, and ſays nothing to her parents, although her will is oppoſed to anything evil, yet the other does not allow himſelf to be put off by the firſt or ſecond reſuſal; he perseveres, and ſtill hopes to gain his end ſome time or other. But if he ſees that the mo-deſt, chaste young girl at once runs to her father, and complains of the treatment ſhe has been ſubjected to, then the tempter is completely foiled, and deſiſts from his attacks, knowing that they will certainly be fruitleſs. The devil is a traitor and wicked wretch of this kind, when he

Shown by
ſimiles.

¹ Omnia qui male agit, odit lucem.—John iii. 20.

tempts and tries to allure a man to commit sin. His object is to take the fortress out of the hands of God, and to cast it into the jaws of hell; he spares no trouble to turn away from her heavenly Bridegroom the soul that is in the state of grace and a beloved spouse of the Holy Ghost, and to this end he represents to her imagination pictures of unlawful pleasure, or of temporal gain, to persuade her to commit that act of spiritual adultery. Now, if he sees a man going often to confession, and disclosing to his spiritual Father with sorrow of heart the sin he has committed and the temptations that assail him, oh, then the tempter knows that his efforts are sure to be frustrated, and, despairing of success, he is forced to beat a retreat.

Frequent confession lessens the punishment due to sin.

And besides that, not only does frequent confession cleanse the soul from the stain of sin and hinder the attacks of the devil; but it also destroys gradually and securely the vestiges and evil effects of former sins, namely, the punishment still due to them, which should otherwise be suffered in the terrible fire of purgatory to the last farthing. "A modest confession," says St. Ambrose, "is of the greatest help in wiping out the punishment due to our sins."¹ It is of the greatest help; for, although every penitential work and pious practice that one performs in the state of grace is partly available in the way of satisfaction for our sins, yet this satisfying power is specially attached by Our Lord to the sacrament of penance; for, in it, besides the acts that are made of the most perfect virtues, faith, hope, charity, and sorrow for sin, which constitute the preparation for it, the penance imposed by the priest, small though it be, is, not on account of the work or prayer in which it consists, but through the virtues of the sacrament, united with the infinite merits of Jesus Christ and offered to our heavenly Father to pay the debt contracted by our sins. Hence one "Our Father," imposed by way of penance by the priest in confession, has far more efficacy in atoning for sin and blotting out the punishment due to it, than a whole rosary said merely out of private devotion. Therefore many pious souls are accustomed to ask their confessors to give them a severe penance for small faults, in order all the better to atone for their sins. "The oftener one confesses his sins," says St. Thomas, "the more does he lessen the punishment due to them," so that at last, after repeated confessions, it is taken away altogether."² "Nor it it too

¹ *Plurimum suffragatur verecunda confessio ad penam quam extinguimus.*

² *Quanto aliquis pluries de ipsis peccatis confitetur, tanto magis pena minuitur.*

much to say," he adds, "that frequent confession takes away even all that punishment;"¹ so that a man owes nothing more to divine justice, since the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ, in which he so often participates in the sacrament of penance, completely satisfy for his sins

Further, what is of the greatest advantage and profit for the soul, it follows that one who goes often to confession, even if he sometimes falls grievously through weakness, yet passes the greater part of his life in the grace and friendship of God; and whenever he confesses his sins with sorrow of heart, that grace is not only increased by the power of the sacrament, but, as a consequence of that increase, all the good works performed in the state of grace become more and more meritorious; until at last an incalculable amount of treasures of merit must be heaped up by such a soul during life. On the other hand, a tepid Christian, who goes to confession but once or twice a year, and defers repentance for a long time after committing mortal sin, labors like the dumb beast, and, with all the good works he may perform in the meantime, gains nothing for heaven. All his fasting, almsgiving, devout visits to the church, hearing Masses, saying the rosary, saluting pious pictures, and other good works, are, indeed, as I have elsewhere explained, not utterly useless as long as he is in the state of sin, for they help him to keep many commandments of God, to foster good habits, and to obtain the mercy of God; yet, after he has done all this, he has not gained the least degree of glory in heaven; he is and remains a slave of the devil, who allows him to do those good works, as long as he avoids the confessional, which would free him from his slavery. Thus he lives at enmity with God, and is always on the verge of eternal ruin; and if he is hurried off by an unprovided death, he will be condemned to hell forever. Truly, he is in an unhappy state!

Increases sanctifying grace.

Finally, what else can follow from the frequent confessions and pious life of a man who is really anxious to save his soul, but perseverance in good, and a happy death? As a man lives, so will he die. This is a saying that is generally verified. He who spends the most of his time on land, and seldom ventures on the water, can have a well-grounded hope that he will die on land; while the sailor, who is always on the stormy sea, and although he sometimes sets foot on shore, yet never remains on it long, but returns to his ship to carry on his restless avocation,

Obtains the grace of perseverance and a happy death.

¹ Non est inconueniens si per frequentem confessionem etiam tota pœna tollitur.

seems to have made up his mind that he will die at sea. Such, too, is the end that those children of the world have to expect who spend their lives in going from sin to sin, and go to confession once or twice a year (and God knows what sort of a confession they make)! They spend the most of their time on the stormy sea; what sort of a death have they to expect? "Their soul shall die in a storm,"¹ we might say of them with that friend of Job. They have put off for a long time the settlement of their accounts with God, and have allowed them to fall into disorder; and in disorder they will find them at the last moment of their lives, when they will hardly have time to examine and arrange them. Happy Christians, who often go to confession with due preparation, and live, as it were, on dry land, safe in the sweet peace of your conscience! You are they of whom Christ, our dear Saviour, says, in the Gospel of St. Luke: "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching: Amen I say to you that He will gird Himself, and make them sit down to meat, and passing, will minister unto them."² You are watching now, since you are continually occupied with the purification of your souls, that very business which will hardly demand any of your attention at the hour of death, since you will have rightly performed it beforehand; and when death comes, your Lord will meet you and invite you to His banquet. You are those of whom St. Paul says to the Corinthians: "But if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged."³

Exhortation
to frequent
and contrite
confession.

Happy, then, I say again, are you who keep yourselves away from many sins by frequent confession, and persevere zealously in the service of God! Be of good heart, and never let anything interfere with that holy and most advantageous habit of yours! Ah, would to God that all those careless, tepid Christians, who burrow in the earth like blind moles, and are occupied the whole day with earthly things, would only follow your example; they would not then rot away in their sins as they are now doing! Almighty God, who holdest the hearts of men in Thy hands, and canst lead them according to Thy pleasure where Thou wilt, "Let peoples confess to Thee, O God; let all peoples give praise to Thee."⁴ Twice, my dear brethren, in a short psalm,

¹ *Morietur in tempestate anima eorum*—Tob. xxxvi. 14.

² *Beati servi illi quos, cum venerit Dominus, invenerit vigilantes: Amen dico vobis, quod præcinget se, et faciet illos discumbere, et transiens ministrabit illis.*—Luke xii. 37.

³ *Quodsi nosmetipsos dijudicemus, non utique judicemur.*—1. Cor. xi. 31.

⁴ *Confiteantur tibi populi, Deus; confiteantur tibi populi omnes.*—Ps. lxxvi. 4.

the Prophet repeats the same words. Why? He wishes to encourage all men, says Hugo, to frequent and contrite confession of their sins. And truly, as the Roman Catechism says, "there is nothing the faithful should deem of greater importance, than to cleanse their souls by frequently confessing their sins."¹ We know by unhappy experience that we sully our souls by daily and almost hourly faults and failings; why, then, should we not cleanse them by the frequent use of such an easy means as the holy sacrament of penance, unless we wish to be buried in the filth of our sins? What care and trouble do not fastidious worldlings, and especially delicate ladies, take to keep themselves clean outwardly, so as to please the eyes of some mere mortal? Why should we not take the same care to keep our immortal souls free from the filth of sin, so as to please Our God, who is worthy of infinite love? We all wash face and hands every day. And if they are dirtied ten times a day, ten times a day we wash them again. Are our immortal souls of less importance to us, so that, when they are sullied, we need not care to cleanse them? "Let peoples confess to Thee, O God; let all peoples give praise to Thee!" Ah, Christians, go often to confession, and make frequent use of that salutary means, if you are really desirous to remain free from sin in the future, and to persevere in good. Think of the end for which we are in this world; it is no other than to serve our great God alone, to tend to the business of our souls, and to live in constant penance, that we may rejoice forever in heaven after death.

Go often to confession! many will say. Must I, then, often submit to that fearful torture? Is it not torment enough for me to be compelled by the commandment of the Church to go once a year? I find it so hard to go every three months, that I tremble all over when I think of it; what would it be if I had all that trouble and anxiety to endure several times in the month? I quite believe that what you say is true; but your objection is as ridiculous as the complaint of the jester, who, having lain on a single straw all night, said the next morning that he was suffering from severe pains in the back; and he added, if it hurts me so to sleep on one straw, what would it be if I slept on a whole heap? It is no wonder that the confession of your sins appears difficult to you; but do you know why it is so? Because you go so seldom to confession. You make your confession, so to speak,

The more frequent it is, the easier it becomes.

¹ Nulla res fidelibus adeo curae esse debet, quam ut frequentii peccatorum confessione animum studeant expiare.

according to the almanac; certain feast-days are marked therein with red letters; for instance, the 15th of August, the feast of the Assumption; the 1st of November, the feast of All Saints; certain days in March or April; Easter time, etc.; but these feasts are celebrated only on the days marked down for them in red letters in the calendar. So also you, and probably many other sinners, too, write down in the calendar of your confessions: on Easter Sunday, a confession; on the feast of the Assumption, a confession. And that must do for the year. No matter what sins you commit meantime, you never dream of going to confession unless at the fixed times. What wonder is it, then, I ask, that confession seems so hard to you? Everything that one is unaccustomed to, and does not practise assiduously, appears difficult. A dirty little boy, who has to herd swine all the year, and never combs his hair, if he is at last compelled to use the comb, has to tug and pull and drag many a hair out before he succeeds; whereas a well-reared boy, who combs his hair every day, as he ought, finds not the least difficulty in doing so. A soldier who seldom draws his sword, and allows it to rust in the scabbard, has to work hard at it before he succeeds in drawing it when the time comes for him to use it. If you go but once or twice a year to confession, you must necessarily find it a difficult and troublesome task; for everything that is required for this holy sacrament becomes harder to fulfil when it is long deferred. The examen of conscience becomes harder, for you have to recall the sins you have committed during a long interval, so as to declare them in due order, mentioning their number and nature. Contrition becomes more difficult, as well as the firm purpose of amendment, on account of the influence of bad habits, that have grown almost to a second nature and cannot at once be got rid of and detested. The disclosure of one's sins in confession becomes more difficult, on account of the long time it requires to declare a great number of sins with their specific distinctions. And all this difficulty has to be faced by him who wishes to make a good confession. Bromiard wonders at those who, although they have not been to confession for a year, yet rush into the church, and, without having patience to wait, go to the first priest they find and ask him to hear their confession, saying that they will not keep him long, nor give him much trouble; how can such people make a good confession? ¹ And even if one finds no dif-

¹ Est mirabile qui per totum annum non fuit confessus, festinanter venit, dicens: audias me, statim ero expeditus.

ficulty on account of the time it takes to tell his sins, he must, at all events, feel very much ashamed at having to declare so many grievous transgressions. Now, all these difficulties disappear when you go frequently to confession. If a man confesses his sins every week, or at least every fortnight, what great difficulty can he find in it, in God's name, unless, indeed, he makes difficulties for himself through unfounded anxiety. Otherwise everything is easy enough for him. The examen of conscience is easy, because he has only a short time to go through; contrition is easy, because he is well practised in making acts of sorrow for sin; it is easy for him to tell his sins, because he has, generally speaking, nothing to confess but small faults and daily imperfections, or else he has to repeat some sin of his past life. You see now that the very excuse you allege goes against you; so that, if you wish to remove the difficulty of which you complain, and to make it easy and consoling for you to confess your sins, you must go to confession frequently; there is no better means to that end.

But what is the use of going so often? What will I have to confess? I could not find anything to accuse myself of so often, so that I should be obliged always to repeat the same thing, and that is not worth while. What? You could not find anything to confess? Alas! you will find enough matter for sorrow and confession, if you only examine your conscience as you ought. That objection of yours shows that you are not very watchful over your actions, or else that you think little of venial sins, since your conscience is capable of feeling only mortal sins, and is like a worn-out horse, that cannot feel a blow, and is insensible to anything but the spur. Still, if you cannot remember having committed any deliberate venial sin during the week, give thanks to the good God. I congratulate you with all my heart, and wish I could say as much for myself! But, nevertheless, can you not go to confession and receive the holy sacraments? You need have no trouble on that head, nor are you obliged to sin on purpose to have something to tell the priest, like those boys who, when they are sent to confession on the four great feasts of the year, fight and quarrel with each other on the way, and when asked what they are fighting about, reply: we are committing sin, so as to have something to tell in confession. No, I say, that is altogether unnecessary. If during your whole life you had done nothing worse than telling one deliberate venial lie (I am pretty certain that you will find something more than

He who has committed but one sin in his life has still matter enough for confession.

that on your conscience), that is matter enough and more than enough for sorrow and repentance and for a firm purpose of amendment every day of your life; and therefore, if you wish, you can receive the sacrament of penance validly every day. Is it not worth while now? For thus you receive every day an increase of sanctifying grace, by which all your future good works are made more pleasing to God and more meritorious of eternal glory in heaven. Is not that worth while? You receive, too, each time, fresh special graces from God, to enable you the more easily to overcome temptations and dangers of sin, and to abstain from evil? Is not that worth while? Each time you get a new impulse to persevere in good and to preserve the friendship of God to the end. Is not that worth while? Each time you blot out a good share of the punishment due to your sins. Is not that worth while?

Pious Christians go to confession often during the week.

O pious and holy souls, you have better understood the great worth of the sacramental grace! St. Charles Borromeo, our holy Founder, St. Ignatius, St. Catherine of Siena, the blessed Coleta, and many others used to go to confession every day. St. Francis Borgia went twice a day, in the morning before Mass, and in the evening before going to rest. Catharine of Sweden, a royal princess, and Father Gonzalez Sylveira, a martyr, used to go to confession three times every day. Do you imagine that those holy servants of God had a new mortal sin to confess, every time they went to the sacred tribunal? Nay, do you think they had even a venial sin to tell? Who could reasonably entertain such a thought? Oh, no! their object was to purify their souls all the more, and to obtain an increase of sanctifying grace and merit at the same time. And could you not do the same once a fortnight, or, if you are very busy, which is not, however, a valid excuse, at least once a month? Shall I tell you the real reason why you do not begin to go frequently to confession? It is because you have not a sincere desire to lead a pious life, to please God, to enrich your soul with merits; your idea is to live according to the vain world, and not to mortify your sensuality and evil inclinations, nor to amend your vicious ways; that is the whole reason.

Conclusion and resolution.

Oh, certainly! That it is which has kept me so long from frequent confession! Ah, my Lord and my God! if I had during my life made better use of that easy, salutary, and advantageous means, I should not have committed so many grievous sins; I should not have remained so long addicted to this or that vice;

I should have collected, oh, what a great treasure of merits, as so many seeds of future glory in heaven! But now, alas, by being in the state of sin, I have deprived myself of them forever! Now I will earnestly begin, and will continue during my life to go to confession at least every fortnight, or at the furthest every month, so that by thus constantly cleansing my conscience I may be preserved from sin, be more zealous in Thy service, increase daily in virtue and sanctifying grace, and persevere constantly therein till death.

FIFTY-FOURTH SERMON.

ON GUARDING THE HEART FROM EVIL THOUGHTS.

Subject.

1. Are evil thoughts sins? 2. When are they sins, and how is one to guard his heart from them?—*Preached on the third Sunday after Easter.*

Text.

Gaudebit cor vestrum, et gaudium vestrum nemo tollet a vobis.
—John xvi. 22.

“Your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man shall take from you.”

Introduction.

Sorrowful was the announcement made by such a beloved Master to His forlorn disciples: “You shall not see Me!” and that, too, in a short time; “A little while” I shall remain with you, then I shall leave you, and, “you shall not see Me.” Still, there was some consolation in store for them: “A little while and you shall see Me;” and then your sorrow shall be changed into joy; “your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man shall take from you.” Far more sorrowful, my dear brethren, and without any gleam of consolation, is the state of those sinners of whom one can say, after they have been to confession, “a little while;” for but a short time they will have the Lord in their hearts by grace, and rejoice with Him; and again in a little while, by relapsing into sin, they will drive God out of their hearts, and lose His grace and friendship. I have shown

recently that perseverance in good is the surest sign of a future resurrection with Christ to glory, and of seeing Him in heaven, from which I concluded that inconstancy in good and the habit of relapsing into sin is an almost unfailing sign of being rejected by God. To avoid this relapse, and to encourage us to be constant in the divine service, I will now suggest for your advantage, and mine too, some useful means, and, first, we shall turn our attention to that part of the human body which is the noblest, namely the heart, from which everything good and bad takes its first beginning, mindful of the exhortation of the Holy Ghost by the Wise Man, in the Book of Proverbs: "With all watchfulness keep thy heart, because life issueth out from it."¹ Therefore, O man, carefully guard your heart from all evil thoughts and desires, if you wish to continue in the grace of God and to rejoice with Him in heaven. There are two questions which I propose answering in this instruction.

Plan of Discourse.

Are evil thoughts sins? This I shall answer in the first part. When are evil thoughts sins? This I shall answer in the second part. How am I to guard my heart against them? This I shall show in the conclusion.

O Holy Ghost! enlighten our hearts, that we may henceforth keep them from being sullied, so that they may be Thy constant dwelling! This we beg of Thee through the merits of Thy Immaculate Spouse Mary and our holy guardian angels, that we may all be amongst the number of those to whom Thon hast said the consoling words, "Your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man shall take from you."

Many think that sin cannot be committed in thought.

It is a great mistake of many, very many people, to imagine that, as long as they do nothing wrong in outward act, they need not trouble about their thoughts and desires, no matter of what kind they may be. For instance, a man is grossly insulted; he goes about full of bitterness and enmity; he thinks of all possible ways and means of taking revenge on the person who has insulted him, and of repaying him like for like; but through want of opportunity, or because his anger has evaporated after a considerable time, or even on account of some supernatural motive, because he recalls vividly to his recollection the law of Jesus Christ, which forbids all grievous revenge under pain of damnation, and commands us to love even our worst enemies and to

¹ *Omni custodia serva cor tuum, quia ex ipso vita procedit.*—Prov. iv. 23.

return them good for evil, he refrains from fulfilling in act the revenge he was plotting. Another, who is sitting idly at home, or is lying sleepless in bed in the morning, has his imagination full of all sorts of abominable images; it represents to him all kinds of temptations in the matter of impurity, so that he thinks what he would do if he came into such an occasion, etc. He takes pleasure in those imaginations, although he has no will or intention of committing the impure act he is thinking of; while, if he looks at a person of the opposite sex, or reads a love-tale, or spends his time amusing himself and laughing with a person of the opposite sex, how many unchaste thoughts and desires would not one find in his heart, if it could be looked into? But through shame, or fear that, if he committed a sinful act, people might come to know of it, or since he has no hope of being able to fulfil his bad desires, he does nothing wrong outwardly. Now, both these people think themselves innocent, and when they go to confession the one forgets the revengeful, the other the impure thoughts, and neither thinks of repenting of and confessing such thoughts; for, as long as they abstain from sinning in outward action, they imagine that their thoughts and desires are not of importance. If they happen to hear in a sermon, or elsewhere, that it is not lawful to consent to bad thoughts and desires, they fall into a still greater error, by persuading themselves that such consent consists only in action, or at least in a firm purpose and eager desire to do the evil deed when opportunity offers.

A most fatal error, by which the wicked tempter ensnares simple souls and tepid Christians, who seldom come to sermons, or hear any explanation of the Christian doctrine. There is a certain bird of prey, that eats nothing but the heart of the animals it kills, while others eat only the brains. The devil is a bird of prey of both kinds; unceasingly he tries to ensnare our souls; the chief object of his rage is our heart, which he endeavors to conquer by evil suggestions, impure thoughts and imaginations; if he induces the heart to entertain a voluntary pleasure and desire, he has attained his end, and it matters little to him whether the bad action is accomplished or not, because he has already killed the soul and subjected it to himself by the unlawful thoughts and desires. Generally speaking, he devours the brains, too, of such people, after he has betrayed them; that is, he blinds their understanding, so that they make nothing of such thoughts and desires, admit them without fear or shame, in-

They are deceived by the devil.

crease them without number, and retain them without repenting of and detesting them.

Human justice takes no account of thoughts; but divine justice does.

This, I repeat, is a grievous error. Far different is the justice of God from that of man; the latter takes no account of thoughts and desires, not so the former. If I affirmed, even on oath, that a thousand times I had a firm purpose of stealing, murdering, or committing adultery, if the occasion were given me, no earthly judge could condemn me on that account; for, if he cannot prove me guilty of the act, he must acquit me. "Man seeth those things that appear," says the Lord God; "but the Lord beholdeth the heart;"¹ that is, men judge of nothing but what they see, while God wishes to have the whole man as an unspotted sacrifice, not only as to his body, but especially as to his soul and his heart, the most precious part of him. What did it help the foolish virgins that their lamps were clean outwardly, and well-polished, since they had no oil in them? I know you not, said the heavenly Bridegroom to them, when they knocked at the door; away with you! In vain does a man flatter himself that he has preserved his purity of body, if his heart is sullied with unchaste thoughts and desires. Therefore we read in the divine law: "Take away the evil of your devices from My eyes."² "Turn ye from your evil ways, and from your wicked thoughts."³ Our divine Lord tells us that we must not even let our desires tend to evil: "But I say to you: that whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart."⁴

One can sin in thought principally, and more dangerously, than in outward act.

So that one can sin, then, by mere thought? Certainly, and that, too, principally, nay, more dangerously than by outward act. Principally, I say, because it is from thoughts that all sins and vices, whatever they may be called, take their origin. Before I do anything evil in action, I must first have the determination and will to do it; and before I can arrive at such a determination, I must necessarily think about it. Therefore Christ, the Eternal Truth, says in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "But the things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and those things defile a man: for from the heart come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false testimonies, blasphemies," as from the source

¹ Homo enim videt ea quæ patent; Dominus autem intuetur cor.—I. Kings xvi. 7.

² Auferte malum cogitationum vestrarum ab oculis meis.—Isa. i. 16.

³ Convertimini de viis vestris malis, et de cogitationibus vestris pessimis.—Zach. i. 4.

⁴ Ego autem dico vobis: qui viderit mulierem ad concupiscendum eam, jam moechatus est eam in corde suo.—Matt. v. 28.

whence they derive their origin. ¹ Nay, it is in the heart and soul that the sin is properly committed; for sin consists in the determination of the will to evil, while the outward act, no matter how bad it may be, is no sin, if the heart refuses its consent to it. I have said that sins of thought are more dangerous than sins of action, because, according to the words of the Council of Trent, "sometimes they wound the soul more grievously, and are more dangerous, than those which are committed in outward act."² Why so? Because they are committed with greater facility and less fear; because they are committed oftener and in greater number; because they are generally more difficult to avoid.

Even the detestable name of sinful outward actions is enough to terrify at once a soul that has any conscience left. At the first resolution to do a wrong act the conscience immediately becomes uneasy; and therefore the devil does not try to tempt a pious man at once to an impure act; for he sees clearly enough that he would not succeed. But bad thoughts creep into the heart before one is aware of them; and as they do not cause such shame or fear as outward acts do, they force themselves in gradually, until at last they are deliberately entertained. "Every one that doth evil, hateth the light,"³ says Our Lord. The wrong-doer seeks solitude, and even the most abandoned is not so shameless as to sin outwardly and in the presence of others. But in thought and desire one can sin without shame, at all times, in all places, public or private, in society or alone. Such sins are not visible to others, while opportunity for them is given everywhere; nay, in the holiest places and occupations, in religious houses, in the wildest deserts, in the churches consecrated to divine service, before the altar and the very eye of God, at devotions and prayers, bad thoughts enter the heart and often give one enough to do to drive them away.

Because sins of thought are more easily committed.

Who could count the number of sins committed in a month, a week, or even a day by one who does not know how to guard his heart carefully, and allows it to dwell on bad thoughts? The vindictive, the unchaste man, before gratifying his lust or his revengeful feelings even once in outward act, has already com-

Because they are committed in greater numbers.

¹ Quæ autem procedunt de ore, de corde exeunt, et ea coinquant hominem : De corde enim exeunt cogitationes malæ, homicidia, adulteria, fornicationes, furta, falsa testimonia, blasphemia.—Matt. xv. 18. 19.

² Nonnunquam animam gravius sapient. et periculosiora sunt illis quæ manifeste admittuntur.—Trid. Sess. xiv.

³ Omnis qui male agit, odit lucem.—John iii. 20.

mitted a hundred sins of thought. To carry out his desires, much and long consideration is required; he has to wait a long time before finding an opportunity, and a hundred plans and means have to be laid aside after having been adopted, before he can attain his end; meanwhile the greater number, nay, almost all of his thoughts and desires, from early morning till late at night, are directed to his fleshly lust or his revenge, and are so many mortal sins; nay, to speak more correctly, are a continued, uninterrupted sin of the heart.

Shown by a simile.

With reason is the devil compared to a sower, when there is question of sinful thoughts, as we read in the parable in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "But while men were asleep, his enemy came and oversowed cockle among the wheat, and went his way."¹ Do you know, my dear brethren, the difference between sowing and planting? The latter takes some time, while the former can be done quickly; in planting, one thing is set in the ground after another, and very little, indeed, can be done in a quarter of an hour, because everything has to be put in carefully; besides, more room is required, that the things may not be too near each other; they have to be looked after and watered frequently, and, in spite of all that, many of them wither and die. On the other hand, how many seeds can one not scatter in a quarter of an hour? All you have to do is to open your hand and spread them over the ground, and they will produce abundant fruit. "His enemy came and oversowed cockle." That is the way in which the devil acts; he plants sins, as it were, when he incites us men to do unlawful actions; but he sows the sins we commit in thought and desire. All he has to do is to scatter a handful of seeds, that is, of impure or other forbidden images, and then he can go away, and await the result without further trouble; for when that seed is once received and nourished in the heart, sins without number will be the consequence.

Because they are generally more difficult to avoid.

From these reasons, namely, because sins of thought are committed with less fear, on account of their causing less shame and of their malice being less acknowledged; because those sins are committed almost without number; and because they generally creep into the heart unforeseen and without any occasion having been given for them, it follows, finally, that no sins are more difficult to avoid than those which are committed by thoughts and imaginations. An unchaste man will refrain from

¹ Cum autem dormirent homines, venit inimicus ejus et superseminavit zizania in medicamentis, et abiit.—Matt. xiii. 25.

impure actions, at least, when he arrives at old age, when his body becomes weakened, and his blood cold, or, else, when the occasion is violently taken away from him, and he has made his peace with God by sincere penance; but that the forbidden pleasures he has enjoyed do not frequently recur to his imagination afterwards,—that, I believe, is contrary to the experience of all men who have any knowledge of this matter, and who would tell us that they who have been in the habit of gratifying their carnal desires, and have been accustomed to take pleasure in impure thoughts, must have great difficulty in immediately and always duly overcoming such thoughts; for the combat they have to sustain is a grievous and dangerous one, that requires an extraordinary help and grace from God.

We know from the Holy Scriptures that they especially who have led sinful lives never run greater danger of eternal damnation than in their death agony; for then, as the holy Evangelist St. John says, the raging demon summons up all his strength in order to ruin their souls in the short time that remains to him, and to lead into sin, and after sin to drag down to hell, those who have escaped from him by true penance. Now, I ask, what sort of a sin would the devil be likely to tempt me to with his suggestions, in my last moments, when I see before my eyes the home of my eternity? To some unlawful, shameful action? No, indeed; for I should not have strength for such a sin as that, nor opportunity, either. Therefore the aim of his temptations must be thoughts and desires alone. And there is no doubt, my dear brethren, they are the means by which the demon betrays and perverts those who abandon God at the last moment. Unchaste Christians, who have lived according to the wanton desires of the flesh, repent of, bewail, and confess your sins when you are on the point of entering into eternity! It is well for you to do so, and I congratulate you with all my heart; nor will I refuse to believe that your repentance and conversion are sincere. But, alas! how I fear for your salvation in that last combat, if the devil should try to re-awaken in your heart impure desires, and to represent to your imagination the object of your former unlawful love, the forbidden pleasures you enjoyed! How will you be able to defend yourselves against such temptations then, since you rarely or never opposed them properly during your lives? How many like you were overcome at the last moment by those assaults of the devil, and hurried down to hell, even after they had done penance!

The dying
are tempted
by the devil
in thought
alone, and
are often
overcome.

Shown by
an example.

From many examples of this I select but one from Father Paul Segneri, which I will briefly relate. A priest had just left the bedside of a dying man, after having heard his confession, full of consolation at the thought of having converted a great sinner to God, even at the last moment; for the dying man had made his confession so well and with such tears of contrition that the priest could not think otherwise than favorably of him. When the priest was about to say Mass and to recommend the soul of his penitent to God, it was announced to him that the man had just died. Thank God! said he, with still greater consolation, that he was so well prepared! I will now say a Requiem Mass for him. But hardly had he put his hand on the sacred vestments, when they were snatched from him violently, and he heard a voice saying to him: "priest of God, where are you going?" "To the altar," answered the latter, "to say Mass for the soul of him whom I prepared for death." "Hold," said the voice, "I am that man; in vain would you offer up the holy sacrifice for me; it cannot help me, for I am lost forever!" "What!" said the terrified priest, "you lost? How can that be? Did you not candidly confess your sins to me before you died, and that, too, with such sincere sorrow that I could not expect from any one better signs of repentance?" "It is true," answered the lost soul; "there was nothing wanting to my confession, sorrow, and repentance." "Perhaps, asked the priest, your purpose was not firm? Yet I saw you myself drive with violence out of your house the person with whom you had committed many sins, and you expressed your firm determination not to have anything more to do with her." "That is also the case," answered the soul; "I was fully in earnest in all that; I was absolved from all the sins I confessed to you; they were and are eternally forgiven me by God; I was in the state of grace, a child of God, and an heir to the kingdom of heaven, and was about to enter into a happy eternity. But, alas! to my irreparable misfortune! hardly had you left me, when the devil represented to my imagination the person whom I had made the object of my sinful passion, and I thought of how she loved me, and how she must have wept and sorrowed when I drove her away. At first I at once resisted the temptation. Away with you! I said in thought; weep as much as you please! Would to God I had never seen you! You are the only cause of my being so unfortunate as to have offended God grievously and frequently! Thus the first attack was happily overcome; and would that I could say as much of the others! Imme-

diately afterwards the devil suggested to me the thought, but if I get well again and am fully restored to health, in case that person comes to me and renews her caresses, will I be able to withstand them, and to put her away from me? There I was caught, because I was not accustomed to conquer in such combats. Oh! I thought, that would be another matter; if I got well again, I certainly would not keep that person away from me. There was nothing more required; after this consent on my part my spirit departed, and now, by a just judgment of God, I am lying in hell."

What think you of this, my dear brethren? Oh, truly, all the souls of the departed cannot come back to tell us how they fare, or else we should find a countless number who lose heaven by similar temptations in their last moments! But mark here the confirmation of the truth I explained to you on another occasion, that amongst a thousand who lead bad lives you will hardly find one to die a happy death, if he does penance only when death is at his door; partly on account of the danger he runs of not sincerely repenting under such circumstances, and partly on account of the danger of not receiving the grace of final perseverance, although he may have sincerely repented, because he has rendered himself unworthy of that grace during his life. Mark, too, how very hard it is for a man who has been accustomed to the odious vice of impurity, and has not learned during life to watch over his heart, to resist bad thoughts and desires even in his last moments. Hence the Holy Ghost warns us all, in the words of the Wise Man: "With all watchfulness keep thy heart, because life issueth out from it." Keep thy heart, O man, from sinful thoughts, if thou art earnestly desirous to persevere in good, for from the heart comes all that is good and bad; life and death come from it. Now, there still remains the question: when are bad thoughts sins? The answer to it we shall see in the

Therefore, they who often sin ir thought are in a dangerous state.

Second Part.

Poor, desolate, and lost mortals we should be if all the bad thoughts that occur to our imaginations were sins! We should be lost, I say; for who could then keep from sin? What grown-up person could be amongst the elect? Chosen saints of God! how many of you had the extraordinary privilege conferred on you by God of never being troubled with such thoughts? If we could examine you all, one after the other, we should hardly

It is not a sin, but rather adds to one's merits, to suffer bad thoughts unwillingly.

find one in a thousand who was not sometimes assailed by the most abominable and wicked imaginations. Chastest of souls, who should be called angels rather than men, Jerome, Antony, Benedict, Teresa, Catherine of Siena, Francis Xavier, who led angelic lives in human bodies, you had nevertheless often to fight, even to shedding your blood, in order to defend yourselves from the most horrible thoughts. The great apostle of the Gentiles, St. Paul, that chosen vessel of God, even after being raised to the third heaven, could not, with all his prayers and entreaties, as he himself acknowledges, obtain the grace of being freed from such abominable temptations. "Unhappy man that I am," he sighs, how I am troubled! what a vessel of corruption I find in my flesh, which constantly strives against the law of my spirit, and holds me captive like a slave! "Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death,"¹ which thus troubles me? This should console you, pious Christians, who at the first appearance of an impure thought are as troubled and uneasy as if you had already committed sin, and all was lost for you. No, you must be of good heart; it is one thing to suffer temptations, and another to allow one's self to be overcome by them; it is one thing to have impure images in the imagination, and another to accept those images and deliberately to take pleasure in them.

Proved
from the
Life of the
Saints.

"Where wert Thou, Lord Jesus?"² Such was the question that St. Catherine of Siena asked her heavenly Bridegroom, after the devil had been plaguing her for a long time by suggesting to her imagination impure objects, that one must not even describe or think of. "My dear daughter," answered Our Lord, "I was in the midst of thy heart."³ "How?" asked the holy virgin, "how is it possible that Thou couldst remain in the midst of the filth that sullied my heart?" "Tell me," said Christ to her, "did those thoughts please thee?" "Oh, no!" was the answer, "I was never in greater trouble than at the thought of not being able to free myself from them." "For that very reason," answered Our Lord, "thou hast never been more pleasing to Me than thou wert then; for thou wert true to Me in that dangerous and violent combat." Therefore, bad thoughts, no matter how horrible they are, as long as one is displeased at them and tries to resist them, are not only not sinful, but bring a great increase of

¹ Infelix ego homo, quis me liberabit de corpore mortis hujus?—Rom. vii. 24.

² Ubi eras, Domine Jesu?

³ In medio cordis tui.

merit for heaven; not only are they not injurious to chastity and purity, but they make that virtue more beautiful and glorious, like gold that is purified by the fire. God allows His dearest children to be tempted by them, that they may increase in humility, acknowledge their misery, fly for refuge to Him with greater confidence and earnestness, like a child to its mother, when a barking dog frightens it, and that they may guard their outward senses more carefully, avoid all dangers and occasions of sin, and so increase daily in virtue and gain more glory in heaven by conquering in those combats. This was well understood by that hermit, who opened his conscience to his spiritual Father and told him that he was incessantly plagued by the most horrible thoughts. "Be satisfied my son," said the old man to him, "I will beg of God to free you from those temptations." "No," said the other, "do not pray that I may be freed from them, but rather that God may help me by His grace never to consent to them."

Therefore it is consent alone that makes bad thoughts sinful. When and how is this consent given? I will explain it by a simile. A commandant of an important fortress, for instance, Temesvar in Hungary, who was entrusted with the defence of it by the emperor during the Turkish wars, received secretly from Constantinople letters through a disguised spy, containing the offer of a large sum of money, if he would betray the fortress into the hands of the Turks. Now, there are three ways in which the commandant can take and read that letter; in the first place, he may not know where it comes from; he breaks the seal and begins to read, but hardly has he read the first line, when he sees what is asked of him; full of anger, he folds up the letter again and has the man who brought it beheaded; further, without reading another word of it, he sends the letter to the emperor, saying that, if he had known what it contained, he would not even have opened it, but sent it at once, sealed as it was, to Vienna. What would you think of that commandant, my dear brethren? Did he act rightly or not? Was he, perhaps, deserving of punishment, for taking the letter from the enemy, and so holding communication with him? No, he was a true and faithful soldier to his emperor, and acted as all good men should act; so that he deserved a great reward, and instead of having his fidelity suspected, the emperor would for the future have still greater confidence in him, and trust him still more fully than before. In the second place, the commandant, as soon as he sees what are the

Consent
alone maket
the sin :
how it is
given,
shown by a
simile.

contents of the letter, continues to read it and finds pleasure in the promise of the money that is made him. Oh, he says, it would not be a bad thing if I could get that sum; and he considers the matter and asks himself how he could manage the treason so as not to be detected. He takes counsel with the spy as to the plan to be adopted, but still he is not resolved; he really does not wish to betray the fortress, nor does he betray it, but simply allows the spy to go away unpunished, without giving him a decisive answer. What do you think of that? Is he a faithful commandant? No, you think; he did not act honestly, and if the emperor knew of his conduct, he would have good reason for suspecting him, and, if he did not have him put to death, would certainly depose him from his position, and would not trust him any longer; for, although he did not actually determine to give up the fortress, still he was guilty of perjury in treating with the spy about the act of treachery, in his eagerness to receive the promised sum of money. In the third place, the commandant, after having read the letter, and considered the matter, gives as answer to the spy that he will be ready at the first opportunity to deliver the fortress into the hands of the enemy. In that case there is no doubt that he is a traitor, and deserving of the most painful death, although he may not actually deliver up the fortress, through want of opportunity.

In three ways we can deal with bad thoughts; first, meritoriously.

It is nearly the same with us mortals, my dear brethren. Jesus Christ, our King, has entrusted to each one of us a soul, to be guarded for Him alone as its lawful Lord, since He has bought it with His blood. But the sworn enemy of God and man suggests evil thoughts; see, there you have the treacherous letter which he sends us, to persuade us to take away our souls from God and give them to him; he represents to the imagination some alluring object, some enticing beauty, some carnal pleasure; that is the reward he promises us if we give up our souls to him. Now, like the commandant, we can act in three different ways with regard to this letter of the tempter, this evil suggestion. A pious, God-fearing man, the moment he is aware of the evil thought, puts it away at once out of his mind, thinks of something else, and sends the wicked letter to his Master; that is, he sighs to God in heaven with king Ezechias: "Lord, I suffer violence, answer Thou for me;"¹ the hellish wolf is behind me; help me and do not abandon me! see what a horrible proposal

¹ Domine, vim patior: responde pro me.—Isa. xxxv. vi. 14.

he is making to me! It is against my will, for I am determined to be faithful to Thee, my sovereign God, forever. And although these thoughts and imaginations return a thousand times, he renews a thousand times his determination, and is always displeased at them, although the flesh finds pleasure in them. O happy soul! these attacks, this wicked suggestion, will not harm you; by means of it you can prove all the better your fidelity to your Master, and can gain still brighter jewels for your crown in heaven.

Another, when he is aware of the bad thoughts, at first continues them through curiosity, and afterwards finds pleasure in deliberately speculating in his imagination on what is presented to it, although he does not resolve, nor has any desire to do any impure outward action; he has only a wilful pleasure in the thoughts. Alas! he is already guilty of perjury towards God! The will has given its consent, not, indeed, to the act, but to the pleasure derived from the thought, although it may last but a moment; the sin is complete, partly, because a wilful, deliberate dwelling on impure thoughts is of itself apt to lead to impure feelings, and partly on account of the proximate danger of consenting to unchaste desires. Therefore, according to theologians, it is not lawful for one who is still unmarried to represent deliberately to himself the pleasure he will have in the married state; nor for a widower to recall the pleasure he lawfully enjoyed when in that state.

Finally, the third not only dwells with deliberation on the impure thoughts, when he is aware of them, but also has the wish and desire to accomplish the impure act when he has the opportunity of doing so. This is a far worse sin than the former, and it must be declared exactly in confession. For it would not be enough for me to say in such a case: I have had wilful pleasure in impure thoughts; I must also add: I have also had the deliberate intention of doing the impure act; and, moreover, I must declare what kind of an act it was that I wished to do. For instance, I have had a desire to see unchaste things, to be guilty of impure touches, to sin with a single or a married person, or with a near relation, or with one consecrated to God; all these different circumstances must be declared in confession, according to the nature of the sin.

It often happens that one doubts whether he has deliberately dwelt on the impure thoughts and desires, especially when they have remained a long time in the imagination, or, after having

Second, sinfully.

The third, the worst of all.

How to act if one doubts whether he

has consent-
ed or not.

been driven away, have returned often. What is to be done in a case of that kind? Spiritual writers generally say that in such a case a pious, God-fearing man, who is firmly resolved not to offend God grievously on any account, and therefore carefully avoids all dangerous occasions, can reasonably conclude that he has not fully consented. On the other hand, one who is given to the vice of impurity, or gratifies the curiosity of his eyes and other outward senses, and goes into all kinds of dangerous company without fear, can and must in such a case look on himself as having committed sin in thought; for, generally speaking, such thoughts are then voluntary, either in themselves, or in their cause.

Exhortation
to guard the
heart care-
fully.

I close with the exhortation of the Holy Ghost: "With all watchfulness keep thy heart." O man, whoever you are, keep your precious soul for your God and Lord, who has given it into your care, and who will one day demand it of you; and that you may do so all the more easily, guard your heart most carefully from all bad thoughts and desires! With what great care does not a man look after his money, lest it should be stolen from him! He will not allow it to remain on the table, although he may believe in the honesty of his servants; it is put away in his coffers, and they are well locked; the door of the room in which the coffer is kept is bolted and barred; the door of the house and the windows are most carefully closed every night; and all this is done to keep a piece of metal from being stolen. Ah, immortal, precious soul, bought by the blood of Jesus Christ! are you, then, of less importance, so that one need not take so much trouble for your sake? Must I, then, lose you for a miserable, momentary thought? Lucifer and countless numbers of angels were hurled from heaven to the pit of hell, where they will burn forever, for one momentary, sinful thought. Alas, so should each of you say to himself; woe to me if I, too, should have to burn there for a voluntary imagination! Unhappy me! how would not the remembrance of my folly torture me!

Conclusion
and resolu-
tion to
avoid bad
thoughts,
and use
every means
against
them.

No, I will not be so foolish! In future I will know better how to guard my heart; I will use every means to prevent bad thoughts from finding room in me. To that end I will close my outward senses to all dangerous objects; I will avoid idleness as the chief pillow on which the devil rests most securely with his wicked suggestions. In the morning, as soon as I awake, I will raise my first thought to God, for that is the time at which the enemy is especially on the watch. If what St. John Climacus says is true,

there is one demon who is called, "the morning precursor;"¹ and his duty is to keep watch at the bed of a sleeping man, and the moment he awakes, to snatch away the first thought from him by an evil imagination. And as experience teaches, there is nothing more dangerous than to lie in bed awake in the morning. Therefore, in future, at the break of day, when I have returned thanks to God and offered to Him by the supernatural intention all my thoughts, words, and actions during the day, my first prayer shall be a protestation that whatever evil suggestions occur to me during the day shall be against my will. I renounce Satan, I will then say, renewing my baptismal vow; and I renounce all his suggestions, the flesh and its desires, the world and its vanities; for, according to theologians, this renewal of the vows is a powerful means against the temptations of the flesh and all witchcraft. If bad thoughts attack me unexpectedly, I shall at once take refuge in flight; that is, as soon as I am aware of them, without further examination or discussion of them, I must put them away at once and turn my thoughts to something else. Carnal desire is called a fire; the first impure thoughts are, as it were, sparks, that help to light that fire. How do I act if by chance a spark of fire falls on my hand? Do I stop to say, where does that come from, I wonder? How has it managed to fall right on my hand? See how it burns into the flesh? I wonder will it stay long there? No, the moment I feel the fire, I shake it off without more ado, and then I look at my hand to see if I am burned or not. Such is the way in which I must act with those sparks from hell, the evil thoughts and imaginations that occur to me. Above all, I will fly to Thee for refuge with humble, child-like confidence, O God of my heart and Lover of chaste souls! I have given my heart to Thee once for all; Thou alone and no other shalt keep possession of it; but see how many fierce enemies surround me at every moment to take this heart of mine; think also on my weakness and misery, on account of which I cannot defend myself without Thee, and therefore I beg of Thee, with Thy servant David: "When my strength shall fail, do not Thou forsake me, O God; be not Thou far from me; O God, make haste to my help."² Help me to keep a pure heart, that I may arrive where nothing defiled may enter, that is, to Thee, in Thy kingdom of heaven, where my heart shall rejoice, and my joy no man shall take from me. Amen.

¹ *Præcursor matutinus.*

² *Cum defecerit virtus mea ne derelinquas me. Ne elongeris a me; Deus meus, in auxilium meum respice.—Ps. lxx. 9, 12.*

FIFTY-FIFTH SERMON.**ON GUARDING THE EYES.****Subject.**

He who allows his eyes to wander about unchecked in every direction will not long remain free from sin, nor persevere in good.—*Preached on the fourth Sunday after Easter.*

Text.

Et jam non videbitis me.—John xvi. 16.
“And now you shall not see Me.”

Introduction.

This is a curious thing, my dear brethren. Who could ever imagine that the sacred presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ could be injurious to His disciples? And yet He says expressly, I am going away from you, and you will not see Me any more; “but I tell you the truth; it is expedient to you that I go;” it is better for you not to see Me any more, than if I were to remain amongst you. Do you wish to know why? “If I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you.” The consolation you have in My presence (so commentators interpret the passage) is only a sensible one; this must be taken away from you, if you wish to receive the consolation and grace of the Holy Ghost. But I cannot help thinking, if the consoling presence of Our Lord on earth was incompatible with the presence by grace of the Holy Ghost, how, then, can that grace consist with vain, carnal glances at earthly beauties, and dangerous objects, in whose presence we are everywhere in this world, unless they are removed from our sight, or we violently turn away our eyes from them? Oh, certainly, my dear brethren, as I showed in my last sermon towards the end, a necessary means of guarding the heart and keeping it in the grace of God is watchfulness over our outward senses, especially the eyes. There you have the whole subject of this exhortation. Namely:

Plan of Discourse.

He who allows his eyes to wander about curiously on all sides will not long remain free from sin, nor persevere in grace. Therefore we must all be especially watchful over our eyes.

Help us thereto by Thy powerful grace, O all-seeing God, through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

Amongst all our outward senses, there is none from which physicians are better able to form a judgment with regard to our constitution and the state of our health, than from our eyes. According to Hippocrates, the prince and master of physicians, "from no part of the body can so many symptoms be derived, as from the eyes; if the eyes are healthy, the whole body is healthy."¹ And with greater certainty still might I say that amongst all the outward senses there is none from which we can better judge the state of the soul, as to whether it is healthy or not, than from the eyes. The Holy Ghost, who cannot deceive, says by the Wise Ecclesiasticus: "The fornication of a woman shall be known by the haughtiness of her eyes, and by her eye-lids;" (and the same is to be understood of men); therefore, "take heed of the impudence of her eyes."² It is a rare and unusual occurrence for the fire of lust not to be ignited, when the eyes are allowed to rest on a person of the other sex. Bad thoughts, as we have seen in the last sermon, are treacherous letters which the enemy of our souls sends to our hearts, in which he tries to dwell by impure images, to persuade them to give up our souls to him. The spies who bring those letters are generally the eyes. "Death is come up through our windows;"³ says the Prophet Jeremias. The look is followed by the thought, the thought by pleasure, and pleasure by consent.

It is an undoubted truth, which even blind heathens have found out by experience, that the eyes first lead to impure love; therefore Seleucus, a heathen legislator, commanded that, as a first punishment for adulterers, their eyes should be plucked out, because, he said, that part should first suffer which was the first cause of the crime. When the Holy Scripture speaks against sin, it often alludes to and condemns the eyes alone, as the chief cause of sin. Thus God, by the Prophet Ezechiel, speaking of idolators, does not condemn the persons themselves expressly, but their eyes: "I have broken their heart, that was faithless and revolted from Me, and their eyes, that went a whoring after their idols."⁴ In the same way He reproaches, not

The eyes generally show what a person's constitution is, and lead to evil.

Therefore the eyes alone are often blamed by God and man for sin committed.

¹ Nulla ex parte tot signa, quam ex oculis accipiuntur; ut valent oculi, sic totum corpus.

² Fornicatio mulieris in extollentia oculorum, et in palpebris illius agnosceatur. Ab omni irreverentia oculorum ejus cave.—Eccles. xxvi. 12, 14.

³ Ascendit mors per fenestras nostras.—Jerem. ix. 21.

⁴ Contrivi cor eorum fornicans, et recedens a me; et oculos eorum fornicantes post idola sua.—Ezech. vi. 9.

the envious themselves, but their eyes: "The eye of the envious is wicked." He calls, not the avaricious, but their eyes, insatiable: "The eye of the covetous man is insatiable in his portion of iniquity; he will not be satisfied till he consume his own soul, drying it up." In a word, in order that we may avoid all transgressions of the law, God warns us to mortify our eyes: "Let every man cast away the scandals of his eyes," He says by the Prophet Ezechiel. "But they provoked Me and would not hearken to Me; they did not, every man, cast away the abominations of his eyes, and I said I would pour out My indignation upon them." O eyes! as grateful, useful, and necessary as your beautiful light is to the body, so dangerous are ye to the soul!

And blind men are looked upon as fortunate by the saints.

A blind man is a poor man! Such is the cry of the blind beggars on the streets; but with regard to the welfare of the soul, I hear sensible people exclaim, a blind man is a happy man! Such was the opinion of Peter, abbot of Clairvaux, when the doctor told him that the illness from which he was suffering would cause him to lose the sight of one eye. "Happy man that I am," said Peter, "I shall now have to fight with but one enemy, instead of two! Such, too, was the belief of Narsetes, bishop of Chalcedon, who became blind, as we read in the life of St. Athanasius. Julian the Apostate cried out to him in a mocking tone the following blasphemy: "What a fine God must Christ the Galilean be, since He cannot preserve your sight!" "You are greatly mistaken," answered Narsetes; "Christ, my true God, could not have given me a greater grace than to take away my sight, that I may not see such a wicked wretch as you, nor many other dangerous objects. So dangerous are the eyes, when they are not well watched.

It is dangerous, then, to look curiously at another's beauty.

Now I ask each one of you, Christians, do you intend to avoid sin, and to keep on the right road to heaven? if so, what about your eyes? Do you allow them to wander about unhindered? Do you give them full liberty to gaze on everything that presents itself to them? Do you permit them to look with deliberate curiosity at persons of the opposite sex and to take pleasure in such looks? Do you wish to see and to be seen? Alas! if so, I ven-

¹ Nequam est oculus lividi.—Eccles. xiv. 8.

² Insatiabilis oculus cupidi in parte iniquitatis; non satiabitur donec consumat a se faciens animam suam.—Ibid. 9.

³ Unusquisque offensiones oculorum suorum abiciat. Et irritaverunt me, et noluerunt me audire; unusquisque abominaciones oculorum suorum non projecit; et dixi ut effunderem indignationem meam super eos.—Ezech. xx. 7, 8.

ture to prophesy with St. Augustine, no matter how innocent, pious, and firm in your good resolution you are now, your piety will not last long; you will not have a chaste heart, if your eyes are not modest; you will in a short time have to sigh forth, with the Prophet Jeremias: "My eye hath wasted my soul!"¹ My soul has hitherto been rich in the treasures of divine grace it had collected; one curious look has robbed me of all those riches. "I saw and was lost," you will have to acknowledge with the poet.² In the morning I confessed my sins with the firm resolution rather to die a thousand times than again offend my God; and yet on the very same day I looked on a dangerous object, and stained my conscience by a new sin: "I saw and was lost." After hearing that sermon about the eternal truth, I thought heaven and earth would perish before I should resolve to offend God again; but, alas! one imprudent glance has made me forget my resolution: "I saw and was lost." I went into the church in a state of innocence, to hear holy Mass, and to beg many graces from God, but I came away laden with mortal sin; and that was the result of a single glance at another's beauty, in which I took pleasure I saw and was lost. "Lust," says St. Thomas of Aquin, "can hardly be avoided, unless its beginning, namely looking at a woman's beauty, be avoided."³ Therefore the Holy Ghost warns us by the Wise Ecclesiasticus: "Look not upon a woman, lest thou fall into her snares: gaze not upon a maiden, lest her beauty be a stumbling block to thee; look not round about thee in the ways of the city, nor wander up and down in the streets thereof: turn away thy face from a woman dressed up, and gaze not upon another's beauty."⁴ Mark, my dear brethren, how often in the one chapter God warns us to guard our eyes.

What! some will say; must we, then, go about like blind men? Why has my Creator given me eyes, if not that I may use them? And what harm is it for me to look at what pleases me? What! I answer; your Creator has given you ears to hear; are you therefore allowed to hear anything you please? He has given you a tongue to speak; can you therefore say whatever you like?

The danger shown by similes.

¹ Oculus meus deprædatus est animam meam.—Lament. iii. 51.

² *Hic vidi, ut perii.*

³ *Luxuria vitari vix potest, nisi vitetur principium ejus, scilicet aspectus mulieris pulchre.*—St. Thomas, ii. 2, q. 167, a. 2.

⁴ *Ne respicias mulierem, ne forte incidas in laqueos illius: virginem ne conspicias, ne forte scandalizeris in decore illius; noli circumspicere in vicis civitatis, nec oberraveris in plateis illius; averte faciem tuam a muliere compta, et ne circumspicias speciem alienam.* Ecclus. ix. 3, 5, 7, 8.

He has given you hands to stretch forth, but not to take everything that it would please you to have. And yet you are not obliged to go about deaf, dumb, or lame. Truly, you have eyes to see with, but not to look at everything you please; otherwise the Holy Ghost would not warn you so often to keep from gazing at another's beauty; yet you are not forced on that account to go about like a blind man. What harm is there in it? you ask. And I ask you, what harm is it for a little child to take a knife in its hand? And yet you do not allow him to keep it. Why? He has not yet cut himself with it. That may be, you reply; but it is very dangerous, and he might hurt himself with it. I answer you, in the words of St. Ambrose: "Seeing in itself is not sinful; but take care lest it be the beginning of sin."¹ The eye is the only member that can cause death when it is wounded. In former times it caused the death of Henry II., king of France. During a marriage festivity this young monarch held a tournament, in which he wished to give a proof of his skill in arms. He appeared on the ground on horse-back, clad in full armor, so that it was impossible for a blow to reach his body; his eyes were the only part that he was obliged to leave uncovered, and they actually opened the door to death; for a splinter of a broken lance struck him in the eye and wounded him mortally. A similar tragedy is often enacted by our enemy, the devil, with our souls; many a pious man arms himself on all sides against his attacks and temptations; he arms his head with salutary meditations and spiritual exercises, so as to keep off bad thoughts; he arms his tongue with frequent confession and Communion against unchaste talk, cursing, and swearing; he arms his ears against uncharitable talk, by diligently hearing the word of God in sermons; in his hands he bears the prayer-book and rosary; on his breast he has the scapular and relics of the saints; but if his eyes alone are unarmed, the devil has room enough to enter and wound the soul mortally.

Many are
thereby led
into sin,

What harm was it for Eve, our first mother, to look at the forbidden fruit in paradise? And yet, that one look brought death to her and to us all. St. Bernard, in one of his meditations, thus apostrophizes her: "Why, O Eve, dost thou look so intently on thy own death? Why does it please thee to look at that which thou art not allowed to taste?"² Ah! said Eve, let

¹ Non vidisse crimen est; sed cavendum est ne origo criminis sit.—S. Ambr. l. 1 de pœnit., c. 13.

² Quid tuam mortem tam intente intueris, Eva? Quid spectare libet, quod manducare non licet?

me look at it! do not be afraid; I will only admire the fruit, and will not stretch forth my hand to pluck it; I am not forbidden to look, but only to eat. But alas, Eve! if thou hadst not looked, thou wouldst not have eaten, and thou and all of us would not have lost paradise! Eating followed seeing, and the sin was consummated. What harm was it for the wife of Pharaoh to look at her servant Joseph? "And after many days," says the Holy Scripture, "his mistress cast her eyes on Joseph:"¹ but when she did so, shame, honor, and conjugal fidelity were cast to the winds. "While she kept her eyes cast down," says Oleaster, "she did not sin; but when she raised them, she suffered scandal,"² and fell shamefully through impure desires. What harm was it for David, that holy king, to look out through the windows of his palace at Bethsabee? And yet, if he had not done so, he would not have become an adulterer and a murderer. "He would not have committed adultery," says St. Ambrose, "if he had not looked."³ David, says St. Gregory, did not look at the wife of Urias because he lusted after her, "but he lusted after her because he looked at her."⁴ What harm was it for Ammon to look at his own sister? And yet those looks of his led him into incest. But what need is there of proof? Often enough we hear in our own days people giving expression to the heartfelt wish, after they have been converted, ah, would that I had never seen that person; I would not have fallen into sin! And how many would still be innocent, if they had been blind, or had not incautiously indulged their curiosity?

O dear Christians, keep the windows closed, if you do not wish to be robbed of a great treasure! Guard your eyes carefully, if you really wish to persevere in the friendship of God! If an angel had foretold to our first mother in paradise what would follow if she looked at the forbidden fruit, and had said to her: Eve, go away from that tree! close your eyes at once! if you look at the fruit, it will take your fancy, you will stretch out your hand for it, put it to your mouth, and eat it; then you will induce your husband to follow your example; after which you will be driven out of paradise and condemned to death with all your posterity,—if Eve had known all this, would she have been so incautious as not to have mortified her eyes? If the Prophet Nathan had gone to David when the latter opened

Who would have restrained their curiosity, had they foreknown the evil effects of it.

¹ Post multos dies iniecit domina sua oculos suos in Joseph.—Gen. xxxix. 7.

² Quandiu oculos habuit demissos, non peccavit; cum vero levavit, scandalum passa est.

³ Non adulterasset, nisi adspexisset.

⁴ Sed ideo concupivit quia incauta respexit.

the window of his palace, and was about to look out into his garden, and had said to him in the name of God: O David, what are you about to do? It would be better for you to fall down and break your neck! You will forget your God completely, whom you have hitherto loved above all things, and who has written you in His heart; you will become a murderer and an adulterer; "therefore the sword shall never depart from thy house,"¹ your favorite child will die; one of your daughters will be dishonored by her brother; your son Absalom will drive you from your throne and persecute you until he dies on a tree in the state of sin and is lost forever; you will be made a laughing-stock to your own subjects, who will vilify and throw stones at you like a hunted dog, and all this will be as a punishment for your sin. You will try to hide your sin: "Thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing in the sight of all Israel, and in the sight of the sun."² Till the last day the world will speak of the abominations you have committed; and you yourself will henceforth water your couch with your tears, and eat ashes with your bread, through sorrow and repentance. If such a dreadful announcement were made to this pious king, as he then was, what would he have thought, my dear brethren? Would he have been so foolish as still to have gratified his curiosity? That is not likely. And yet one incautious glance, without his foreseeing any harm, or having the least bad intention, brought all that evil on him.

Therefore all, especially the young, must guard their eyes, or else they will be led into sin.

Dissolute young man! vain girl! weak mortals, of whatever age, condition, or position you may be! I am not, indeed, a prophet, much less an angel; yet, when I consider the law of God, the miseries of our corrupt nature, its wicked inclinations, and the power that an alluring object has over it, I can easily foretell what will happen to you. If you do not learn to keep your eyes always in check; if you give them full liberty to gaze at everything that offers itself to them; if you cast them freely on persons of the opposite sex; if you mix unrestrainedly in all kinds of company, then you may be assured that it will soon be all up with your purity of heart. You will be guilty of murder and incest, if not in reality, at least in inclination and desire; some of you will be tormented day and night by the spirit of impure love, which will give you no rest; some will seek opportunities, and consume the best years of their lives in impurity;

¹ Quamobrem non recedet gladius de domo tua usque in sempiternum.—II. Kings xii. 10.

² Tu fecisti abscondite; ego autem faciam verbum istud in conspectu omnis Israel, et in conspectu solis.—Ibid. xli.

some will be addicted to that vice till their old age, nay, till their death; some will perhaps indulge in it publicly, before the whole town, and then, hear what follows: "Thus saith the Lord:" "If any man violate the temple of God, him shall God destroy. For the temple of God is holy, which you are."¹

How many like you, even in Christian times, have had experience of this? I bring forward as a warning to you the example of one young man, whose fate St. Augustine bitterly bewails in his "Confessions." His name was Nebridius, and at first he was pious and inclined to virtue; but he was of a vain and pleasure-loving disposition, and was very fond of mixed company. On one occasion, when certain shows were publicly exhibited for the amusement of the people, at which Christians were forbidden to appear, on account of the danger of seeing some things against holy purity, Augustine went to him, and representing the great danger he would run by going to those shows, induced him to promise that he would keep away from them. But another companion unexpectedly came to Nebridius and made him alter his determination and go with him to see the show. He remembered what he had promised to Augustine, and to God as well; his conscience was very uneasy and he would have come victorious out of the struggle, if the devil had not interfered and suggested to him craftily a means of getting out of the difficulty; for the incautious Nebridius resolved to go, in order not to offend his friend, and to remain in the theatre, but to close his eyes all the time, so as not to see anything of what was going on. Thus, he thought, I shall satisfy God and Augustine, inasmuch as I will keep my promise; I shall consult the repose of my conscience, for I will avoid all danger; and at the same time I shall gratify my friend. The show begins, the curtain is raised, and every one is silent in expectation. The actors and actresses strut about on the stage in magnificent costumes; Nebridius is for a considerable time unmoved, and keeps his eyes closed, so that he does not see the least of what is going on. But all of a sudden a great cry is raised among the audience; well done! very good! bravo! they exclaim. This uproar excites the curiosity of Nebridius. He opened his eyes,² says St. Augustine; and what then? He cried out with the others;³ and what more? When he saw the dangerous objects that were presented to his view, he

As was the case with many.

Shown by example.

¹ Si quis autem templum Dei violaverit, disperdet illum Deus. Templum enim Dei sanctum est, quod estis vos.—1. Cor. iii. 17.

² Spectavit.

³ Clamavit.

was inflamed with the fire of impure love.¹ What followed thereon? He entered into that place full of sanctifying grace, full of the fear of God; and he came out full of the madness of impure passion, blinded and consumed by it.² "Let all," I must say, in the words of St. John Chrysostom, "take warning by this, who are fond of admiring others' beauty, and who are passionately addicted to theatre going."³ O Christians, be careful! to keep the windows of your eyes well closed! Pray to God frequently to that end with the Prophet David, after he had been warned by his own misfortune: "Turn away my eyes, that they may not behold vanity:"⁴ that I may never cast them on dangerous objects.

The same is to be said, with even greater reason, of bad books.

What I have said hitherto of the eyes, with regard to keeping them from gazing on dangerous objects, or looking with curiosity at persons of the opposite sex, is even more necessary to be observed with regard to dangerous reading. Just as there is nothing more useful for us if we wish to persevere in good, and to become more devout, than the reading of spiritual books and the Lives of the Saints (to which all good Christians should devote some time on Sundays and holy-days, and those who have nothing to do, half an hour every day), so also there is nothing more injurious, especially to holy purity, than the reading of books that treat of unchaste subjects and impure love tales. This is an accursed invention of the devil, with which he endeavors to infect hearts, as with a pestilence, while his attacks in this way are directed chiefly against the young, whom he tries to bewitch, and to lead astray; nor is he hardly ever disappointed; for if he can only induce a person to read a book of that kind through curiosity, he can make sure of his soul. Alas, he scatters those abominable books abroad in all places, at all times, by wicked agents and hellish sleuth-hounds! Are not we poor mortals already versed enough, of our own corrupt nature, in this filthy knowledge, without being under the necessity of being taught by those agents of the devil how to have no regard for holy purity?

Especially of love-tales and romances.

Still, the crafty tempter knows well that with respectable people, who have some regard for their souls, he can do little by books that are openly immoral; if he put such books in their way, he would rather disgust them than attract their attention

¹ Exarsit.

² Abstulit inde insaniam.

³ Audiant hæc curiosi, qui pulchritudines considerant alienas; audiant qui insaniant spectaculis theatralibus.

⁴ Averte oculos meos, ne videant vanitatem—Ps. cxviii. 27.

How does he act, then, in order to ensnare their souls? He places before their eyes amusing comedies, well-written romances, long-winded love-stories full of incident, which are in reality more dangerous to souls, the more cunningly they conceal the filth they contain, the more they are able to amuse, and the more eager they make the reader to know the end of the story. Meanwhile they fill the heart and mind with violent and unruly passion, and softly fan the flame of impurity, feeding it and keeping it alive. Eternal truths, which should and ought to lead us to heaven, you are often explained in sermons, and are sometimes listened to with pleasure! But, alas, how soon you are forgotten! Hardly is the sermon over, when you are no longer thought of! But those love stories generally so captivate the imagination and the memory of young people, that sometimes they are not forgotten for quite a quarter of a year.

But, they say, there is nothing wrong in those books. I read them only for the sake of the language, and the skill shown in developing the plot. A fine excuse, indeed! You must be a great admirer of fine language! There are Lives of the Saints and similar spiritual books enough published, which are written even in a better style, and are filled with still more wonderful and true incidents, which raise up the mind and heart to heaven and heavenly things, and teach us how to amend our lives; why do you not read those books with the same pleasure and eagerness? They are not mere fictions, which betray your understanding; they are true, and can instruct you not only in the beauties of style, but also in the duties of a Christian life, and in what you have to do to save your soul. Why, I ask again, do you not prefer those books to the others? Is it not because they do not gratify your sensuality? And even if those romances and love tales were better written, should you not be more anxious about the purity of your soul than about the elegance of your style? more careful to live well, than to speak well? to be learned in the school of Christ, than in that of the demon of impurity? Do you know what happened to St. Jerome? He describes it himself, and swears to the truth of it. When he was at Rome in his young days, he was so anxious to learn the art of oratory, that he would even forget his meals in order to read Plautus and Cicero. "Miserable wretch that I was," he says, "I fasted when about to read Cicero. After frequent night-watching, after the hot tears which the recollection of my former sins forced from the depths of my heart, I used to take Plautus in

No one
should on
any account
read or keep
such books.

my hands,"¹ in order to amuse myself with his rhymes. That kind of reading did not fill his mind with dangerous thoughts, nor place him in danger of sin; yet it hindered him considerably in the course of his spiritual life, and was the cause of his afterwards finding no relish in spiritual books, on account of the unpolished style in which they were written. "Whilst the old serpent was thus deceiving me,"² I was suddenly taken ill, and was rapt up before the judgment-seat of God. "Being asked about my condition, I answered that I was a Christian."³ But the Judge, looking at me, said: "thou liest! thou art not a Christian, but a Ciceronian; for where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also."⁴ Then, at the command of the Judge, poor Jerome was so severely beaten, that he could not endure the pain. O God, have mercy! he cried out; O God, have mercy! But to no purpose, until at last the by-standers begged of the Judge to consider the age of the thoughtless young man, to spare him, and give him time to amend. When he had given his solemn word never more to waste his time in reading vain books, he was released, and returned to himself. This was not a mere vision; for the Saint himself affirms on oath that his shoulders were actually marked with the stripes inflicted on him. Think of this, O Christian! St. Jerome did not read the licentious poems of a Martial or an Ovid, but Cicero, a book which is as pure in morals as in Latinity, and which does not suggest any evil thoughts or desires; besides, his only idea was to admire the beauties of the style; and yet, since his spirit was rendered cold to heavenly things by reading of that kind, God caused him to be punished severely. How, then, will it be with you and others like you at the divine tribunal, since you so often read those vain love tales, that are so ruinous to morals? What answer will you make when asked what you are? Will you dare to say, I am a Christian? "Thou liest," the Judge will answer; you are an Ovidian, a Catullian, a reader of romances, and not a Christian. Certainly, as far as my opinion goes, I do not see how any one can conscientiously read those books, or give them to others, or even keep them in his house, to the great risk of

¹ Miser ego, lecturus Tullium, jejunabam. Post noctium crebras vigillas, post lachrymas, quas mihi præteritorum recordatio peccatorum ex imis visceribus eruebat, Plautus sumebatur in manibus.—Hieron. ep. xxii. ad Euseb.

² Dum antiquus serpens ita me illuderet.

³ Interrogatus de conditione, Christianum me esse, respondi.

⁴ Mentiris, ait; Ciceronianus es, non Christianus; ubi enim thesaurus tuus, ibi et cor tuum.

having them fall into the hands of people who will be scandalized by them and led into sin.

Do you wish to act as a good Christian? Then pitch those filthy books at once into the fire, as an agreeable burnt-offering to God. Better for you to do that, than for one soul to be cast into the fire of hell. In the *Life of Stanislaus Hosius*, who was afterwards a celebrated cardinal of holy Church, it is related that, while he was a student in Cracow, he used often to visit another young man of his own age, who was for a long time lying sick in bed, and could not be cured by all the medicines that were given to him. One day Hosius saw a book under the sick man's pillow; he took it up and found that it was a romance, when, turning at once to his friend, "see," he said, "this is your fever, this is the illness you are so long suffering from."¹ You cannot recover, until you get rid of the cause of your illness. So saying, he took the book home with him, with the sick man's permission, and threw it in the fire. The next day he repeated his visit, and found the young man quite restored to health; having asked at what time he recovered, he found that it was exactly at the same hour in which the dangerous book was cast into the fire. O Christians, is one of you, perhaps, sick, through a book of that kind, of the fever of which St. Ambrose says "our fever is lust; our fever is impurity"?² Oh, in that case let him at once throw the book in the fire, if he wishes to recover the health of his soul, and ask God to forgive him for not having done so long ago, with the firm purpose of never taking such a book in his hands again.

But they should be burnt at once.

The most dangerous objects for the eyes are indecent pictures and statues

I am ashamed to speak here of those indecent pictures and statues, which may be seen here and there in private houses, and which in public gardens are exposed to the gaze of every one. O chaste souls, turn away your eyes from such things, even if they are supposed to represent the saints of God, as, alas, is sometimes the case; for in this matter, too, the devil shows his cunning in trying to deceive souls under the pretext of devotion. Woe to those painters and sculptors who are the authors of pictures and statues of that kind. For such things are far more dangerous than anything of which I have spoken hitherto. It is true that the living human form is apt to seduce even the holiest; but there is no one so shameless as to appear in public in the disgraceful style in which those works of art are exhibited. And

¹ Hæc est, inquit, ista febris, quæ te adeo graviter exercuiat.—Stanisl. Resc. in vita, l. I., c. 5.

² Febris nostra libido est; febris nostra luxuria est.—Ambr. l. IV., in c. IV. Luke.

the eyes can be fixed on them all the more boldly under the pretext of admiring the skill the artist has displayed. An impure book can be read by but one person at a time; but those impure statues and pictures can be seen by every one at the same time. There are many who cannot even read, so that they have no danger to dread from impure books, unless they hear them read by others; but all except the blind alone can see those images, and thus the scandal is widespread.

Woe to those who exhibit such things.

“Woe to the man by whom the scandal cometh!” I must cry out here, in the threatening words of Our Lord, against all those who give to others occasion of sin, by placing bad books in their way, or by allowing them to look at indecent statues or pictures, or by not observing the rules of modesty in their own dress; for all those things are so many snares to catch souls and to betray them into the clutches of the devil. Theologians teach that a woman (and the same is to be understood of a man) who knows for certain that she is the object of an impure affection commits a mortal sin if, without necessity or reasonable cause, she puts herself deliberately in the way of being seen by that man, although she has no intention or wish to excite an impure passion in him thereby, because without sufficient cause she is the occasion of awaking and inflaming his passion. Now, I say that, if the law of Christian charity binds every one, in order to avoid giving others an occasion of sin, not to appear before a person in whom a sinful desire might be awakened, even when clad with a due regard to modesty, how, then, will they be able to answer to God for their actions, who deliberately place in the way of others objects that are of their nature apt to incite them to sinful thoughts and desires? Woe to that man! All the sins others commit through his instrumentality will be recorded against him, although he may not have had the deliberate wish or intention to lead others into sin.

Woe to parents who do not look after their children in this respect.

If time permitted, I might here give vent to a bitter complaint against those careless parents, who allow their innocent little children to see things that would be unlawful amongst unmarried people. Let no one tell me that the children are too young, and that they do not understand. Granted that they do not understand it now, are not the impressions of such things imprinted on their imaginations and memories, so that they will never be eradicated? If you have not another room in your house for your children, it were better to let them go and stay in the pig-sty, than see what could be an occasion of scandal to them

and ruin their precious souls. And I might complain, too, of those parents who allow their grown-up daughters too much liberty, and permit them to spend their time at the window or door, in order to see and be seen. There are parents who toil and moil from morning till night, while their daughters know how to do nothing but deck themselves out in the latest fashions, and let themselves be seen, in the way I have described.

Parents, watch over your children more carefully! Fish are never safe, unless when they are in the water; if they leave their own element, they must die in a short time. Never are your daughters safer than at home, under your own eyes, and occupied with some work befitting their condition. The goods exposed in the shop windows are either damaged, or are in a fair way to become so. No matter how pious, devout, and innocent your daughters may be, if they are fond of seeing and being seen, although they may not do anything wrong outwardly, yet they will have wickedness enough in their hearts. Hear what St. Cyprian says: "When young maidens begin to go about too freely, they soon lose their virtue, as their hearts become sullied with sinful thoughts and desires."¹

Children who are fond of seeing and being seen are not free from sin.

Shown by an example.

Well known is the incident that occurred to St. Antoninus, archbishop of Florence, as described at length in the history of his life by Surius. The holy man once happened to pass by a poor and small house, when he saw at the window a choir of angels holding a joyful feast. Ah, dear angels, said he, what are you doing here? This must certainly be a paradise on earth, since it gives you such pleasure to dwell here! And, anxious to know who was living in the house, he entered it, and saw in a room a poor widow with three grown-up daughters, who, although poor, were decently clad, and the mother and children were occupied with some domestic, manual work. Antoninus, having greeted the mother (for none of the daughters dared to raise her eyes from her work to look at him), asked her how she managed to live. The mother answered humbly: "I live as you see; every morning we hear Mass, and then spend the whole day in this room, working; sometimes we say the rosary together; otherwise we are content in the midst of our poverty, and have full confidence in our heavenly Father, who has not allowed us to suffer hunger up to the present." The holy man, edified by their innocent lives, gave them some spiritual consolation, and encouraged them to persevere; but when he got to his own home, he

¹ Dum publice evagari virgines volunt, esse virgines desiderunt, furtivo dedecore vitiatæ.

sent the mother a purse of money, telling her at the same time that she should not lose heart, for as long as he was alive she and her daughters would not want. Some months afterwards he came back to visit what he thought that paradise on earth, which was quite concealed from the eyes of the world; but, alas, what a sad change he found! In the windows of the house, instead of angels, he saw a troop of hideous demons, giving signs of the greatest exultation. What is all this about? he asked in astonishment. The good people must have moved from here. But, as he soon discovered, it was not the house, but the morals of the inhabitants that had changed. For the three daughters, having some money in hand, and relying on the comforting assurance that the bishop had given them, gradually fell away from their industrious habits, until at last they abandoned them altogether, and spent their time in dressing and standing at the door; thus many people became acquainted with them, and in a few weeks they were changed from pure doves into hideous owls of night. O curiosity and idleness! so quickly can you turn a paradise, which by its retirement and modesty was a dwelling fit for the angels, into a hell and a habitation for demons.

Concusion
and resolution
to
guard the
eyes.

Ah, parents, whom God has so solemnly entrusted with the souls of your children, the wise Ecclesiasticus warns you: "On a daughter that turneth not away herself, set a strict watch; lest, finding an opportunity, she abuse herself."¹ Father, look after your son! Mother, watch over your daughter, and keep her at work at home constantly; "take heed of the impudence of her eyes, and wonder not if she slight thee."² If you let her have too much of her own way, you must not be surprised to find her dead to all shame in the end; but know that the Lord will require her soul at your hands. Christians, of whatever condition, sex, or age you may be, guard your eyes from all curious and vain glances, if you wish to persevere in the grace and service of God. Alas, in what fragile vases we carry about the precious treasure of sanctifying grace! Our own carnal desires are always dragging us towards sin of their own accord, and we often complain of our weakness and evil inclinations; why, then, should we open the doors and windows to further temptations?

¹ In filia non avertente se, firma custodiam, ne inventa occasione, utatur se.—Eccles. xxvi. 13.

² Ab omni irreverentia oculorum ejus cave, et ne mireris si te neglexerit. —Ibid. 14.

So it is, O my God! I acknowledge that I have often been surprised at my own inconstancy in Thy service; but now I know the reason of it. My heart has hitherto been like an open house, to which all kinds of objects have had free admission. Thou hast often warned me to pluck out my eye, and cast it from me, if it is an occasion of sin to me, for it is better that I should go to heaven with one eye, than to go to hell with two. Ah! I now confess that it would often have been better for my soul if I had been blind altogether; for then many sins of thought and action would not have been committed. "Would that my eyes had never seen anything," I must sigh with St. Bernard, "if they are to be the occasion of my being deprived of the sight of God, which may He avert!"¹ Henceforth I will guard my eyes more carefully; I will make a covenant with them, like Thy faithful servant Job, so that not even a thought of anything evil may be suggested to me; I will cast them humbly down to earth, and think that, though they have one day to decay in the earth, and though I must now mortify them, yet they will see my Saviour in the glory of His resurrection. Then, full of confidence and consolation, I will raise them up to heaven, and will think, there is my true country, in which I shall see my God forever. Therefore, eyes, spare me now! have a little patience and restrain yourselves for a short time; the beauty of creatures is not worth your consideration! In a little while I will give you pleasure enough in heaven, where you may gaze forever on the infinite God, on Jesus Christ, the most beautiful of the children of men, on Mary, the beautiful Spouse of the Holy Ghost, and on all the elect of God! Reserve your curiosity till then! Amen.

*FIFTY-SIXTH SERMON.***ON PRAYER FOR PERSEVERANCE IN GOOD.**

Subject.

Fervent prayer to God is an absolutely necessary means for all men to persevere in good and to save their souls.—*Preached on the fifth Sunday after Easter.*

¹ Utinam nihil unquam vidisset oculus meus, si illa, quod avertat Deus! frustrandus est visio.

Text.

Petite, et accipietis.—John xvi. 24.

“ Ask, and you shall receive.”

Introduction.

There we have the surest, most powerful, and at the same time the most necessary means of obtaining from the almighty God all that is good for our souls and bodies. I have already spoken to you, my dear brethren, of different means that we must make use of in order to persevere in good; one of them is to guard the heart from bad thoughts and desires; another is to guard the eyes from dangerous curiosity. But all this will be of little use, if we omit praying to God, or pray but seldom; as I shall now show.

Plan of Discourse.

Fervent prayer to God is an absolutely necessary means for all men, in order that they may persevere in good and save their souls; therefore, he who wishes to be saved must pray. Such is the whole subject.

Most faithful God! Thy promises cannot deceive us; Thou hast said: “ Ask and you shall receive.” One petition we have to lay before Thee to-day by the hands of Mary, the Mother of Thy Son, and our holy guardian angels; move and impel us for the future to pray to Thee constantly; for then we shall be sure of receiving all the other graces we stand in need of, according to Thy promise, “ Ask and you shall receive.”

Our need
compels us
to pray fer-
vently to
God, be-
cause of
ourselves
we are frail
mortals.

That is for me an absolutely necessary means to which I am obliged to have recourse by my own wants, and without which I cannot free myself from misery. Thus, for the poor man, who is hungry, and has no bread or anything else to eat, the only means left to avoid dying of hunger is to beg food and drink from charitable people, since he cannot procure it in any other way. A similar means, absolutely necessary for all men in order to persevere in the state of grace and to save their souls, is frequent prayer to God; we are driven to it by our own great necessity; nor will God, according to the present disposition of His Providence, help us without prayer. Our necessity compels us; for who will doubt of that, who considers what we are, where we are, and what are the circumstances in which we are placed in this world? We are mortals, who, as St. Paul says, are not able of our own natural powers to form even a good thought:

“Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God.”¹ We are mortals, who, without the supernatural help and grace of God, are not only incapable of attaining eternal salvation, but cannot even make the least move towards it, or desire heaven, or tend towards it by a meritorious thought. We are poor, frail mortals, who are not only unable to do any good of ourselves, but are, moreover, inclined to evil of our own corrupt nature, and are blown hither and thither like reeds, by our inordinate appetites and desires, by pride, avarice, anger, impatience, hatred, envy, lust, forbidden love of creatures, as by so many violent winds; nay, according to the repeated assertions of the apostles, we are held captive in and by the law of sin, like bond-slaves; so that, if a man were abandoned to his own natural strength, although he is free to sin or not, yet without the supernatural assistance of God he could not, humanly speaking, long refrain from sin.

Thus miserable and frail as we are, where do we live? In the midst of a perverse world, whose vain usages and false maxims run directly counter to the divine law and the eternal truths; and yet those usages and maxims are adored as gods by most men. In the world, which is the arena wherein we have to contend by day and night with countless enemies, who far surpass us in strength and power; in the midst of a thousand temptations and dangers; dangers from the demons who surround us on all sides, and are unceasingly occupied in trying to bring about our eternal ruin; dangers from men, who lead each other into sin by bad example, by promises, threats, allurements, and flattery; dangers in prosperity, which generally turns away the human heart from God and heavenly things, and fixes it on earthly goods; dangers in adversity and in the many trials of life, which drive many a one to despair; dangers when we are alone at home; dangers when we are in company abroad. Ah, no matter where we turn, we find snares set to entrap us to eternal ruin. Well might each one of us sigh with the Prophet David: “My enemies have trodden on me all the day long; for they are many that make war against me.”² O my God, how can I, a weak mortal, save my soul from so many attacks? What can I say, but, like Josaphat, when he was surrounded by the enemy on all sides: “As for us, we have not strength enough

Always exposed to the danger of sin.

¹ Non quod sufficientes simus cogitare aliquid a nobis, quasi ex nobis: sed sufficientia nostra ex Deo est.—II. Cor. iii. 5.

² Conculcaverunt me inimici mei tota die: quoniam multi bellantes adversum me.—Ps. iv. 3.

to be able to resist this multitude, which cometh violently upon us. But as we know not what to do, we can only turn our eyes to thee,"¹ and humbly implore thy assistance.

God permits these dangers, that we may always seek help from Him in prayer.

And truly, my dear brethren, that is just what God requires of us men. He who wishes to be certain of a yearly income invests his capital in mortgage on immovable property. God wishes to have from His rational creatures a daily income, namely, prayer, as a sign of their service; now, what does He do in order to make sure of this? He makes sure of it by the daily miseries and wants we suffer from, and in which He alone can help us, as if He wished to say, I will give over man to continual weakness of body and soul, to darkness of the understanding, to inconstancy of the will, to continual combats and temptations, and to the manifest danger of being lost forever, so that he may know that he is in need of My help, and may humbly implore it of Me daily. St. Basil asks why God wishes us to pray to Him. For two reasons beggars are forced to ask alms from the rich and wealthy: first, to declare their poverty, of which the others could not know anything otherwise; secondly, to excite pity and commiseration by humbly representing their wants. Must we pray to God for the same reasons? No, for that all-knowing Lord is better acquainted with our wants than we are ourselves, as Christ assures us in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "Your Father knoweth what is needful for you before you ask Him."² He does not require you to explain and make known to Him your miseries, for He knows them already; and, besides, He has greater pity for our wretchedness than a mother has for her only child who is sick. "I say not to you," says our dear Saviour to us by way of consolation, "that I will ask the Father for you; for the Father Himself loveth you,"³ and cares for you. Why, then, is it necessary for us to implore the help and assistance of God, if He knows already what we want, and His Fatherly love inclines Him to help us? It is true, says St. Jerome, to the heretic Vigilantius, who for those reasons maintained that prayer was unnecessary, it is true that God knows already what help and grace we are in need of from Him; and He can give us His grace without our co-operation, if He wishes

¹ In nobis quidem non est tanta fortitudo ut possimus huic multitudini resistere. quæ irruit super nos. Sed cum ignoremus quid agere debeamus, hoc solum habemus residui, ut oculos nostros dirigamus ad te.—II. Paralip. xx. 12.

² Scit enim Pater vester, quid opus sit vobis. antequam petatis eum.—Matt. vi. 8.

³ Non dico vobis, quia ego rogabo Patrem de vobis; ipse enim Pater amat vos.—John xvi 26, 27.

to do so; but in the present disposition of His Providence, as a general rule, He will not give us any grace, the first alone excepted, unless we humbly ask it of Him.

If He pleased, God could have caused the fruits of the earth to come forth of themselves; but He does not do so, for He requires us to work, and till the fields, and sow the seed. In the same way, as far as lies with Himself, He wishes all men to be eternally happy in heaven, and to that end He is ready to give us all the assistance of His grace in liberal measure, but on the condition that we ask it of Him; so that we may always humbly acknowledge that He is the sole Lord and Giver of all grace, on whom depends our temporal and spiritual welfare. He acts with us in this way as the Lacedæmonians did with their children; in order to make them expert archers, they never gave them a piece of bread in their hands, but set it up on high and made them shoot at it until they hit it, and then they were allowed to eat it; see, my son, they would say, there is the bread, if you wish to have it, you must shoot at it until you knock it down. See, says God, our heavenly Father, to His adopted children, there is My grace and help ready for you in superabundant measure at all times; if you wish to have it, you must shoot at it; raise your heart to Me, call out to Me, and entreat Me, and as many graces will fall down on you as you hit and ask from Me in prayer. If you are unwilling to comply with that condition, and do not even ask Me for My grace, you must suffer hunger, and ascribe the eternal loss of your soul to your own negligence.

I have told you often enough, and I tell you again, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you."¹ That is to say, he who asks nothing receives nothing; he who seeks nothing finds nothing; and if you do not knock, the door of grace will be closed against you. Therefore the Lord repeats again and again in His exhortation to turn to Him. "Cry to Me,"² He says, by the Prophet Jeremias. "Let nothing hinder thee from praying always,"³ is His warning by the Wise Ecclesiasticus. "Watch ye and pray,"⁴ are His words in the Gospel of St. Matthew; and in that of St. Luke, "We ought always to pray, and not to faint."⁵

He is ready to help us, but He must be asked.

And without prayer He will not give us His grace.

¹ Petite et dabitur vobis; querite, et inveniatis; pulsate, et aperietur vobis.—Matt. vii. 7.

² Clama ad Me.—Jerem. xxviii. 3.

³ Non impediaris orare semper.—Eccles. xviii. 22.

⁴ Vigilate et orate.—Matt. xxvi. 41.

⁵ Oportet semper orare, et non deficere.—Luke xviii. 1.

“Pray without ceasing,”¹ is His advice by the Apostle St. Paul; and by St. Peter, “Watch in prayers.”² The holy Fathers, explaining the necessity of prayer, compare it to a canal, by which all gifts and graces from heaven must flow down on the human soul; to a chain, by which we draw ourselves up to God, in order to bring down His favor on ourselves; to a key, by which we open heaven, and secure the right of entry therein; to a bulwark, behind which we take refuge from all the attacks and assaults of our enemies. St. Basil says that prayer is like food, because we cannot live long without it. St. John Chrysostom compares it to air, and says that it is as necessary to us as the air we breathe, nay, as the soul is to the body. Take away from the body its food, its breath, its soul, and what would become of it? So will it be with you, if you deprive your soul of prayer. And they all, in general, maintain, that not to pray, and still to try to persevere in good; not to pray, and still to desire heaven; not to pray, and still to hope to remain free from sin, is to tempt God and to desire a miracle from Him; it is like trying to see without light, to speak without a tongue, to hear without ears, to walk without feet. “We hold it as certain,” says St. Augustine, “that no one can work out his salvation without the help of God, and no one receives that help, unless he prays.”³ Nay, St. John Chrysostom looks on it as a sheer impossibility. “It must be evident to all,” he says, “that it is absolutely impossible to live virtuously without prayer.”⁴ “Therefore,” concludes St. Bernard, “I implore you, brethren, always to have prayer at hand as your most assured refuge.”⁵

Neglect of
prayer oc-
casions sin
and vice.

If you notice in a religious or lay community or household that its members lead a disorderly, un-Christian and wicked life, you may conclude without any rash judgment that in that convent, or community, or family there is no spirit of prayer. But why do I speak of a community? If you see any individual who is given to vanity, drunkenness, injustice, impurity, or other vices, you may safely say, that man does not pray, or he does not pray enough. This is not my doctrine, my dear brethren; it is taken from a far more enlightened source, namely, from St.

¹ *Sine intermissione orate.*—I. Thess. v. 17.

² *Vigilate in orationibus.*—I. Pet. iv. 7.

³ *Nullum credimus salutem suam, nisi auxiliante Deo, operari; nullum, nisi orantem, auxilium promereri.*

⁴ *Arbitror cunctis esse manifestum, quod simpliciter impossibile sit absque precationis præsidio cum virtute degere.*—S. Chrysost. l. i. de orand.

⁵ *Propterea rogo vos, fratres, ut semper ad manum habeatis tutissimum orationis refugium.*

Cyprian. When that saint saw that the Christians in Africa were wandering away daily more and more from the paths of virtue, and were becoming more and more wicked, so that some of them actually denied the faith, he wrote to them: "Know that we are sleeping at our prayers, and do not pray watchfully."¹ St. John Chrysostom, speaking of the Prophet Moses praying during the battle with the Amalekites, says: "What just man has ever fought without praying? Who has ever overcome his enemy without prayer? Moses prays, and he conquers; he ceases to pray, and is conquered. From this let the Christian learn the source of his victory or defeat in the spiritual combat; although the Christian should pray more fervently" than Moses, "both because his enemy is more dangerous, and because he is fighting for himself and not for another."² What wonder, then, is it that a man who is not given to prayer is often overcome by his enemy and is led into grievous sin?

Not only is prayer necessary to us as a means of salvation, but it is often the only means which God has ordained for many; the only means for the sinner to bring him to the knowledge of his unhappy state and to true repentance and conversion; and if he does not use that means, and humbly beg of God the grace of true contrition, no other grace will ever be given him by God. It is the only means for that man who is in the midst of temptation, to enable him to resist and to conquer; and if he does not use it and cry to God for help, he will certainly consent and fall into sin. It is the only means for that oppressed individual, in order to enable him to bear his crosses and trials with patience and merit for his soul; and if he does not use it and earnestly beg of God the grace of patience, he will not be comforted by God, and will even despair. It is the only means for that just man to persevere in the state of grace; and if he does not use it, and often cry to God for help, he will be perverted and fall into sin. "The flesh being consumed, my bone hath cleaved to my skin," says Job on the dunghill; my whole body is a mass of corruption; "and nothing but lips are left about my teeth;"³ as if he wished to say, in the person of a certain sinner, through the many sins I have committed and the

Prayer is the only means by which many can lead pious lives.

¹ Sciatis quod dormitemus in precibus. nec vigilanter oremus.

² Quis iustorum non orando pugnavit? Quis hostem non orando devicit? Orat Moyses, et vincit; cessat orare, et vincitur. Didicit Christianus, unde aut vincatur, aut vincat; quamvis instantius Christiano orandum sit, et quia periculosior hostis est, et quia pro seipso, non pro altero pugnat.—S. Chrysost., serm. de Moyse.

³ Pelli meae, consumptis carnibus, adhæsit os meum, et derelicta sunt tantummodo labia circa dentes meos.—Job xix. 20.

inveterate habits of vice in which I have lived everything is in a lost and despairing condition with me; all I have left are my lips and tongue, with which I can still pray to God and implore His grace and mercy; and if I only earnestly ask for it, I shall receive it; if I do not ask for it, there is no hope of salvation for me, and I am lost forever.

It is for all a necessary means of procuring a happy death.

All the holy Fathers agree with St. Augustine in saying that prayer is absolutely necessary for all men, in order to obtain the grace of perseverance and a happy death; that grace, which, as I have said on another occasion, no man can merit by any good works, and without which all our troubles and labors go for nothing, and no man can be saved. This grace is a pure gift, as St. Augustine says, and therefore it cannot be merited; if I die in the grace of God, heaven is the reward I have merited by my good works; but if I die in the state of grace, that is a pure gift of the divine generosity, and not a reward, so that I cannot fix my hopes of salvation on any good works, as if by them I could merit that gift, but I must earnestly beg of God to bestow it on me. "It is certain," says St. Augustine, "that God has prepared some graces, such as the first grace of faith, for those who do not ask for them; and that other graces He will give only to those who pray for them, such as the grace of final perseverance."¹ "Constant prayer is necessary for a man," says St. Thomas of Aquin, "if he wishes to save his soul."² The conclusion is evident; prayer to God is an absolutely necessary means for us men to persevere in good and to attain our eternal salvation.

Hence, in the first place, no one can complain of a want of grace to love his enemy.

From all this I derive the following truths: first, that no man, no matter who he is, has just reason for complaining of a want of divine grace if he transgresses the law of God, sins grievously, dies impenitent, and is lost forever, even if God does not give him a single grace to help him to keep the commandments, to avoid sin, to do sincere penance, and to escape damnation. How so? Because the very permission that he has received to beg help and grace of God, and at the same time the infallible promise of the almighty and faithful God, "Ask and you shall receive," would force him to close his mouth, and would clearly convince him that he could have had graces and helps in abundance, if he had but asked for them; and hence, that his sins, his final im-

¹ Deum constat, alia non orantibus, ut initium fidei, alia non nisi orantibus præparasse, et usque in finem perseverantiam.—S. Aug. in Exord. L. de bono perseverant.

² Necessaria est homini jugis oratio, ad hoc quod cælum introeat.

penitence, and his everlasting damnation are all to be attributed to his own negligence, his own fault. For instance, a man says, I cannot keep the commandments. Why not? I ask; show me one that you cannot keep. Christ commands me to love my enemy from my heart, to forgive him all he has ever done against me, to forget the injuries he has inflicted on me, and even to do good to him. Now, I cannot do that; it is impossible: no matter what efforts I make, I cannot drive away the recollection of the injuries that man has inflicted on me; the very sight of him makes the blood rush to my face; I cannot force myself to greet him in a friendly manner, and as to loving and doing him good, it is utterly impossible. What a terrible thing to say! Hear what St. Augustine says, or rather the Council of Trent, which quotes his words: you are mistaken, my good friend; "God does not command us to do impossible things; but when He lays His commands on us, He exhorts us to fulfil them, as far as we can, and to ask from Him help to do what is beyond our power; and then He helps us to do it."¹ There you have the proof of your mistake, or rather of your obstinacy. You do not feel any salutary inclination to forgive injuries and to love your enemy; this grace of God is wanting in you, I grant you that; without this grace you cannot possibly overcome yourself and love your enemy, that, too, I must acknowledge; but you have another grace, which is never wanting to you. And what is that? The permission to pray, which God has placed in your hands as an instrument by which you may obtain the other grace of loving your enemy, nay, every grace that is necessary and advantageous for your salvation; and you may be infallibly certain that you will receive them, for God has bound Himself and given His word to deny nothing to prayer. Therefore, if you cannot pardon and love your enemy, you can, at all events, pray. Go down on your knees, then, before a crucifix, and say: O almighty God, see this hard heart of mine! Thou commandest me to love this man, who has injured me; I would willingly do it and obey Thee, but I cannot restrain my wicked inclination. Thou hast said to me, "Ask and you shall receive," and now I beg of Thee, by that love with which Thou didst pray on the cross to Thy heavenly Father for Thy murderers and tormentors, give me Thy powerful grace and soften my heart, so that I may forget the injury done me, and love this man according to Thy law.

¹ Deus impossibilia non jubet; sed jubendo monet et facere quod possis, et petere quod non possis, et adjuvat ut possis.—Trid., Sess. vi. c. 11.

Repeat this or a similar prayer frequently and fervently, and you will get that grace as infallibly, as it is certain that God's promises cannot deceive. If you refuse to do that, then there is no help for you; but your misfortune you must attribute to yourself alone.

And to
serve God
properly,
according to
his state.

Another complains and says, ah, would that I were in a different state of life, in which I might serve God and save my soul in peace and quiet. Why do you wish that? Because I am in the midst of the turmoil of the world, in which there are every day so many dangers to be avoided, so many snares to be detected, so many temptations and allurements to be overcome. I cannot save myself from a fall; sometimes I sin here, sometimes there, so that I must despair of salvation. Nonsense! God does not command you to do impossible things; if He has called you to that state, He has not imposed any impossible task on you, no matter how dangerous it is. If it seems impossible to you to avoid sin, pray at least (for that you can always do) that it may become possible for you, and the Lord God, in virtue of His promise, will make it possible. Pray in the morning, in the evening, and in thought during the day, with king David when he was overwhelmed with the affairs of his kingdom, "O God, come to my assistance; O Lord, make haste to help me. Let them be confounded and ashamed that seek my soul. But I am needy and poor; O God, help me."¹ Direct my steps and teach me the way of Thy commandments; do not allow me to become puffed up by prosperity, or cast down by adversity; keep me in Thy grace, and grant that amongst the many dangers which surround me I may never forget the duties of my state, but constantly fulfil Thy holy will in all things; come to my assistance in the temptations and dangers that are inseparable from my position, that I may not consent to sin, and lose Thee, my sovereign good, etc. If you refuse to do that, there is no help for you.

And be pa-
tient in
trials.

I cannot be patient, complains a third. Why not? Because too many crosses and trials come upon me, one after the other, every day of my life. It is too much, altogether; it is intolerable; I cannot even form a good thought, anxious though I may be to do so, and much less can I resign myself to the will of God with patience; I have no consolation, either from heaven, or on

¹ Deus, in adiutorium meum intende; Domine, ad adjuvandum me festina. Confundantur et revereantur qui quaerunt animam meam. Ego vero egenus et pauper sum; Deus, adjuva me.—Ps. lxxix. 2, 3, 6.

earth, either from God or man; I am actually driven to despair. No, do not say that! God does not command us to do impossible things; when He told you that you must bear patiently and contentedly the crosses and trials He sends you, he did not lay on you a command impossible of fulfilment. Of course, you can be patient if you wish; and if you cannot, you can pray for that grace, at all events. Therefore, if that despairing feeling comes on you, sigh and cry out to God, although you may not have any relish in such prayers, O dearest Saviour, who didst have mercy on those poor people who were hungry and had nothing to eat, grant me patience, that I may bear for Thy sake the heavy cross Thy Fatherly hands have laid on my shoulders, and enable me to resign my obstinate will to Thine. I ask this of Thee, O Lord, by the merits of that prayer Thou didst send forth to Thy heavenly Father when in Thy agony in the Garden. "My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." ¹ Patience, O Lord! etc. If you do not cease praying, I assure you, in the name of God, who has promised to deny nothing to fervent prayer, that you will experience spiritual comfort and consolation in your crosses, no matter how heavy they may be. If you refuse to do that, you may despair if you will; I cannot help you; but do not blame the almighty God for your despair.

I cannot keep from certain sins, says a fourth. Why not? The bad habit of this or that vice has now grown inveterate with me; I cannot withstand the temptations and assaults that are made on me day and night; they are so violent and impetuous, that I cannot resist them, and must succumb. What do you mean by that? Does not St. Paul say expressly, that "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able, but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it"? ² And you, too, can withstand your wicked desires, or any other temptations, no matter how violent they are. If you have not the grace to do so, then, at all events, you can pray for it. The holy Abbot Sabas, as *Metaphrastes* writes in his *Life*, had retired into a cave, in order to serve God better. Once during the night, as he was asleep, a lion came in, took the holy man by the clothes and began violent-

And overcome temptations.

¹ Pater mi, si possibile est, transeat a me calix iste: verumtamen, non sicut ego volo, sed sicut tu.—Matt. xxvi. 39.

² Fidells autem Deus est, qui non patietur vos tentari supra id quod potestis; sed faciet etiam cum tentatione proventum ut possitis sustinere.—I. Cor. x. 13.

ly to drag him out. When Sabas awoke, he at once betook himself to prayer, and the lion stood still without doing him further harm. But when the prayer was finished, the savage beast renewed his former violence. The Saint took refuge again in prayer, and the lion again became quiet. And at the next interruption of the prayer, the lion renewed his attacks. Thus it went on for some time, until at last the holy man, full of confidence in God, and with a holy indignation, turned to the lion and said: I will not go out; but you must go at once. Whereupon the lion left him. Do you know what St. Peter says? "Be sober and watch, because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour."¹ This hellish lion rushes at you when you are tempted to sin; but, in order to be able to devour you, he tries to drag you first out of the cave of decency, mildness, meekness, justice, chastity, and perhaps you feel that you are inwardly inclined to anger and impatience, to cursing and swearing, to avarice and injustice, to impurity and unchaste love, and that you are, as it were, violently impelled in the direction of those passions. If you wish the fierce lion to be quiet, or lose his strength, and to frustrate his efforts, you have no other means but to fly to God for refuge by prayer. "Watch ye and pray that ye enter not into temptation,"² is the exhortation given by Our Lord to all of us. St. Ambrose assures you that the devil with his temptations is put to flight by prayer; "where there is prayer," he says, "the Word is present, cupidity is banished, lust disappears."³ And St. Isidor maintains that the proper means by which to extinguish the fire of the passions is to pray whenever it is enkindled in the heart: "This is the means for him to adopt who is on fire with the assaults of vice; for, as often as he feels the attacks of passion, if he pours out prayer, he will find that it will extinguish the fire of temptation."⁴ Pray, then, you, too, when you are tempted. But if you refuse to do that, and do not appeal to God to help you, then you must not be surprised at your weakness and frailty, but you ought not to complain that you cannot overcome temptation. "No one can be excused," say St. John Chrysostom,

¹ Sobrii estote, et vigilate; quia adversarius vester, diabolus, tanquam leo rugiens circuit querens quem devoret.—I. Pet. v. 8.

² Vigilate et orate, ut non intretis in tentationem.—Matt. xxvi. 41.

³ Ubi est oratio, adest Verbum, fugatur cupiditas, libido discedit.—S. Ambr. de Viduis.

⁴ Hoc est medium ejus, qui vitiorum tentamentis aestuat, ut quoties vitio quolibet tangitur, toties orationem fundat; quia frequens oratio impugnationem vitiorum extinguit.—S. Isidor., de Summo Bono, l. iii., c. 8.

“ who by ceasing to pray shows that he does not wish to conquer the enemy.”¹

Hear what Father Paul Segneri writes of a young man named Pacco. This young man retired into the desert, in order to do penance for his sins. After having spent many years there in the practice of the greatest austerities, he was assailed by such violent temptations to impurity that he could not overcome them, and often gave way to them, until at last he was driven to despair, and made up his mind to put an end to himself. It is better, he thought, to die at once, and go to hell, than to live longer and commit more sin, thus adding to my eternal torments. Filled with this idea, he ran to a cave in which he knew that there were two fierce, wild animals, that they might kill him. As he entered, the beasts sprang at him; but they had hardly touched him, when they crouched down at his feet, meek as dogs. The hermit, encouraged by this miracle, returned home, full of comfort. But the temptations came back to him; and again falling into despair, he caught up with both hands a poisonous adder that was crawling about on the sand; he scratched the reptile and tried to provoke it in every possible way to bite him, but all in vain; the adder would not touch him. O my God, he cried out at last, Thou allowest so many men to die, who fear nothing more than death, while I, poor wretch, would willingly die, and Thou wilt not permit me. And then he heard a voice calling to him: poor mortal! how can you imagine that you will be able by your own strength to overcome temptations? “ Pray to God; ask God to help you!”² Place your confidence in Him, and the temptations will not harm you. And after he had prayed fervently he experienced immediate relief, so that ever after he would not have feared all the demons of hell. Now we might ask, could not the good God have come sooner to the assistance of that poor hermit, who was so good and well-meaning at first? Certainly, there is no doubt of that; and yet He did not do so; He preferred to work all those miracles, rather than to help by His grace one who had not asked for it, thus showing that without prayer we cannot hope for anything from Him, while by prayer we can obtain everything. Therefore no one can have just reason for com-

Advantage and necessity of prayer in all those cases shown by an example.

¹ Nec quisquam poterit excusari, qui hostem vincere noluit, dum ab orando cessavit.—S. Joan. Chrysost. de Moyse.

² Deum roga; Deum precare!

plaining that he had not the grace, that he has fallen into sin, and that he is lost forever.

Even here-
tics can
obtain the
light of
faith by
prayer.

In the fifth place, heretics, who are not in the true Catholic faith, in which alone salvation can be found, and especially those who now and then have a reasonable doubt as to the religion they profess, or who at least could have such a doubt, may allege by way of excuse that God did not give them the gift and light of the true faith. I grant that they have not received that gift; but they could have asked God for it, and if they had done so they would certainly have received it. If I knew that there were any such here, I would cry out to them: precious, dear souls, you, too, are bought by the Blood of Jesus Christ, you are created for heaven, as well as I and all men; and I would willingly do all in my power to bring you to heaven; but you must know (and indeed you believe it) that no one can be saved outside the true faith. “But he that believeth not, shall be condemned.”¹ Reason teaches you, too, that there can be but one true faith; for the God of truth cannot say yes and no to the same article of belief. For instance, it cannot be true at the same time, that, as we Catholics believe, Jesus Christ has instituted seven sacraments, and, according to your teaching in different countries, that He has instituted only two, or three, or four, or five; otherwise God would be guilty of deceiving either you or us, and that is impossible; therefore, either your religion or ours must necessarily be false. But I do not wish to dispute with you now as to the truth of our respective religions. One request only I make of you, and your religion will not cause you to object to it: pray and call out to God: my Lord and my God, Thou hast created me for eternal happiness; my only wish and desire is to come to Thee in heaven, otherwise it were better for me that I never were born! Now I beg of Thee, by the precious Blood that Jesus Christ Thy Son, our Saviour, shed for me, lead me on the way in which Thou knowest I shall save my soul; if I am on the right way already, then keep me on it; but if I am wrong, if my religion is not the true one, then I implore of Thee to bring me to the true religion, in which I can save my soul! You can pray in that manner without doing the least wrong to your religion, especially if a doubt occurs to you now and then; and that prayer is a reasonable one, as you must acknowledge. I beg of you, for the sake of your soul’s salvation, repeat it daily with humility and fervor, and you will certainly receive what

¹ Qui vero non crediderit, condemnabitur.—Mark xvi. 16.

you ask for. I have no doubts about my religion, you say. Very well; but even in that case that prayer cannot harm you; for, if you are on the right way, it will help to keep you there; and if not, it will help to set you right. Ask, then, and you shall receive.

Another truth which follows from the foregoing is this: the state of the man who gives up prayer, or who calls on God for help only seldom or in a sleepy fashion, is a most miserable and desperate one. Why? Because to give up prayer means to neglect the most necessary means of salvation, which cannot be replaced by any other. All other means, good and meritorious works, and even the holy sacraments themselves, necessary and useful as they always are to our souls, can be supplied in some other way, when there is no opportunity of having recourse to them. If I cannot fast on account of ill health, I can make up for it by alms-giving or other good works; if I have no opportunity of confessing my sins, I can obtain forgiveness for them by an act of perfect contrition; even if I have not an opportunity of receiving baptism, I can make up for it by my desire and by a perfect love of God. But nothing can take the place of prayer; if I refuse to pray, I have nothing on which to ground, with any degree of certainty, my hopes of salvation; for without prayer, in the present disposition of God's Providence, as we have seen already, God does not, as a general rule, bestow His graces; without prayer I shall not receive the grace of repenting of and detesting my sins, nor the grace of loving God above all things, nor the grace of final perseverance and a happy death, without which I cannot hope to save my soul. A sinner, no matter how wicked he is, as long as he prays for the grace of conversion and amendment, has not yet lost all hope; but if he goes so far as to lose the spirit of prayer, or not to have an earnest desire that his prayers should be heard, then one might say of him with truth, that man is blinded, hardened, and obstinate in sin. Therefore the penitent David praises and blesses God with a grateful heart: "Blessed be God, who hath not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me,"¹ and who, after all the sins I have committed, has left me still the love of prayer!

Therefore, Christians, whatever we do, let us pray! Whatever good works we neglect, let us not give up prayer. A certain doctor, who was very successful in the treatment of his patients,

It follows, too, that he is in a desperate state who does not pray.

Exhortation to constant and fervent prayer.

¹ Benedictus Deus, qui non amovit orationem meam, et misericordiam suam a me.— Ps. lxx. 20.

before feeling the pulse of a sick person, used to remain silent for a while, and seem to be lost in thought; he would then feel the pulse, and again resume his cogitations. As he was in the habit of acting in that way even in cases that were not serious, a good friend of his asked him one day what was the meaning of it. He answered that, before feeling the pulse of his patient, he was in the habit of praying to God that he might diagnose the case correctly, and afterwards he prayed that he might use the proper remedies; for the science of medicine is a difficult one, and nothing is easier than to make a mistake in examining a sick person, so that he knew of nothing better than to recommend himself to God in his professional difficulties. Oh, if all had recourse to the same means in the far more dangerous illnesses and maladies of the soul, how easy the business of their salvation would become! "Ask and you shall receive." Sinners, who are still suffering from spiritual maladies, ah! pray, and pray daily, Lord, give me grace to know the dangerous illness from which I am suffering, and to use the right means of freeing myself from it, that I may at last be converted to Thee with my whole heart! Proud, avaricious, envious, passionate, vindictive, impure, intemperate, and tepid Christians! ask, ask without ceasing, Lord, make me humble, meek, pure, and zealous in Thy service! Pious Christians, ask, and ask fervently, O Lord, make me love Thee constantly! keep me from all occasions of sin! help me with Thy powerful grace in the dangers and temptations I cannot avoid, that I may not consent to them, and lose Thy friendship! In temporal prosperity, ask, pray to God, Lord, free my heart from an inordinate love of temporal goods, that I may not lose eternal happiness! In crosses and trials, ask, pray to God, Lord, give me the grace of patience, that my will may always be united with Thine! If you sometimes, through trouble and annoyance, have no taste for prayer, or do not know how to pray, then say at least: Lord, give me the desire for prayer! grant me the grace to pray as I ought!

Conclusion
and resolu-
tion.

Yes, O my God, I shall do that! Happy me! even if I had received no other benefit from Thee but that alone of being allowed to pray to Thee at all times, in all places, in all circumstances, not only with the lips, but also with my thoughts! And at the same time Thou hast given me the assurance that in matters that concern my eternal salvation Thou wilt always hear my prayer. Do I not owe Thee a debt of infinite gratitude? Oh, if all the beggars in the world were certain of

getting whatever they ask for, who could look on himself as poor and needy? This very certainty Thou hast given me, O God; and shall I, then, neglect to profit by it? No; the misery and poverty of my soul is, as I must acknowledge, too great for me to neglect appealing to Thee, who alone canst help me. Therefore I will pray, and pray humbly and constantly; and since I am in need of Thy help and grace every day, hour, and moment of my life, I will every day humbly entreat Thee to assist me; nay, according to Thy advice to pray always, and not to cease praying, I will offer up to Thee everything I do, raising my mind to Thee and directing all my actions to Thy honor and glory, and I will sigh forth to Thee, with Thy prophet: "O God, be not Thou far from me; O my God, make haste to my help." When my soul is in danger of offending Thee, "be not Thou far from me!" "make haste to my help," and do not abandon me! When, at the end of my life, my soul shall be on the point of leaving the body, ah, Lord, that is the time for Thee to show Thy mercy, and to give me the last grace of final perseverance, which Thou hast promised to those who pray! Then, "be not Thou far from me; make haste to my help." I rely on Thee; Thou canst not be unfaithful to Thy word. Thou hast said, "ask and you shall receive." I will ask, and will humbly and with child-like confidence persevere in asking; and thus I shall certainly receive Thy help in life, Thy grace in death, and Thy glory, which Thou hast promised to give me in eternity, where I shall praise, love, and adore Thee forever. Amen.

*On False and Useless Prayer, see the foregoing Second Part.
On the Properties and Effects of Prayer, see the following Fourth Part.*

FIFTY-SEVENTH SERMON.

ON KEEPING ONE'S SELF IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD, IN
ORDER TO AVOID SIN.

Subject.

The best and surest means of avoiding all sin is the constant recollection of the presence of God.—*Preached on Pentecost Sunday.*

¹ Deus, ne elongeris a me; Deus meus, in auxilium meum respice.—Ps. lxx. 12.

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.

So that the great God, who is all-sufficient to Himself, loves so much a poor mortal who loves Him, that, not satisfied with heaven and earth, He wishes to dwell in that man personally with His whole divine essence. “If any man love Me,” He says, “he will keep My word, and We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him,” that is, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost will take up Their dwelling in him. Just souls, children of God, rejoice and exult, as long as you are in the state of sanctifying grace, on account of this great honor that is yours! And be most careful never to lose by mortal sin the great God who is dwelling in and with you. To avoid that misfortune, you must keep up a constant communication with God by always walking in His presence. Nor can you find any better means of keeping free from sin, as I shall now prove.

Plan of Discourse.

The best and surest means of avoiding all sin is the constant recollection of the presence of God; therefore he who wishes to be free from sin, and to have his God dwelling in him, must always think to himself: God is with me. Such is the whole subject.

We beg Thy light and grace, O Holy Ghost! through the intercession of Mary and the holy guardian angels.

The rope-dancer must keep his eyes fixed on one point if he does not wish to fall.

There is many a simple soul who, if he saw a rope-dancer performing his tricks, would certainly come to the conclusion that such feats are impossible without the aid of witchcraft or sorcery; for what wonderful things does not the rope-dancer do on the slender rope suspended high in the air? He dances and leaps about with the weight of his whole body, bending backwards and forwards, as confidently as if he were on the ground; he makes somersaults in the air and alights on his feet; he hangs on the rope by an arm or a leg, and in a moment is on his feet again. Nay, sometimes he wheels a barrow over the rope, and rarely does he get a fall. How is that possible? No, no, says the simple peasant; you may say what you will, I do not like the business, God has little part in it, that man has surely deal

ings with the devil. And yet the whole thing is natural enough, and requires only a certain bodily dexterity and agility, which can be acquired by practice. But how does the rope-dancer keep himself from falling? He has a long pole in his hands, with equal weights at either end, that helps him to keep his balance. But that is not all; the chief thing consists in the man himself. If you look attentively at him, you will see that he keeps his eyes fixed on a ring or globe, beside which there is a lighted candle; that is the point at which he must look constantly, in order not to lose his balance. During the performance you will never see him turning his eyes away from that, and even if he turns his face a little to one side now and then, his eyes will still be fixed on that central point. If he were to turn away from it, and begin to stare around him, neither his skill nor the balancing pole would be of the least assistance to him; he would certainly lose his balance, fall, and break his neck.

My dear brethren, Cassian and St. John Chrysostom compare a rope-dancer each and every one who wishes to keep straight on the way of virtue, that leads to heaven. While we are in this world, we are exposed to far more and far greater dangers than the rope-dancer, and if we fall, it is not so much the mortal body as the immortal soul that suffers; wherever we go, we are walking in the midst of snares and traps that are set for our eternal ruin at all times, in all places; for so the Prophet David calls the dangers and occasions of sin: "The cords of the wicked have encompassed me."¹ "The proud have hid a net for me: and they have stretched out cords for a snare: they have laid for me a stumbling block by the way-side."² Oh, how deplorable the fall of some who were at first most holy, just, and pious servants of God; who seemed to have made a spring from those ropes even to heaven; who shone in virtue and sanctity like the stars of the firmament, and who yet fell headlong down from the way of the divine law into the depths of mortal sin! How shameful the fall of David himself, although he had ascended even to the heart of God, for one incautious glance was enough to turn him away from God, and to make him an adulterer and a murderer! How disgraceful the fall of Solomon, his son, the wisest man that ever lived! In spite of his wisdom, he allowed himself to be ensnared by carnal love; he forgot his God and bent the

Like rope-dancers, we are in constant danger of falling into sin.

¹ Funes peccatorum circumplexi sunt me.—Ps. cxviii. 61.

² Absconderunt superbi laqueum mihi, et funes extenderunt in laqueum: juxta iter scandalum posuerunt mihi.—Ibid. cxxxix. 6.

knee before dumb idols. How terrible the fall of Judas, an apostle of Jesus Christ, who, after he had become blinded by the love of money, was changed into a despairing demon, as Christ had foretold of him! With reason does St. Paul cry out to us all: "He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall."¹ He who has a good conscience should be careful not to fall into sin.

Therefore
our eyes
should be
always kept
fixed on the
presence of
God.

What are we to do, my dear brethren, what means must we make use of, to keep our balance and to avoid the danger of a fall? The rope-dancer, as we have seen, holds a pole in his hand, with which he moves about fearlessly. Our pole must be the fear and love of God, which should keep us from sin and in the way of virtue by the twofold weight of the promise of heaven and the threat of hell. But how long will this pole help us, if we do not remember it, and think of Him who promises the reward and threatens the punishment? The chief, best, and surest means of never committing a mortal sin is to be found in our eyes, minds, and memories, which we must always keep fixed on the central point, that is, on God. We must always keep God before our eyes, and walk in His presence as well as we can by our thoughts. "As for the just," says David, "they shall give glory to Thy name; and the upright shall dwell with Thy countenance."² "They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance," as in that of a lighted candle, "and in Thy name they shall rejoice all the day."³ "My eyes are ever towards the Lord," he says of himself before his fall, "for he shall pluck my feet out of the snare,"⁴ and will keep me from falling. His wise son gives us the same warning in the Book of Proverbs: "Have confidence in the Lord with all thy heart; in all thy ways think on Him, and He will direct thy steps: then shalt thou walk confidently in thy way, and thy foot shall not stumble: for the Lord will be at thy side, and will keep thy foot, that thou be not taken."⁵ Oh, if David and Solomon had themselves acted according to this beautiful advice, they would not have fallen so shamefully into sin!

¹ Qui se existimat stare, videat ne cadat.—I. Cor. x. 12.

² Justi constebuntur nomini tuo, et habitabunt recti cum vultu tuo.—Ps. cxxxix. 14.

³ Domine, in lumine vultus tui ambulabunt, et in nomine tuo exultabunt tota die.—Ibid. lxxxviii. 16, 17.

⁴ Oculi mei semper ad Dominum; quoniam ipse evellet de laqueo pedes meos.—Ibid. xxiv. 15.

⁵ Habe fiduciam in Domino ex toto corde tuo; in omnibus viis tuis cogita illum, et ipse diriget gressus tuos: tunc ambulabis fiducialiter in via tua, et pes tuus non impinget. Dominus enim erit in latere tuo, et custodiet pedem tuum, ne capiaris.—Prov. iii. 5, 6, 23, 26.

And whence does it come that so many miserable falls occur Most sins are caused by forgetting God. in the world, and that sin, alas! is committed so frequently without scruple or shame, daily and hourly, for some wretched thing, by people of all kinds, young and old, great and lowly, if not from the fact that they turn away the eyes of the mind from the central point, forgetting the great God, who is always present, and is looking at them? "They have set their eyes bowing down to the earth," says David of the wicked:¹ so as not to think of God. "God is not before his eyes,"² that is, the eyes of the sinner. And what is the consequence? "His ways are filthy at all times: Thy judgments are removed from his sight."³ According to another interpretation the passage reads: "His ways bring forth."⁴ The Holy Ghost means thereby that, just as those parts of the earth's surface which are never lit by the rays of the sun can produce nothing but serpents and reptiles, and other poisonous creatures, so, too, in the heart of one who hides from the face of God and rejects the light of a real lively faith in the divine presence nothing can be produced but monstrosities of vice: "His ways bring forth." "His mouth is full of cursing," continues the Psalmist, "and of bitterness, and of deceit;"⁵ his hands are full of injustice; his house is like a den of lions, in which he lies in wait for the innocent and poor, that he may oppress them, etc., and all this, because "God is not before his eyes:" "For he hath said in his heart: God hath forgotten, He hath turned away His face not to see the end."⁶ Behold, said God to His Prophet Ezechiel: "The iniquity of the house of Israel and of Juda is exceeding great, and the land is filled with blood, and the city is filled with perverseness."⁷ And the whole cause and origin of this wickedness was that, "they have said, The Lord hath forsaken the earth, and the Lord seeth not."⁸ They thought so little of God, that they almost believed He was no longer amongst them.

Experience teaches us that the same is the case nowadays He who sins drives with each and every sinner. When people have made up their

¹ Oculos suos statuerunt declinare in terram.—Ps. xvi. 11.

² Non est Deus in conspecto ejus.—Ibid. ix. 5.

³ Inquinatae sunt viae illius in omni tempore. Auferentur judicia tua a facie ejus.—Ibid.

⁴ Parturiant viae illius.

⁵ Cujus maledictione os plenum est, et amaritudine, et dolo.—Ibid. 7.

⁶ Dixit enim in corde suo: oblitus est Deus, avertit faciem suam, ne videat in finem.—Ibid. 11.

⁷ Iniquitas domus Israel et Juda magna est nimis valde, et repleta est terra sanguinibus, et civitas repleta est aversione.—Ezech. ix. 9.

⁸ Dixerunt enim: dereliquit Dominus terram, et Dominus non videt.—Ibid.

God out of
his memory.

minds to commit sin, they do not think of the all-seeing God, nor do they wish to think of Him; they are afraid of hearing anything about Him which might make them uneasy and disturb their wicked projects. For, as St. Ambrose says, nothing is more intolerable to them than that the all-seeing eye of God should witness their vices. They would be glad if God could not see or notice anything, so that they might give a loose rein to their disorderly desires without being discovered. They act, in a word, like the two elders who attacked the chaste Susanna with their impure proposals. "They perverted their own mind," says the Holy Scripture of them, "and turned away their eyes, that they might not look unto heaven, nor remember just judgments." What wonder is it, then, that God should withdraw His fatherly hand from such men, allow them to run into danger, and to fall into many sins and be lost forever? "My people heard not My voice," He says by the Psalmist, "and Israel hearkened not to Me; so I let them go (terrible words!) according to the desires of their heart; they shall walk in their own inventions;"¹ like dumb beasts, they will go wherever their untamed desires shall draw them. Mark, my dear brethren, the origin of all sins and vices is to turn away the eyes from God, to forget His presence.

No subject
would act
unbecom-
ingly in the
presence of
his king.

On the other hand, how could it be possible for a man, no matter how strong his desires to evil, how violent the temptations that assail him, to sin grievously when he keeps the presence of God, who sees everything he does and is everywhere present, before his eyes with a lively faith? According to His own promise, the Lord cannot deprive of His help the man who with child-like confidence always keeps his eyes fixed on Him; nor can any man who has the least sense of decency left be so presumptuous and shameless as to dare to offend God at the very moment when he recollects with a lively faith that God is there looking at him. Oh, what modesty and reverence is caused amongst his attendants by the mere presence of a prince or king! "The king, that sitteth on the throne of judgment," says the Wise Man, "scattereth away all evil with his look."² Could one of his servants be so daring and insolent as to act the buffoon before him, speak slightly of him, or draw his sword against him?

¹ *Evertterunt sensum suum, et declinaverunt oculos suos, ut non viderent cœlum, neque recordarentur iudiciorum justorum.*—Dan. xiii. 9.

² *Non audivit populus meus vocem meam, et Israel non intendit mihi; et dimisit eos secundum desideria cordis eorum; ibunt in adinventionibus suis.*—Ps. lxxx. 12, 13.

³ *Rex, qui sedet in solio iudicii, dissipat omne malum intuitu suo.*—Prov. xx. 8.

It is not an unheard-of thing in the world, nor is it to be wondered at, that there should be rebellious subjects, who revolt against their lawful sovereign and plot in secret against him, when they are at a distance from him; but that one should publicly venture into the palace in which his sovereign lives, penetrate into his room, draw his sword, and say that he does not acknowledge him for his lawful king, that would be an act of daring such as has never been heard of up to the present, and which could only be expected of a madman. King Antigonus, as he was once concealed in his tent, heard some of his ministers, who were standing before it, murmur against him, whereupon he put his head outside the tent and said to them: "go a little further off, lest the king should hear you;"¹ and the ministers were as much shocked and frightened as if they had been smitten with a thunderbolt. No soldier would be so insolent and daring as to treat with contempt his general or superior officer in the midst of his army. In olden times a soldier once ventured on an act of that kind; persuaded by his companions, he went to a certain place where Marius, the celebrated general, was, with the intention of killing him; but no sooner had he looked at him, when he lost the power of moving even his hand, not to speak of drawing his sword, so that the mere presence of his superior prevented him from committing the intended murder.

Where is the child so ill-reared and unnatural as to act insultingly to his father, who loves him dearly and has never done anything to harm him? Alas, on second thoughts, I must recall my words! for are there not wicked children who, when they are grown up, treat their aged and feeble parents as if they were servants, nay, even dare to threaten and beat them? Yet this is a rare thing in the world, and such children are looked on by all respectable people who hear of their bad conduct as monsters, who, as the Holy Scripture says of wicked children, deserve to have their eyes devoured by the ravens. Absalom was one of these undutiful children, who dared to take up arms against his own father; but he did it out of his father's sight; for, as we read in the Second Book of Kings, after having murdered his brother, he was forbidden to appear in his father's presence; he "saw not the king's face,"² which would doubtless have inspired him with fear and reverence. The prodigal son we read of in the Gospel dissipated all his substance in riotous living and

Nor a child
in the pres-
ence of its
parents.

¹ Recedite parum, ne rex vos audiat.

² Faciem regis non vidit.—II. Kings xiv. 24.

impurity; but while he was leading that wicked life he was out of his father's sight; "he went abroad into a far country, and there wasted his substance living riotously."¹ And yet the greatest cause of sorrow to him afterwards was that his father, even at a distance, knew all his bad conduct; therefore he wept bitterly and cried out: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee," as it were in thy very sight and hearing; "I am not worthy to be called thy son."²

Nor a wife
in the pres-
ence of her
husband.

She would be, indeed, an unworthy and shameless woman, who would dare in the presence of her husband to act too freely with a stranger. How enraged king Assuerus was, as we read in the Book of Esther, when he came in out of the garden and found Aman kneeling at the feet of the queen, although the only intention of that unhappy courtier was to ask the queen to intercede for him; but Assuerus, suspecting that he was guilty, cried out to him, full of wrath: "He will force the queen also, in my presence, in my own house."³ What an intolerable insult! Away with the wretch, to the gibbet at once! "The word was not yet gone out of the king's mouth, and immediately they covered his face."⁴ "In my presence!" This it was that made the bare suspicion intolerable to Assuerus. No servant, says St. Augustine, would dare to bring anything away out of the house when the master or mistress is standing at the door looking on; nor would he even venture to pluck a flower in the garden, or to pick up an apple that had fallen from a tree, and eat it, or to hide away a crust of bread, unless he was sure that the master or mistress could not see him.

Every one
is ashamed
to do a dis-
graceful act
before an-
other.

But why should we spend such a long time speaking of the presence of a master, a parent, or a king? For every one has at least that much natural modesty, that he would abstain from doing a disgraceful action in the presence of another, although the latter may be nothing to him, and may not have any power either to benefit or to injure him. If you, O unchaste man, when, shut up in your room, you are meditating a shameful action, knew that even a beggar, a child, or a lowly swineherd were at the door, looking through the key-hole, although you could not see him, yet if there is any spark of shame left in you,

¹ Peregre profectus est in regionem longinquam, et ibi dissipavit substantiam suam vivendo luxuriose.—Luke xv. 13.

² Pater, peccavi in oeculum et coram te; jam non sum dignus vocari filius tuus.—Ibid. 18, 19.

³ Etiam reginam vult opprimere, me presente, in domo mea.—Esth. vii. 8.

⁴ Necdum verbum de ore regis exierat, et statim operuerunt faciem ejus.—Ibid.

you would desist from the sinful act. Ah, what fear and torment it causes many a one to declare under strict secrecy and in private, to one whom he may not know and who does not know him, his secret sins! What would it be if that other person were actually present and had seen the sin committed? And how many souls are brought to eternal ruin by that hellish shame; for they prefer to carry the load of their secret sins about with them for years and years, making during the time bad confessions and Communions, sacrificing God and their hopes for eternity, and giving themselves up to the flames of hell, rather than declare candidly one such sin to their confessor! Such power is exercised over them by the listening ears of another, to say nothing of the witnessing eyes of one who is present. And what is still more, the very presence of a senseless statue representing a great prince, has, as St. John Chrysostom testifies, often kept a rebellious people in subjection. Nay, if the Evil One himself were present in visible form, who would dare to commit a sin, although the foul spirit would be pleased at such an act? I do not think any one would be so hardy, for he would be terrified at the fearful aspect of the tempter, and would abstain from sin, unless he has formally devoted himself to the service of the devil.

Why have I spoken in such detail of these matters, my dear brethren? That you may see all the clearer the wickedness and presumption of the sinner who sins in the presence, before the very eyes, of his God. Represent to yourselves, if you can, at once all that I have said, and then say whether you think it possible for one who remembers with a lively faith that God is present and sees all his actions to commit a mortal sin? If the presence of a prince, a master, a father, a husband, a beggar, a child, a devil, nay, even the very dread of being found out or seen, is enough to keep unruly desires in check, how much more capable of doing that is not the true, undoubted, and living presence of God, who is our lord and king, compared with whom all the monarchs of the earth are but as grains of sand? That God who is our true and loving father, who has bound us to Himself with a million benefits as with so many chains, and has laid us under an eternal obligation never to offend Him! That God who is the jealous Spouse of our souls, and who wishes that we should devote our hearts to His love alone, to whom we have sworn eternal fidelity in baptism! The man whose presence I dread can notice nothing but what appears outwardly,

Much more should the remembrance of the presence of God deter us from sin.

when I commit a sin; but God sees and penetrates, besides the outward act, even my most secret and hidden thoughts and desires: He searches the reins and the heart. The man who is the witness of my guilt is nothing to me; I have nothing to fear from him, except that I must be ashamed before him; but the God who sees me sin is my just and strict judge, before whom the angels prostrate themselves in fear, and all nature trembles; who pursues every sin with implacable hatred, forbids it so strictly, and punishes it so terribly; who, after the first sin I commit, can cast me down, body and soul, into hell, amongst the demons. If, I say, a man realizes to himself that this great God hears and sees him, that He is before, and behind, and on both sides of him; if he can say to himself, God is in me, and I am in Him, and now I, a poor worm of the earth, am about to rebel against this great God, to trample His law under foot, and to do what is displeasing to Him! Where will I do it? Before His face, under His very eye, in His arms in which He holds me, in His lap in which I rest! Should not that thought act as a powerful check on my bad desires, and keep me from sin? If not, then what will be able to do it?

Shown by
an example.

A nobleman of high rank, who was an officer in the German army, as he was once giving a candid account of the state of his conscience to a priest of our Society, told him that he had never offended God by a mortal sin. Being asked how he was so fortunate as to keep his soul free from grievous sin, in the midst of the many and great dangers which surround the soldier's life, he answered that when he was at school, in one of our colleges at Parma, the words, "God sees me," made such a deep impression on his memory that he could never forget them. He acknowledged that he was often grievously tempted to hatred, revenge, rapine, and impurity, but he always came off victorious with the help of the thought, "God sees me." During the temptation he would say to himself, if his imperial majesty were here now and looking at me, I certainly would not consent to my wicked desires in his presence; shall I, then, give way to them before the infinite Majesty of the omnipresent, all-seeing God? Oh, no; I will not, I cannot do that! And with that thought he kept himself free from all grievous sin. He added, moreover, that in his engagements with the enemy the same thought was a wonderful source of courage to him; for he used to say to himself, the almighty God is here, He sees the danger into which I am forced to go by my duty, He sees the necessity in which I am, and He can and

will help me to come out of it unscathed. Oh, if all men, when they are tempted, took refuge in a similar thought, would it be possible, I ask again, for them to consent to mortal sin so easily?

To remember that God is present, and yet to sin! Oh, who will give me words to express the exceeding great presumption of such an act! It would be the same as sinning and taking God to witness that we have sinned; nay, it would be, so to speak, making God hold the light for us, that He might see how we despise and contemn Him. What more terrible thing could one think of? To my mind, it is like the act of a tyrant who shows the father and mother the knives and other instruments with which he is about to have their little son hacked to pieces; or like that of the thieves who compel the master of the house they have broken into to hold the candle for them, while they are rifling his coffers. To realize that God is present, and yet to sin! That is nothing else than mocking God in thought and action, which He understands just as well as words, and saying to Him, see, my God, although I know that Thou art here, and seest me; although I know that this impure thought in which I am now taking a wilful pleasure, this improper conversation I am commencing, this shameful act I am doing, is very displeasing to Thee; although I am aware that Thou hast me completely in Thy power, and canst punish me as Thou pleasest, yet I will accomplish my wickedness under Thy very eyes, and before Thy face. Thou shalt be my witness and helper in my sin; what Thou hast promised or threatened is nothing to me; Thou mayest be angry or not, it makes no difference; I will gratify my passions and enjoy the pleasures Thou hast forbidden. You who have any sense of decency, stop your ears, lest you should hear such insolence! And yet, O sinner, you and I are guilty of it, as well as every one who consents to mortal sin; for sin is committed before the eye of the all-seeing God. But what lessens in some degree our malice is the fact that, when we sin, we do not remember in such a lively manner the presence of God. No, my dear brethren, it must be that we do not think of it, or else we could not sin. "The recollection of the presence of God," says St. Jerome, "puts a stop to all vice."¹

From this we can see how great the audacity of one who sins, remembering that God is present.

Hence St. Basil says straight out that we do not consent to sin until we have first shut the eyes of the mind to the thought of the presence of God; and that each sin that we commit is a proof

Folly of the sinner who tries to forget God, al-

¹ *Memoria Dei cuncta excludit flagitia.*

though God
sees him all
the time.

that we have not a lively faith that God sees us. True, our conscience cries out, God is looking at you; but we close the ears of our mind, as it were, to its warning voice, when we wish to commit sin; we allow our thoughts to be distracted by things that flatter our sensuality, we drive God out of our hearts, and act like little children, who cover their eyes with their hands, and then think they are not seen. But we may close our eyes and keep God out of our thoughts as long as we please, He is still present and sees us, whether we like it or not. If, like the heathens of old, we had a god of wood or stone, made by hands, we could hide from him. And, as St. Cyril relates, there were some who made the sun their god, so that during the night, when he was asleep, they might sin without scruple, as he could not see them. If we had a god of that kind, O Christians, I could understand in a measure why so many Catholics commit such abominations during the night; but the God we adore is far different; His eyes are infinitely brighter than the sun; they are not darkened by the darkest night; everything is bare and open before Him, as the Apostle says to the Hebrews: "Neither is there any creature invisible in His sight; but all things are naked and open to His eyes."¹

And no one
can hide
from Him.

In vain did our forefather Adam, after his fall, try to hide from the sight of God. Adam, cried the Lord to him, where art thou? I can see thee plainly, and saw thee while thou wert eating the forbidden fruit. "He did not hide from God," says St. Gregory, "but hid God from himself."² In vain did Cain, after the murder of his brother, try to escape the sight of the Lord; in vain did Jonas fly before His face: "Jonas rose up to flee into Tharsis from the face of the Lord."³ He soon found out that the Lord saw him wherever he went. He ventured out on the high seas, and there he saw the presence of God in the storm that rose against him; he allowed himself to be cast into the deep, and there he found God present when the huge fish came to swallow him up; he was hidden in the belly of the monster, and found God present there, for he acknowledges himself that it was God who saved his life; when the fish cast him out on the shore, and he went to Ninive, there, too, he found God, who gave strength to his words to convert the Ninivites; when he went on the mountain, he there found God, who mir-

¹ Non est ulla creatura invisibilis in conspectu ejus; omnia autem nuda et aperta sunt oculis ejus.—Heb. iv. 13.

² Se Deo non abscondit, sed Deum sibi abscondit.

³ Surrexit Jonas, ut fugeret in Tharsis a facie Domini.—Jonas 1. 3.

aculously caused the ivy to spring up, in order to shelter him from the rays of the sun; wherever he went, he could not escape the eye of God. In vain did the wicked elders say to Susanna in the garden: "Behold, the doors of the orchard are shut, and nobody seeth us,"¹ for the eye of God discovered their wickedness and publicly convicted them of it; they were condemned to death, and were stoned by the people. In vain do adulterers try to hide their vices under the cover of the night; for, as the Wise Ecclesiasticus writes: "Every man that passeth beyond his own bed, despising his own soul, and saying: Who seeth me? Darkness compasseth me about, and the walls cover me, and no man seeth me, whom do I fear?"² Fool that you are! you ask whom do you fear? You would fear the presence of a man, and it is the dread of being seen that makes you look for some hidden corner; how, then, are you so senseless as not to fear the presence of God? "And he understandeth not that His eye seeth all things." The darkness is not dark to God, nor do shut doors exclude Him. "The eyes of the Lord are far brighter than the sun, beholding round about all the ways of men, and the bottom of the deep, and looking into the hearts of men, into the most secret parts."³ In vain do you still endeavor, O sinner, to escape the eye of God; fly up to the clouds, if you can, and you will find God there; hide yourself in a crevice of the earth, and God will be there, too; go down, if you will, into the abyss of hell, and there, too, God will be present, as the Prophet David says: "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? 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."⁴ If you go out, says St. Augustine, you will be seen; if you come in, you will be seen; if the candle is lit, you will be seen; if it is extinguished, you will be seen just as well; "fear Him who sees everything, or seek for a place where He cannot see you, and then do as you please."⁵

¹ Ecce ostia pomarii clausa sunt, et nemo nos videt.—Dan. xiii. 20.

² Omnis homo qui transgreditur lectum suum, contemnens in animam suam, et dicens; quis me videt? Tenebræ circumdant me, et parietes cooperiunt me, et nemo circumspicit me; quem vereor?—Eccles. xxii. 25-26.

³ Et non intelligit quoniam omnia videt oculus illius; quoniam oculi Domini multo plus lucidiores sunt super solem, circumspicientes omnes vias hominum, et profundum abyssus, et hominum corda intuentes in absconditis partibus.—Ibid. 27-28.

⁴ Quo ibo a spiritu tuo? et quo a facie tua fugiam? Si ascendero in cælum, tu illic es; si descendero in infernum, ades.—Ps. cxxxviii. 7, 8.

⁵ Time coram eo qui videt omnia, aut quære locum, ubi te non videat, et age quod libet.—S. Aug. in Soliloq., c. 14.

God takes special note of sins, to the sinner's deeper damnation.

Do what you like to shut out the thought of God, He will not be a moment absent from you on that account. He has seen what you were doing, thinking, and saying lately; He still sees and takes note of that secret ill-will you are nourishing against your neighbor; He sees and takes note of the acts of injustice you are guilty of, cheating and deceiving others; He sees and takes note of the bad desires and inclinations that you bring even into the churches consecrated to Him, and which no man can see; He sees and takes note of the unchaste looks you cast on others; He sees and hears the impure conversation, or the uncharitable talk against your neighbor's character, in which you indulge in company; He sees and hears the inhuman cursing and swearing with which you defile your mouth the whole day long, to the great disedification of others; He sees and takes note of the sin you have for such a long time concealed in confession and carried about in your heart. All this, although you might wish to forget it yourself, is well remembered by God; and you will one day find out that He has seen you, when the abominations you are guilty of will be published before the world, to your eternal shame. Woe to you, O sinner! who now deliberately shut God out of your thoughts, and do not wish to remember His presence! A time will come when you will wish to forget Him; but for all eternity you will have to think of Him to your intolerable torment and misery in hell. How so, my God? Can it be that the thought of Thee, which is now so sweet and agreeable to Thy servants, will hereafter be a part of the punishment of Thy enemies? Certainly, my dear brethren; if a lost soul could forget God, he would be free from the worst of his torments; but not for a single moment will he cease to remember in the liveliest manner and to acknowledge what he has lost in God; he will be always saying to himself, this God I could have possessed if I had wished, and had thought oftener of His presence during my life; but now I can have no part in Him forever. "The wicked shall see, and shall be angry, he shall gnash with his teeth and pine away."¹

Conclusion and exhortation to remember the presence of God in temptation.

Ah, Christians, do not let matters get so bad with us! Let us now think of the Lord with joy and consolation of the soul, and as far as possible keep ourselves constantly in His presence; wherever we go, whatever we do, let us keep this thought before our minds, "God is looking at me; God is with me." He is here in this room, in the street, in the garden, in this company;

¹ Peccator videbit, et irascetur, dentibus suis fremet et tabescet.—Ps. cxi. 10.

everywhere I am surrounded by Him. "Whatever I do," says St. Augustine to Him, "Thou seest more clearly than I who do it; for all my actions are known to Thee, who art present everywhere, as the perfect inspector of all thoughts, intentions, pleasures and actions."¹ How, then, could I dare to do anything contrary to Thy holy will? With these thoughts we must arm ourselves against all temptations, dangers, and occasions of sin; and, like the chaste Susanna, when the elders threatened to accuse her of adultery, so that she should be condemned to be stoned to death, and she, thus pressed on all sides, was considering her position, saying: "If I do this thing, it is death to me; and if I do it not, I shall not escape your hands,"² let us make the firm resolution: "It is better for me to fall into your hands without doing it, than to sin in the sight of the Lord."³ Such should be our thought in every temptation. Shall I sign this unjust, usurious contract? I might do it at once, and no one would be the wiser, while it would bring in a good sum, that would help the household expenses; but the great God sees me; it is better for me, then, to starve with my wife and children than to sin in the sight of the Lord. Shall I now take secret revenge on that man? He has grossly insulted me, and I have a fine opportunity of taking satisfaction; I would have done it long since; but the great God sees me! It is better for me to restrain my spirit of revenge, even if my reputation were to suffer before the world on that account; better do that than sin in the sight of the Lord. Shall I indulge in this sensual gratification? I can do so if I will; my inclination to it is very strong; my passions are urging me to it with violence; no man sees me; but the great God is looking at me; He is present here! away, then, with the filthy passion! it is better for me to restrain it, and to forfeit all the delights of the world, than to sin in the sight of the Lord. So let us think and resolve in all other temptations and occasions of sin. Once for all, my dear brethren, he who wishes to keep his conscience free from sin, and to be always in the friendship of God, must keep God before his eyes; there is no

¹ *Quidquid facio, ante te facio, et illud, quidquid est quod facio, melius tu vides quam ego, qui facio: quidquid enim semper operor, tu semper præsens cernis, ut pote perfectus inspector omnium cogitationum, intentionum, delectationum, et operationum mearum*—S. Aug. in soliloq., c. 14.

² *Si enim hoc egero, mors mihi est; si autem non egero, non effugiam manus vestras.*—Dan. xiii. 22.

³ *Sed melius est mihi absque opere incidere in manus vestras, quam peccare in conspectu Domini.*—Ibid. 23.

better or surer means of avoiding sin than the constant recollection of the presence of God.

Repentance
for past sins
and resolution
to remember
always the
presence of
God.

Ah, would that I had attended to that long ago! I should not have sinned so often, so grievously, so shamefully! O my God, worthy of all honor and love! How disgracefully I have acted towards Thee in Thy very presence, before Thy face! The birds of the air have greater respect for a scare-crow than I have for Thy presence, O great God! When the birds see the straw figure moved about by the wind, they fly away from it in dread, and do not dare to pick up a single seedling from the ground. Thy presence does not inspire me with such fear and respect! I have acted like those birds, who, when they see that the straw figure is unable to hurt them, actually roost on it; so have I, too,—shame to me, that I should have to say it!—acted towards Thee. I have sinned, and Thy goodness and mercy has borne with me, and Thou hast not punished me; but instead of being moved thereby to confess and repent of my sins, I have only sinned against Thee with all the greater audacity. Far greater right hadst Thou, than king Assuerus in former times, to cry out to me: what! miserable mortal! hast thou dared to act thus in My presence, while I was actually looking on? I, thy rightful Lord and Master, whose least sign thou shouldst obey? In My presence, who am thy sovereign Benefactor, with whose gifts Thou art richly endowed from the crown of thy head to the sole of thy foot? In My presence, who am thy Father, from whom thou hast received thy life, to whom thou owest in all places a debt of child-like fear and love? In My presence, who am thy Saviour, and have shed My blood for thee to save thee from eternal death? In My presence, who am thy future Judge, and who, at the moment in which Thou didst commit sin, could have hurled thee into hell? In My presence thou hast dared to act thus disgracefully? Enough, O Lord! I must acknowledge my vileness! But where shall I creep to hide my shame? And yet, why do I ask? I cannot escape Thee. So that there is nothing for me but to bewail with sorrow of heart the insolence I have been guilty of towards Thee. “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee,” I say with the Prodigal. I have sinned, nor could I be guilty of greater wickedness. Father, I have sinned against Thee, who dost love me so much; which is still worse for me! Father, I have sinned against heaven; a terrible thing, that my sins should cry to heaven! but what most troubles and fills me with shame is this: I have sinned before Thee, in Thy sight.

Alas, what madness possessed me? I acknowledge, O Lord, that I forgot Thee then! I did not think of Thee and Thy presence, and that was the sole cause of my misfortune and guilt! Henceforth I will make better use of what I have learned, and will keep myself always in Thy presence. “I will fix my eyes upon Thee,”¹ like Thy servant David. Not only will I turn them to Thee now and then, but I will keep them fixed on Thee, that they may never be distracted from Thee and Thy presence, so that I may never sin again. Amen.

On the Reasons we have for constantly keeping in the Presence of God, and on the Consolation and Advantage to be derived from it, see several sermons in the following Fourth Part.

¹ Firmabo super te oculos meos.—Ps. xxxi. 8.

ON AVOIDING THE DANGERS AND OCCASIONS OF SIN.

FIFTY-EIGHTH SERMON.

ON AVOIDING BAD AND DANGEROUS COMPANY.

Subject.

To keep free from sin, and to persevere in good, we must be on our guard against, 1. bad company, especially; 2. and also against dangerous company.—*Preached on the sixth Sunday after Easter.*

Text.

Hæc locutus sum vobis, ut non scandalizemini.—John xvi. 1.

“These things have I spoken to you, that you may not be scandalized.”

Introduction.

Those parts of the human frame that especially scandalize the heart, that is, lead it into sin, are, according to Our Lord, the eyes, the hands, and the feet. “If thy eye scandalize thee,” He says in the Gospel of St. Matthew, “pluck it out, and cast it from thee,”¹ that its dangerous glances may not lead you into sin. “If thy hand or thy foot scandalize thee,” the former by dangerous touches, the latter by leading you into the danger of sin, “cut it off and cast it from thee.”² I have already said, my dear brethren, with regard to the eyes, that we must guard them carefully, if we desire to persevere in good and to keep free from sin. Now I will speak of the feet, which must also be well guarded, lest they should bring us into all sorts of company, in which we, weak mortals as we are, and naturally inclined to evil, might suffer harm. Therefore I say, as the subject of this exhortation:

¹ Si oculus tuus scandalizat te, erue eum et projice abs te.—Matt. xviii. 9.

² Si manus tua vel pes tuus scandalizat te, abscide eum, et projice abs te.—Ibid. 8.

Plan of Discourse.

To keep free from sin, and to persevere in good, we must be especially on our guard against bad company, as I shall show in the first part. We must also be on our guard against dangerous company, as I shall show in the second part.

Give us Thy grace to this end, O Lord; we ask it of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

Man above all other creatures has this peculiar quality, that he easily and readily imitates what he sees and learns from others like himself. We have daily experience of that in little children, whose sole occupation is, generally speaking, imitating others; the little girls, as they are most of the time with their mother or the maid-servants, set up toy kitchens, in which they have their little plates, dishes, pots, and pans; or they carry dolls about, dress them, put them in the cradle, and do everything to them in imitation of their mother or nurse. The boys, too, imitate those of their own sex; they make paper and paste-board houses; build castles of wood and stone, which they glue together; ride broomsticks, as if they were on horse-back, about the house and up and down the street; they make little carts and wagons; belt on swords and take spears in their hands like soldiers; dig graves and hold a funeral; erect and adorn little altars, say Mass, preach and sing, as they see done in the churches. All this is a proof of our natural inclination to imitate and follow the example of others.

Man is by nature apt to imitate others.

Not only the pastimes of children, but also, if we duly consider the matter, many kinds of art, which are held in great esteem in the world, are hardly anything else but imitations. Painters, sculptors, engravers, employ their greatest skill in imitating nature, and in representing each subject as it is created by the almighty God. The art of the organist consists in representing by the pipes of the organ the notes of the human voice; of musicians, in symbolizing by the different changes of harmony the passions and inclinations of the heart; of actors, in imitating as well as possible the persons of kings, peasants, soldiers, and beggars, and in representing the different passions of anger, grief, joy, and so on. And with regard to the manners, customs, usages, dress, and style of conversation in the world, what else are those things but imitations, by which one man follows his neighbor's example, and behaves exactly as he sees others behaving? To introduce a new fashion in dress, all that is neces-

As is evident in all kinds of people.

sary is for some lady or gentleman of rank to dress in unusual style, and at once there will be some people ready to say to themselves, I am not of worse condition than he or she, and I can dress in that way, too. These, in turn, will be imitated by others, and so in a short time the fashion of a whole town will be altered. So true is it, as the philosopher Aristotle remarks, "that it is natural to men from their childhood to imitate others, and in that way they differ from other animals."¹

And we are more apt to imitate bad actions than good.

This consideration, my dear brethren, and also the fact that our nature has been corrupted by the sin of our first parents, is the basis of the proposition I have undertaken to prove; namely, that he who deliberately frequents bad company cannot long remain good and holy. If we were all so constituted as to be ready to imitate the good qualities we see or hear of in others, what an excellent thing would not that faculty of imitation of ours then be! For in that case it would be a desirable thing for the good and pious to mix with wicked sinners, nor would any good man fear being corrupted by bad example, as the wicked would rather learn from the good. But, alas, deplorable condition of ours! who does not see and experience that we poor mortals, already inclined as we are to evil, are much more likely to be led astray by bad example than to profit by good? Take a glass of pure and fresh water, and another of muddy, brackish water; mix the two in one vessel, and see what will be the result. Will the dirty water be purified, think you? No, indeed; you would have to wait a long time for such a thing as that to occur. The clean, fresh water will absorb the dirt and salt of the other, and so both will be spoiled. "With the holy thou wilt be holy," says the Holy Ghost by the Prophet David, "and with the innocent man thou wilt be innocent, and with the elect thou wilt be elect;" but no matter how good and holy you are, if you go with the wicked, you will not long preserve your goodness; "with the perverse thou wilt be perverted."² And again, by the wise Ecclesiasticus: "He that toucheth pitch, shall be defiled with it; and he that hath fellowship with the proud, shall put on pride."³ Mark, my brethren, that the proud man does not learn humility from the humble man, but rather the latter learns pride from the former.

¹ Imitari insitum est hominibus a pueris, et in hoc differunt a ceteris animalibus.

² Cum sancto sanctus eris, et cum viro innocente innocens eris, et cum electo electus eris, et cum perverso perverteris.—Ps. xvii. 26-27.

³ Qui tetigerit picem, inquinabitur ab ea, et qui communicaverit superbo, induet superbiam.—Eccclus. xiii. 1.

Much more is this to be understood of other vices, to which our evil inclinations are constantly urging us. The Patriarch Abraham, as we read in the Book of Genesis, thought of procuring a wife for his son Isaac. Isaac was a beautiful, rich, virtuous, and well-reared young man, and the only son of a great patriarch, so that every maiden of the land would have been glad to have been chosen as his wife. But there was not one of them whom Abraham considered fit for the position; and therefore he sent for his steward and said to him: "That I may make thee swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and earth, that thou take not a wife for my son of the daughters of the Chanaanites, among whom I dwell."¹ He then sent him into far-off Mesopotamia, to seek a good and virtuous bride for his son amongst his own kindred. But is it possible that in such a great and populous country as Chanaan then was no young maiden could be found to suit Isaac? Is it possible that a good woman was such a rarity that not one was to be had amongst the thousands who were in the land? St. Ambrose, Oleaster, and other authors answer this question by saying that at that time the Chanaanites were, as a general rule, addicted to idolatry. Although Abraham could rest assured of the firmness of the faith of his son and of his whole family, and had not the least reason to fear that they would ever lapse into idolatry, yet he thought, and rightly, too, that, if a heathenish woman came into his house, she would in course of time pervert the whole family and lead them away from God. As Abulensis says in his person, "the son, while he is still young, spends most of his time with his mother."² Now, if my son Isaac and the rest of my dependents run no risk of being perverted, yet perhaps the heathenish mother may hereafter give her little children an image of a god to play with, so that they and her grand-children even may be infected with idolatry. No, was Abraham's conclusion, I will not run the risk; any woman to whom even a remote suspicion of idolatry can be attached is not a fit wife for my son, nor should she become a member of my family. Truly, a sensible, prudent, and fatherly decision! For that very reason God afterwards bound the Israelites by an express command not to marry strange women: "You shall not go in unto them, neither shall any of

Therefore Abraham did not ask a wife for his son among the people of the country in which he was living, on account of the danger of being led into idolatry.

¹ Ut adjurem te per Dominum, Deum cœli et terræ, ut non accipias uxorem filio meo de filiabus Chananæorum, inter quos habito.—Gen. xxiv. 3.

² Filius maxime conversatur cum matre, quando tener est.

them come into yours: for they will most certainly turn away your hearts to follow their gods.”¹

For the same reason God commanded the Israelites to kill the idolaters.

Read the Book of Josue, my dear brethren, and you will see to your great astonishment an account of a terrible and bloody slaughter ordered by the celebrated and holy leader of the Israelites, according to the express command of God, on his entry into the promised land. Whenever he came to a hostile city or country, he ordered all to be put to death, without any regard to age, sex, or condition, “Man and woman, young and old.”² He caused thirty-one kings to be strangled, and thirty-one kingdoms to be inundated with the blood of their inhabitants, without sparing a single one; wherever he went, “he left not any remaine therein, but slew all that breathed, as the Lord the God of Israel had commanded him.”³ What a strange manner of making war and taking possession of the enemy’s country! The general rule is to get possession of the towns and the country, and to bring the inhabitants under subjection. And if it sometimes happens that a town, after a long and desperate resistance, is captured and destroyed by fire and sword, that is done only as a warning to the others, and in order to make them submit more easily through fear of being served in a similar manner. But to butcher the inhabitants everywhere, what could be the reason of that, if not to satisfy cruelty? And why did the God of justice and goodness command Josue so strictly to massacre all that opposed him on his entry into the promised land? Because He did not wish to expose His chosen people to the constant danger of being led into idolatry by the inhabitants of those countries; and therefore they were all to be exterminated, without exception. So difficult does it appear to the almighty God for one who has bad companions around him not to be infected by their vices.

How much greater the danger of being led by bad company into those sins to which we are already inclined by nature.

My reflections on this, my dear brethren, are as follows: idolatry is one of the worst kinds of sins, because it takes from the soul the first cause of its spiritual life, namely, the grace of faith, which in all sins that do not destroy the faith remains after the loss of sanctifying grace. Besides, this sin, if considered in itself, has nothing to flatter the senses, or to gratify pride, or to glut the cravings of avarice; and therefore it has nothing to attract our inclinations; yet Abraham was in dread

¹ Non ingrediemini ad eas, neque de illis ingredientur ad vestras; certissime enim avertent corda vestra, ut sequamini deos earum.—III. Kings. xi. 2.

² A viro usque ad mulierem. ab infante usque ad senem.—Jos. vi. 21.

³ Non dimisit in ea ullas reliquias, sed omne quod spirare poterat interfecit, sicut præcepit ei Dominus Deus Israel.—Ibid. x. 40.

lest his son, if he associated with idolaters, should be led astray; and the Lord God Himself ordered such a terrible slaughter of so many people, to keep His own chosen nation from the danger of being contaminated by their example. Alas, I must think, what reason, then, have we not to fear those bad companions, who by their conversations, teaching, flattery, caresses, and example pave the way for us to vices, to learn which we require no other master than our own evil and carnal desires? There is no doubt about it, "They will most certainly turn away your hearts," if you wilfully trust yourselves in their society. Still another circumstance worthy of your attention: Abraham was afraid that one idolatrous woman would corrupt his whole family. But why? Could he not have rather argued in the contrary sense, and said to himself: there are so many in my house who are all zealous believers in the true God and lead virtuous lives; if a heathenish woman comes to us and daily associates with them, in a short time they will persuade her to give up idolatry, and by their good example will lead her on to virtue, so that we will thus gain over a soul to God? No, my dear brethren, such was not the current of Abraham's thoughts; he was rather afraid that that one person would infect all the others with her own spiritual malady; nor did he entertain any hope of her conversion being effected by all the other members of his family. For the same reason God did not wish to leave one of the idolatrous inhabitants in the promised land, because He knew how dangerous it is to associate with even one wicked person.

And so it is in reality; one bad companion is often more than enough to corrupt and lead astray a number of people. Have you ever heard that a scabby sheep became sound by going with healthy sheep? No; but if the shepherd does not separate it from the flock at once, it will infect all the others. "Mix rotten apples with good ones," such is the simile used by St. Vincent Ferrer, "and in a short time the whole lot will get bad;"¹ twenty good apples will become bad, if one rotten one is put amongst them. The celebrated statue that king Nabuchodonosor saw in his dream, the head of which was of gold, the shoulders and breast of silver, the body of brass, the legs of iron, and the feet part of iron and part of clay, fell to the ground shattered in pieces, so that it became dust and was blown away by the wind. What was it that destroyed such a great statue? A single stone that fell from the mountain on its feet: "A stone

One bad companion is enough to lead many astray. Shown by a simile.

¹ *Misce poma corrupta cum bonis; brevi erunt omnia corrupta.*

was cut out of the mountain, without hands; and it struck the statue upon the feet thereof, that were of iron and of clay, and broke them in pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of a summer's threshing-floor, and they were carried away by the wind; and there was no place found for them."¹ Amongst other moral interpretations of this wonderful vision, there is one that serves for my present purpose. Suppose that in a family the head is of pure gold, namely, the father is pure as gold as to his conduct and life; the mother is refined as silver; the children as modest and reserved as brass; the servants, by their industry and diligence, as strong and faithful as iron: even then one stone of scandal, thrown among them, is enough to destroy the whole beautiful statue. A wicked servant comes into a family the members of which lead holy lives; an immoral companion finds his way in; the children are entrusted to some devil's teacher for their education; alas, that is quite enough to shatter to pieces the beautiful gold, silver, and brass, to ruin the morals and destroy the harmony of that family, and change its virtue into vice! "Know you not," says St. Paul, "that a little leaven corrupteth the whole lump?"² A married woman who is too free in her conduct, and is not sufficiently observant of the fidelity she owes her husband, is a source of scandal to a whole neighborhood; an ill-reared, already corrupt child can infect a whole school by his bad example; a bold, vain child of the world, dressed in an un-Christian manner, casts a stone of scandal in the way of the eyes and hearts of a whole town. Now, if one wicked person can do so much harm, and induce others to follow his bad example, what will he not have to fear who recklessly goes into bad company and does not care with whom he associates?

Warning to parents to watch over their children in this respect.

And what will become of those children who are not sufficiently looked after; who are allowed to run about the streets all day with low companions; who have permission to go where they wish, to speak and play with whom they please; whose parents trouble their heads little about what servants they have, as long as the work of the house is done, and who allow their children to be on intimate terms with the servants? Is it any wonder

¹ *Abscissus est lapis de monte sine manibus, et percussit statuam in pedibus ejus ferreis et fictilibus, et comminuit eos. Tunc contrita sunt pariter ferrum, testa, æs, argentum, et aurum. et redacta quasi in favillam æstivæ aræ, quæ rapta sunt vento, nullusque locus inventus est eis.*—Dan. ii. 34, 35.

² *Nescitis quia modicum fermentum totam massam corrumpit?*—I. Cor. v. 6.

that, with such bad companions around them, the children are instructed in wickedness from their very cradles? Ah, Christian parents, look after your children carefully in this particular, if you wish them to be eternally happy in heaven. Take pattern by the pious Sara. She once saw her son, the little Isaac, playing with the son of her handmaid Agar, who was certainly not well brought up. "Cast out this bond-woman and her son,"¹ she cried out to Abraham, filled with a holy jealousy; otherwise your son Isaac cannot remain good. Cast out, not only the dissolute child, but his mother also; the evil must be torn up by the roots. Christian father! out of the house with that servant, that maid, from whom your children can neither see, hear, nor learn anything good. Away with all young men from whom your daughters can expect nothing but sentimental folly, even if they are of decent families, nay, even if they are your own blood relations.

And all of you, without exception, fly bad company, if you expect to remain good and holy. "Depart from the tents of these wicked men," such was the warning given by Moses to the Israelites, and which God now gives to all of us, "and touch nothing of theirs, lest you be involved in their sins."² And not alone must we flee company that is evidently bad, in which attempts are made to lead us astray by talk and conversation, by advice and teaching, by flattery and caresses, and in which a bad example of vindictiveness, injustice, drunkenness, impurity or other vice is given us, but we must also shun dangerous company, as we shall see in the

To all, to avoid bad company carefully.

Second Part.

By dangerous company, I mean that in which, seeing the weakness of human nature and its inclination to evil, one is likely to commit sin, at least in thought. Such company must as far as possible be avoided by those who are anxious to save their souls; for, according to the words of the Holy Ghost, "He that loveth danger shall perish in it;"³ he who goes unnecessarily into danger, or who loves it, will certainly fall into sin. Such company is generally found in those ale-houses in which all kinds of people meet for the purpose of drinking; and, humanly speaking, it can hardly be that one who goes into such

Dangerous company is to be found in many ale-houses.

¹ Ejice ancillam hanc et filium ejus.—Gen. xxi. 10.

² Recedite a tabernaculis hominum impiorum, et nolite tangere quæ ad eos pertinent, ne involvamini in peccatis eorum.—Num. xvi. 26.

³ Qui amat periculum in illo peribit.—Eccius. iii. 27.

society, although he may not have had any bad intention at first, does not place his soul in danger. For, where a lot of people meet there are sure to be some reckless characters present, who speak ill of and criticise the actions of others, detract from their neighbor's fair fame, curse and swear, indulge in immodest buffoonery and unchaste discourses and songs; and it is in such things that amusement is generally, if not always, sought in such places. And even if there were no danger of the kind, yet we should be deterred from going to those houses by the occasion that is offered in them either for drunkenness, or at least for such a degree of intemperance that is for most people the cause of other sins, as we have already seen in detail. If a person wishes now and then to drink a moderate quantity, in order to enjoy himself in a lawful manner, and to preserve his strength for the divine service, that is not forbidden; nay, it is a meritorious work if performed with that intention. But could not that be done better in one's own house, with pious, good people of one's own acquaintance? Certainly, no prudent master would refuse to allow his servants or apprentices to enjoy themselves at home; for thus they can be sure that they for whose souls they are responsible are not doing anything sinful. Nor does the wine or beer cost any more if you send to the ale-house for it, than if you go there yourself to drink it.

The innocent are often led astray in them.

Ah! how I pity those still innocent children and students who are obliged to live for the whole year in such houses; the difficulty they must find in prosecuting their studies, which is the purpose for which their parents have sent them from home, is the least thing to be complained of; it is the innocence of their precious souls, which suffers and is so often ruined, that I deplore most of all! They often see and hear from the frequenters of such places things they should not even dream of. And how I pity, too, those young women who are hired as waitresses and attendants on such guests. Oh, truly, they are in a dangerous position, if they are not well grounded in the fear of God! I will say nothing of those landlords (I hope none of them are here present) who keep or tolerate in their houses women of doubtful character, in order to attract custom. Such people are really bad company, wicked betrayers of souls, and, as it were, publicans of hell, who collect a tax on the souls they try to deliver over to the devil.

Familiarity with the

Further dangerous company for all is the too free and unrestricted intercourse with persons of the opposite sex. Too free

and unrestricted intercourse, I say; for, it is impossible to avoid all such company completely, unless for those who are shut up in a convent. Besides, even holy Religious are often compelled by duty, necessity, charity, or decency to meet persons of a different sex. I am speaking now merely of those who seek such company without reasonable cause, and solely because they like it, and make it an occasion of laughing, joking, and otherwise amusing themselves. Who can doubt that there is danger in such company? Every one will say that we are likely to have rain, when the air feels damp, the sky is covered with dark clouds, and the wind comes from the West. All agree that a long-continued fever is a dangerous illness for a weak, wasted body. And even if the rain does not fall, nor the sick man die, yet the danger of rain or of death has been evident enough; for, the danger of an evil consists in the combination of those circumstances from which the evil is likely to follow and does often follow. Now, speak the honest truth: when two or more people of different sexes are together (and that is like putting fire and straw together), with the intention of amusing one another, and doing their best to make themselves mutually agreeable, laughing and joking to their hearts' content, since the devil does not fail to excite the passions when he gets the chance (and yet he need not give himself much trouble on such an occasion, for evil thoughts arise easily from wilful and vain looks, and much more easily still, when they are helped by agreeable conversation and laughter), are not these circumstances sufficient to point to the evident danger of sin?

opposite sex
is danger-
ous.

What sin? you ask. Amongst decent people there is not such great danger of anything wrong being allowed. I answer in the style of the Schoolmen: there is no danger of anything outwardly wrong being done; *transeat*, that may be; no danger of anything wrong being done in thought and desire; that I deny altogether, and with me hundreds of theologians and holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church, as quoted by Theophilus Raynaud, in his book on the care required in conversations with persons of the opposite sex. St. Hugo, who was often obliged by his duty to converse with women, never deliberately looked one of them in the face for forty years, and knew them only by the sound of their voices. Our St. Aloysius, as Bartolus writes in his Life, was once playing a game of forfeits with other noble youths at court; the condition of the game was that he who lost should perform, by way of penance, whatever was

And must
be allowed
only with
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Shown by
examples.

laid on him by those who won. (Oh, wicked games, generally speaking, in which persons of different sexes are engaged!) Now, Aloysius happened to lose, and the penance enjoined on him was to kiss the shadow of a young girl that was thrown on the wall opposite. The holy youth, full of shame, ran off out of the room, left his pledge there, and could not be induced to take part in such games any more. To say nothing of many others, who did not even wish to venture into the company of their own sisters, I think and say now: A St. Hugo did not dare for so many years to look deliberately on a person of the opposite sex, although his duty obliged him to have frequent dealings with women, and therefore he could expect the special help of God in such occasions. A St. Aloysius thought even the shadow of an innocent young girl a source of danger, so that he did not wish to touch it, and ran away from it to avoid risking his soul. But where young and light-minded people come together, who are not given to constant prayer, fasting, and penance, as St. Hugo and St. Aloysius were; who are not so well armed as those saints with the fear and love of the omnipresent God; who do not dread the shadow of a person of the opposite sex; who look at each other freely and unrestrainedly; who stand and sit in close proximity to each other, laughing, talking, and amusing themselves, and not hesitating sometimes to take each other by the hand, there, there must not be the least danger to dread! Every one may have his own opinion on the matter; for my part, I should look on it as a miracle, if in such circumstances, where the outward senses meet with so many objects to inflame the passions, there were no danger of sin, at least in desire. According to the old saying, where such familiarity is allowed, purity must suffer.

Even great servants of God were led into sin by such company.

Not without reason does God admonish us by the wise Ecclesiasticus to be most careful in this respect: "Sit not at all with another man's wife."¹ Mark those words; when necessity does not require it, you must not even sit beside a person of the opposite sex; and the reason is given in the same chapter: "Many have perished by the beauty of a woman, and hereby lust is enkindled as a fire. Many, by admiring the beauty of another man's wife, have become reprobate; for her conversation burneth as a fire."² Ah, how many have been perverted in that way!

¹ Cum aliena muliere ne sedeat omnino.—Ecclesi. ix. 12.

² Propter speciem mulieris multi perierunt, et ex hoc concupiscentia quasi ignis exardescit. Speciem mulieris alienæ multi admirati, reprobati facti sunt; colloquium enim illius quasi ignis exardescit.—Ibid. 9, 11.

Hear what St. Augustine says in reference to occasions that some in his presence were maintaining to be of small account and not very dangerous. Laying his hand on his bosom, as if he wished to confirm by an oath the truth of his words, he said : “ Believe me, I have seen the cedars of Lebanon, men who were more firmly rooted in virtue, and whose minds were raised higher towards heaven, than the loftiest cedars ; I have seen them fall to the ground in such occasions and company, so that I wondered at it no less, nor was less terrified by it, than if I had beheld a St. Jerome falling from the height of his sanctity and becoming a public sinner, or a St. Ambrose denying the faith.”¹ In the Lives of the Saints we read of men who were models of holiness, such as Macarius, James, John, Victor, Guarinus, all men of great perfection and of long-trying virtue, who lived apart from the world in convents or deserts, spending their time in works of penance and mortification, till their bodily strength was exhausted; old veterans, who, after having long fought under the standard of Jesus Christ, at last fell into the most shameful crimes. And who was able to make them fall like that? The devil cannot boast of doing it in his own person; for years he had made war on them; he had appeared to them in the shape of fierce lions, of swine, and of oxen, and beaten them till they were half dead; but he was not able to conquer them. The cause of their ruin was a woman, with whom they at first began a holy conversation, and then committed sin. Who can read without pity of the holy hermit of whom Macarius writes? He had bravely endured the rack, the fire, the iron, and all the cruelty of the executioner rather than deny his faith ; but when he was brought back into prison, half dead, he fell into a shameful sin of impurity with the maid-servant who brought him his food. O dangerous company, which can pervert even a heroic martyr, and turn the brightest stars of the heavens into fire-brands of hell! And yet people think so lightly of it nowadays! It is even sought for expressly, and made a matter of previous arrangement; while the impure thoughts and desires that arise in such company are not even made matter of confession, since people deceive themselves by imagining that they did not consent to those thoughts. What! Not consent to them? Did you not voluntarily place the cause from which such thoughts arise?

And here I must utter a just complaint against those parents Complaint
against par-

¹ *Crede mihi, cedros Libani, et doctores gregis sub hac specie corrulisse vidi, de quorum casu non magis dubitabam, quam de Hieronymi et Ambrosii.*

ents who
allow their
children to
go into dan-
gerous com-
pany.

who are careless of their children in this respect; who, as I have often said before, when speaking of this damnable abuse, allow them to sit till late at night at the doors, when the neighbors assemble, and talk and laugh in the dark with each other about God knows what. And I must complain, too, of those parents who dress their daughters up in an extravagant, not to say scandalous style, and bring them into all sorts of company, that they may know something of the world as soon as possible, and learn how to behave in society; (we go with them, they say, so there is no danger. Do you think so? Are you, then, able to watch over their hearts? I am afraid that you would require some one to watch over your own first!) of those parents who allow their daughters to be alone with the person they intend marrying; (what more dangerous company can there possibly be, than this?) of those parents who look on while their daughters laugh, joke, and enjoy themselves with persons of the opposite sex, and actually laugh with them. Ah, what can be the result of such a way of bringing up children? "A virgin should tremble, and grow pale," says St. Ambrose, "when a man approaches or addresses her."¹ What will become of them when they are not merely permitted, but even encouraged, not to blush at the approach of a man, but to act with the utmost freedom towards him? Careless, un-Christian way of training children! what an enormous amount of vice and sin you cause in a town, in a whole country! Alas, what account will such parents be able to give of themselves on that day, when the great book will be opened in which all their actions are written down? But, they say, it is the custom for young people to meet together and amuse themselves; others may do it, and why not my son or daughter also? Why should my children be the only ones to remain at home? Ah, there you are again with the perverse customs of the world! If there is anything in what you say, then it is the custom to bring up children badly, and to lead them on the broad road on which so many are travelling towards hell. I lose patience when I think of this and similar abuses.

Exhortation
and resolu-
tion to
avoid dan-
gerous com-
pany.

Christians, he that loveth danger shall perish in it; such is my conclusion in the words of the Holy Ghost. Let us think of this, and carefully avoid dangerous company, and not venture into it unless we are compelled by necessity, or by our position or duty; but especially must we shun that company in which we know by experience that our hearts are turned away from heaven

¹ Trepidare virginum est, et ad omnes viri ingressus pavere.

to earth. Even in solitude, when we are alone, we cannot sometimes avoid temptation; why, then, should we wantonly seek the occasion of many temptations? That courtier, who left the world and retired into the desert, in order to save his soul, well understood that. When he was asked the reason of the change he made in his life, he answered by pointing to a picture representing a garden surrounded by a high wall, in the middle of which was a tree, blown about by the wind and almost torn out by the roots; under the tree was the inscription: "What if it were on the sea?"¹ By the walled-in garden he understood his solitary life; the tree represented himself; the stormy wind, temptation; and the high seas, the world, and the ordinary intercourse with men. His meaning was, if I am not safe from temptation in solitude, what would it be if I were in the midst of the turmoil of the world? If I have many a hard battle to fight here, so as to keep on the way of salvation, what fearful combats would I not have to sustain, if I had in addition to resist the attacks of countless dangerous objects? Ah, that is really the case, as I must acknowledge with Thomas à Kempis: "As often as I went amongst men, I returned less a man."² Therefore, if my duty, or necessity, or Christian charity, or courtesy does not oblige me to go into company, I will keep with Thee, O my God, who art present everywhere with me! And if solitude becomes tedious to me, if I find it hard to keep away from company into which I would willingly go, then I will think: if it is now so hard for me to remain alone a short time, what will it be hereafter, when I shall have to spend eternity in the flames of hell, surrounded by demons? To avoid that terrible company, should any difficulty or weariness seem too great now? I will think of that beautiful heaven, in which I hope to live forever in the society of the angels and saints, eternally praising Thee, O my God! In that heaven I will now live constantly in thought, and will say with Thy holy apostle, St. Paul: "But our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, Our Lord Jesus Christ, who will reform the body of our lowliness, made like to the body of His glory,"³ so that, with glorified bodies and illumined by the light of glory, we may rejoice with the elect for all eternity. Grant us, O

¹ Et quid in pelago?

² Quoties inter homines fui, minor homoredii.

³ Nostra autem conversatio in cœlis est, unde etiam Salvatorem expectamus Dominum nostrum Jesum Christum, qui reformabit corpus humilitatis nostræ, configuratum corpori claritatis suæ.—Philip. iii. 20, 21.

Lord, we humbly beg of Thee, Thy powerful grace to strengthen us in this resolution. Amen.

FIFTY-NINTH SERMON.

ON HUMAN FRAILTY IN DANGEROUS COMPANY AND OCCASIONS.

Subject.

He who does not carefully avoid dangerous company and occasions cannot long have Jesus Christ as his companion and friend, for our weakness, great enough of itself, becomes greater in such company and such occasions.—*Preached on the second Sunday after Epiphany.*

Text.

Vocatus est autem et Jesus et discipuli ejus ad nuptias.—John ii. 2.

“And Jesus also was invited, and His disciples, to the marriage.”

Introduction.

Truly, that was a joyous and happy marriage-feast, at which Jesus, the Son of God, and Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and the apostles of Our Lord appeared amongst the guests! Who would not willingly have been with them? Ah, Christians, would that all our social gatherings, conversations, meetings, entertainments, and marriage festivities were so arranged that we could invite Jesus without scruple to be present at them! But how many there are, especially during Shrove-tide, who in such assemblies cannot hope to have Jesus Christ as their friend and companion, or at least cannot have Him long! I allude to company from which the danger and occasion of sin is not far removed. Christians, if you wish to bear that sacred name in reality, ah, be on your guard as well as you can, not only at Shrove-tide, but at all times, against such company, if you do not want to lose Jesus, but to keep Him as your friend and companion! But this latter will not be the case, if you go into that company without urgent necessity, as I shall now show.

Plan of Discourse.

He who does not carefully avoid dangerous company and occasions cannot long have Jesus Christ as his companion and friend. Why so? Because our weakness and frailty is already great enough of itself, and it becomes still greater in such company and such occasions. There is the whole subject of to-day's sermon.

That we may fly from those dangers, help us by Thy grace, O Christ Jesus; we ask this of Thee through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary, and the protection of our guardian angels.

By dangerous company and occasions I do not now mean those meetings of two or more persons who assemble together for wicked purposes, or who generally commit sin when they meet; for such meetings are evidently sinful, and, in fact, they are the proximate occasion of sin. It is well known that they must be avoided just as carefully as sin itself, as I have elsewhere proved in detail. To-day I am speaking only of that company which, although many a one comes away from it without having committed sin, yet is apt to inspire evil desires, to give rise to temptations, and to lead into sin. For instance, if a man runs on ice in winter time, although he may happen not to fall, yet he is doing a very dangerous thing, and if there is no necessity for him to go on the ice, and he does fall, people are more likely to wonder at his foolhardiness than to pity him. It is the same with dangerous company; in the matter of temperance, when occasion is given to drunkenness; in the matter of justice, when opportunities of unjust gain are offered; in the matter of charity, when there is danger of giving way to anger, quarrelling, fighting, cursing, swearing, calumny, and detraction; in the matter of holy purity, when one is likely to be led into sins of bad thoughts, imaginations, and desires, on account of the too great freedom allowed with persons of the opposite sex; and it is this latter danger I wish to speak of particularly in this sermon. In a word, each and every circumstance that gives occasion to any kind of sin, and that each one knows best by his own experience to have been the occasion of sin, or at least of temptation to him, that is dangerous for him.

What is meant by dangerous company.

Such company and occasions, I say, must be most carefully avoided, if we wish to keep Jesus Christ, that is. His grace, as our friend and companion, and to preserve the purity of our conscience; nor can any one hope to do this for a long time

He who wantonly goes into such company will

not long
have Jesus
as his friend.
Shown by
a simile.

who ventures wantonly into such occasions, and that on account of our inborn frailty. No one who knows that he is of a weak and delicate constitution will expose himself to the attacks of an enemy who is always persecuting him; and if he does not carefully avoid that enemy, what has he to expect but blows and hard treatment? But if he were to open all the doors of his house to his enemy, what would be the consequence? And still more, if he were to provoke his enemy to attack him? Nay, what has he to expect if he actually throws down the weapons with which he might make some attempt to defend himself, gives them into the hands of his enemy, and thus renders the latter still more powerful against him. Would not such a man be looked upon as mad? Would there not be reason to conclude that it is his deliberate intention to allow himself to be conquered and beaten?

We have to
contend
against
many pow-
erful foes.

What is our life on earth, my dear brethren? Well known are the words of God by the Prophet Job, "The life of man upon earth is a warfare."¹ At all times, in all places, we have a most important combat to sustain, on which the fate of our immortal souls depends, and if we are vanquished, our souls are lost; a most dangerous combat, too, because opposed to us there are enemies who far surpass us in strength and power, who are countless in number, and most relentless and cruel in their nature; moved by the bitterest hatred, they have sworn to watch us day and night, that they may lose no opportunity of hurling us into eternal misery. The first and chief of those enemies is the devil with all the powers of hell, who is called in the Gospel, "the tempter."² In cunning and craft he is unsurpassable; for he has profited by long experience and by many victories gained over a great number of men, so that, as holy Job says, no one on earth is so powerful as he: "There is no power upon earth that can be compared with him who was made to fear no one; . . . he is king over all the children of pride."³ And, "your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour."⁴ Ah, be on your guard, poor mortal, that you fall not into his clutches! And we have another still more dangerous domestic enemy, from whom we cannot fly, and who ac-

¹ *Militia est vita hominis super terram.*—Joh vii. 1.

² *Tentator.*—Matt. iv. 3.

³ *Non est super terram potestas quae comparetur ei qui factus est ut nullum timeret; ipse est rex super universos filios superbiae.*—Job xli. 24, 25.

⁴ *Adversarius vester diabolus tanquam leo rugiens circuit, quærens quem devoret.*—I. Pet. v. 8.

companies us everywhere, no matter how careful we are; for, even if we were to hide in the caverns of the earth, we should not be able to escape his attacks. That enemy is our own corrupt flesh, which rebels against the spirit and right reason; our evil inclinations and desires that are always inciting us to sin, even against our will. I will say nothing of the perverse world, which, as St. Augustine says, gives occasion to thousands of sins by its human respect and vain fear of displeasing others, by its false maxims and principles, by its flattery, by its new-fangled fashions and abuses; nor will I now speak of those with whom we have to live and converse daily, and who lay all sorts of snares for us to lead us into sins of anger, impatience, cursing, and swearing. “And a man’s enemies shall be they of his own household,”¹ says Christ in the Gospel of St. Matthew.

O my God, who can look on himself as safe in the midst of so many foes! What strength and power must not be required to resist them properly! But, poor mortals that we are! we are so miserably weak, that I am at a loss for a comparison that can duly represent our frailty. The child walking on the slippery ice is not so likely to fall as we are to sin, even when all dangers and occasions are far removed from us. True, indeed, are the words of the Apostle, “we have this treasure in earthen vessels,”² that is, the treasure of sanctifying grace, of which we must be as careful as we should be of glass, lest it be shattered to pieces.

Alas, when I go in thought into Paradise, and see Adam there in a place of holiness, in a state of innocence and justice, richly endowed with such great graces, illumined with such light and perfect knowledge of divine and natural things, and nevertheless falling so deplorably at a single word from a woman, for the sake of pleasing whom he at once made up his mind to displease his God, and to doom his posterity to eternal death, and that, too, for such a wretched thing as a mouthful of fruit, from which he could easily have abstained in a garden filled with the choicest kind of fruit; Adam, I say, whose flesh was not yet rebellious against the spirit, whose desires were not, like ours, opposed to right reason, and who was yet so weak that he allowed himself to be overcome by a slight temptation—oh! I think, what great reason have we not to fear and to be on our guard, we, who are so weak when compared to him, and who are sub-

Whom we are too weak to resist of ourselves.

Of this we have an example in Adam.

¹ *Inimici hominis domestici eius.*—Matt. x. 36.

² *Habemus autem thesaurum istum in vasis fictilibus.*—II. Cor. iv. 7.

ject to so many violent temptations, even when we do not seek them? And what was it that led Adam to commit such a grievous transgression? It was not so much the desire to taste of the fruit, as the example and persuasion of his wife. For he saw how eagerly Eve had eaten the apple, although she was forbidden to do so under pain of death; he saw, too, that she did not die at once, and when she held out the fruit to him and asked him to taste it, he yielded immediately, and acted without hesitation against the divine command and against his own better lights. Oh! I think again, what power over our hearts has not the example of others with whom we associate!

In David. The same thoughts occur to me when I remember how king David, a man after God's own heart, inflamed with divine love, and a model of perfection, was perverted by a chance look at a person whom he saw far off, and whom he was not at all seeking; and perverted to such an extent, that he rushed headlong into the most abominable crimes, and for long years forgot his Creator, whom he had formerly loved with his whole heart, and forgot Him till the Prophet at last opened his eyes!

In St. Peter. And when I consider the prince of the apostles, St. Peter, who had sworn that he would rather die than leave his divine Master, and who, nevertheless, not only left Him, but denied Him three times running on oath, not forced thereto by soldiers with drawn swords, nor by a judge threatening him with the stake or the gibbet, but by a few words of a wretched maid-servant; when I consider this, I am forced to cry out in amazement: alas! poor mortals that we are! how is it that we are so weak and so liable to fall! And therefore I must warn you all, in the words of St. Paul, "wherefore he that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall." If those mighty giants have fallen before such contemptible foes, what have we not to fear, who are but dwarfs compared to them? If those strong pillars, who with their virtue and holiness seemed to bear up the heavens, were overthrown so easily, can we be sure of ourselves, who are but straws in comparison to them? If those beautiful stars, which have, as it were, shed their light on others, were darkened so soon, how little it must require to extinguish the feeble light that we are carrying about in earthen lamps, exposed to the furious storms of the world, and beset with a thousand dangers to our souls!

¹ Ita que, qui se existimat stare, vident ne cadat.—I. Cor. x. 12.

And yet (O my God, what presumption!) we who are so weak that we should with reason keep ourselves in safety at home as far as we can, we actually rush into new dangers! We seek on purpose the occasions of sin, and wantonly go into the midst of the fight, that is, into company in which occasion for temptation and sin will be given, and in which holy servants of God are often led astray. Is not that opening the doors and windows to the enemy, and giving free admission to sin and vice? Is it not making ourselves twice as weak as we were before; weak inwardly and outwardly? Is it not abandoning the little spiritual strength still left us, and surrendering our arms to the devil, that he may gain an easier victory over us? And, finally, is it not wilfully sacrificing sanctifying grace and the friendship of God, and sinning without scruple? For, what are the weapons that the enemy of our souls makes use of to our destruction? They are our own evil desires and inordinate appetites. But where could they be more inflamed than when attractive objects are presented to them, which please both eyes and ears? For, as St. Jerome remarks, thereby reason is befooled, the understanding darkened, and the will captivated and bewitched. And what is it that presents to our senses such objects, especially in the matter of impurity, if not dangerous company and occasions, in which persons of both sexes meet together frequently for the purpose of amusement? That is the company in which, amidst unrestrained and friendly conversation, flattering words and caressing manners, and the excitement of laughter and amusement, the fire of lust is enkindled, the imagination inflamed, the corruption of our nature awakened, and the devil gains his wished-for prey.

He therefore acts presumptuously who goes into such company without being compelled by necessity.

Now, O man! amidst so many attacks of most powerful enemies that assail you on all sides, internally and externally, how do you expect to be able to keep free for any length of time, at least from impure thoughts and imaginations, and to come away with a good conscience? A man of great holiness was once asked by the brethren of his order what he would have done if he had been present in a certain temptation and occasion in which they had been. He thought a while, and then answered: "I know what I ought to have done; but I cannot say what I would have done."¹ "Oh, no! no one, no matter who he is," says St. Cyprian, "can long keep from sin if he goes without necessity into such dangerous occasions."²

For he is in great danger of sin.

¹ Scio quid facere debuisssem; sed nescio quid facturus fuisssem.

² Nemo tutus est periculo proximus.

There are many such presumptuous people.

And yet, alas, how little people think of the danger! How many Christians there are, even amongst those who are reckoned good and pious, who not only have no fear of such company, but make an almost daily habit of frequenting it? Persons of both sexes, boys and girls, men and maid-servants, and neighbors, men and women, stand and sit, walk, laugh, and joke together, even with the parents' consent, in the one room, or at the door, or in the street, in the evening, till it is quite dark, or else they go for a walk together outside the town and in the public gardens. Persons of both sexes, married and single, habitually spend at parties the precious time given them by God for the sole purpose of saving their souls (but that, important as it is, is the least to be considered in the matter), and squander it away till late at night, playing cards, talking, singing, and dancing, as if they were made of different materials from other people; as if they had received from heaven a written assurance, confirming them in grace, so that no temptation could ever induce them to give their consent to sin in future.

In vain do they rely on their good resolutions.

And on what, in God's name, do they ground this fancied security? Perhaps on their firm purpose never to sin against God and holy purity by thoughts or desires, words or conversation, or outward actions, at such parties and in such company? For they generally pretend that there is no harm in them, and that they are but an innocent form of amusement. Ah, how wretchedly they deceive themselves! No danger of sin even in thought and desire, in company of the kind! For once or twice that might perhaps be the case; but how is it credible, nay possible, that one who is in the habit of frequenting such company should avoid all sin? For each time it is and remains dangerous. And what reason have we poor mortals to trust so much to our purpose of not offending God? Our forefather Adam had the same purpose in the beginning; so had David, and so had Peter; yet, when the danger and the occasion came, they fell most disgracefully. It is one thing to have the purpose of not sinning, and another to carry out that purpose when the time comes, especially in circumstances that are apt to offer a gentle violence to our inclinations and appetites.

For the presence of the occasion drives the resolution out of their heads.

Read what the Book of Exodus says of this in the thirty-second chapter: Moses was speaking with God on Mount Sinai, and meanwhile the Lord saw that the people had made a golden calf, and were dancing round and adoring it. Filled with indignation, He said to Moses: "I see that this people is stiff-necked;

let me alone, that My wrath may be kindled against them, and that I may destroy them.”¹ Be patient, O Lord, said Moses; restrain Thy anger! Remember that they are Thy chosen people, whom I have conducted thus far with such care. What would the Egyptians say? They would say: “He craftily brought them out, that he might kill them in the mountains, and destroy them from the earth.”² Pardon them, O Lord! If Thou wishest to wreck Thy vengeance on any one, behold me; slay me if Thou wilt, but spare my beloved people! “Let Thy anger cease, and be appeased upon the wickedness of Thy people.”³ What do you think, my dear brethren, of this mildness, meekness, mercy, and love on the part of Moses? Could it well have been greater? And in spite of His anger, God was appeased and pacified by it: “And the Lord was appeased from doing the evil which He had spoken against His people.”⁴ But wait a while, till Moses has come down from the mountain to the camp: “And when he came nigh to the camp, he saw the calf and the dances.”⁵ And in a moment, as the Scripture says, “being very angry, he threw the tables out of his hand, and broke them at the foot of the mount.”⁶ Fire flashed from his eyes, and he cried out in a voice of thunder, “if any man be on the Lord’s side, let him join with me: put every man his sword upon his thigh; go and return from gate to gate through the midst of the camp, and let every man kill his brother, and friend, and neighbor.”⁷ And then, at the command of Moses, on that day were slain twenty-three thousand people.”⁸ Mark, my dear brethren, the difference between the conduct of Moses on the mountain, and in the camp. Was he no longer the same man who had been on the mountain a short time before? Yes. Was he not the same Moses who had appeased the divine anger and obtained forgiveness from God for his erring people? Yes. When on the mountain, did he not know of the sin into which the people had fallen? Yes, for God told him of it. Was it

Shown by
an example.

¹ Cerno quod populus iste duræ cervicis sit: dimitte me, ut irascatur furor meus contra eos, et deleam eos.—Exod. xxxii. 9, 10.

² Callide eduxit eos, ut interficeret in montibus, et deleret e terra.—Ibid. 12.

³ Quiescat ira tua, et esto placabilis super nequitia populi tui.—Ibid.

⁴ Placatusque est Dominus, ne faceret malum, quod locutus fuerat adversus populum suum.—Ibid. 14.

⁵ Cumque appropinquasset ad castra, vidit vitulum et choros.—Ibid. 19.

⁶ Iratusque valde, projecit de manu tabulas, et confregit eas ad radicem montis.—Ibid.

⁷ Si quis est Domini, jungatur mihi: ponat vir gladium super femur suum: ite, et redite de porta usque ad portam per medium castrorum, et occidat unusquisque fratrem, et amicum, et proximum suum.—Ibid. 26, 27.

⁸ Cecideruntque in die illa quasi viginti tria millia hominum.—Ibid. 28.

not the same sin that he saw them commit when he came down from the mountain? Yes. And there was no new feature in it? No. Why, then, did the mildness and meekness of Moses so suddenly become changed into anger and wrath? A moment ago he had offered himself as a sacrifice for the people, and now he slays them without mercy; the good God spares them at the prayer of Moses, and now Moses himself wishes to punish them. Whence came such a sudden change? Do you wish to know the cause of it? Hear, then, what St. Ambrose says: "The eyes have a far greater power of persuading with regard to what they see, than the ears with regard to what they hear."¹ Moses knew, while on the mount, the impurity and idolatry of which his people were guilty; but he knew it only remotely and by hearing, when it was revealed to him by God; but afterwards, when he saw the sin committed, it made a much stronger impression on his mind, so that his meekness was turned into anger.

Especially
the occasion
of impurity.

Now, if such a meek, holy, and loving man was so suddenly changed against his own firm resolution, by seeing an action that was calculated to awaken in him a feeling of anger and disgust, a feeling that Moses appeared to have completely overcome by the virtue of meekness, how difficult must it not be for one who has far less virtue to restrain the passion of impurity, which is the most violent and unruly of all our evil inclinations, and to restrain it in presence of an object that is in itself beautiful, alluring, and agreeable to the eyes; when he has full liberty to act towards that object with the greatest familiarity amid the amusements of a party of pleasure? Who could trust that in such an occasion he would keep firmly to the resolutions, made by him long before, not to sin? Ah! we are not made of steel or iron; and even if we were, there would still be danger for us. Even the hardest and heaviest piece of iron can be attracted in any direction one wishes by the power of the magnet.

In which
even the
hollest have
fallen dis-
gracefully.

Does it not seem as if Ammon should have had a heart as firm as iron, instructed as he was in the school of penance, and brought up in the fear of God by his holy father David? Could any one imagine that there would be danger for him in the company of his own sister Thamar? And yet that company so inflamed his passions that he was guilty of a most horrible crime. An example that should not be forgotten by those people of both sexes who are too familiar with each other under pretext of

¹ Citius persuadent oculi, quod cernunt, quam auris potest insnuare, quod præterit.—St. Ambr. serm. lxxvi.

relationship. Did not Henry VIII., king of England, seem to have had a heart of iron, when, surpassing all the other princes of his time in understanding, knowledge, and zeal for the Catholic faith, he wrote against the heretics so well that he received from the Pope the title of "Defender of the Faith"? Who would have imagined that he would have changed so suddenly and so completely; that he would have forgotten the fear of the Lord, have divorced his lawful wife, lived in open adultery, renounced the Catholic faith, which he had before heroically defended, bathed his hands in the blood of Catholics, and brought all England under the cruel yoke of heresy? Who, I ask, could have foreseen that? And yet, such was really the case with him. And what was the cause of that terrible change? The company and familiarity with a woman who was publicly looked on as of doubtful reputation, Anne Boleyn, for whom he entertained an impure passion. Have you ever read in the History of the Church of what tyrants, such as Nero, Diocletian, Maximian, Lucinius, and others did to overcome the constancy of the early Christians? What were the most powerful weapons they made use of, by which they succeeded in inducing some to abjure the true faith? Perhaps the rack, the sword, the spear, the gallows, and the gridirons with which they threatened them? Ah, no, says St. Cyprian; no torments were capable of subduing those Christian heroes, who only laughed and mocked at them. And what then? The flattery and caresses of the women who were sent into their prisons; that was successful in effecting what neither rack nor torture could do, and in making them deny Christ and adore false gods. "He endeavored," says St. Cyprian, speaking of one of those tyrants, "to do by the power of sensual pleasure what he could not effect by the sword, hunger, or cold."¹ It is sad to read what Surius writes in the Life of the holy hermit Victorinus, who was afterwards a martyr. After having sold all his goods and given the price to the poor; after having become quite emaciated by long and rigorous fasting; after having spent many years in a gloomy cave, so narrow that he could not stretch himself in it, and taking his rest on the bare earth, on which he could sleep only in a sitting position, while, if any one happened to be with him, he could not even sit down, but had to stand; into a place of that kind, which resembled the den of a wolf more than the habitation of a human being, he ventured one night to introduce, out of pure Christian

¹ Ut quos ferro, fame, gulu vincere non poterat, voluptate corrumpere.

charity, a girl who, as he thought, had lost her way; and his only idea in giving her shelter for the night was to save her from the danger of falling down some precipice, or being eaten by wild beasts, if she were to wander about the desert alone. But he acted without having recourse to God by prayer, or taking counsel with Him to guard himself from a snare; he trusted to his emaciated body, and to his, as he thought, fully mortified life. And so he took the supposed girl into his cell. But alas! says the historian, “hardly had one hour elapsed, when he found that the fire of concupiscence was not wholly extinguished in him; the girl’s flattering words kindled the flame, solitude gave him the opportunity, and an impure passion induced him to commit the sinful act.”¹ Victorinus fell into sin and was immediately laughed at by the devil, who had deceived him under the appearance of a young girl. After this lamentable fall he entered into himself and with sorrow of heart acknowledged that in no place, at no time, in no condition, and not even in old age, should we trust to ourselves or to our good resolutions, unless we carefully avoid dangerous occasions of sin. From this, my dear brethren, you may see what power an agreeable object has over the human heart, when one deals with it too familiarly.

Confirmed
by daily
experience.

But why should I spend so long to prove this? Let each one of you consult his own heart and his own experience. What ideas arose in your mind whenever you happened to cast your eyes too freely and for too long a time on a person of the opposite sex? How often have you not, even in the church, before the altar of God, hearing holy Mass, at which the angels tremble with awe, if you happened to be sitting beside one of the other sex, had enough to do to restrain your curiosity and to repress evil thoughts? On that account it was the custom in early times, and is still in many places, for the sexes to be separated in church. How often has it not happened that if one of the other sex happened to pass by while you were engaged in some devotion, all your attention and devotion vanished at once? Why so? Because a single glance of the kind is enough to turn our thoughts from God, by the inordinate desires it excites. Since that is so, how can you dare to hope that you can spend whole hours, a whole evening, or half the night in company in which people of both sexes pass away the time in amusements, in laughing, joking, and dancing, without experiencing at least

¹ *Vix horæ spatium intercesserat; addit igniculum dulcedo sermonis; urget facinus solitudo; furtivus amor scelus perficit.*—Surius in vita, 5 Septem.

a thought contrary to the law of God? No, no; your own heart and conscience tell you that it is impossible. And if you wished to deny that before men, you could not conceal it from the all-seeing God, who searches the reins and the heart. But what must be the consequence when one often seeks company of that kind; for the desire of seeing this or that person increases more and more? And finally, what must be the result, if two persons thus attached to each other are in the habit of meeting in secret?

Therefore I repeat my proposition: if we wish to have Jesus Christ as our constant friend and companion, and to keep free from sin, we must most carefully avoid all such dangerous company, unless necessity or the ordinary laws of courtesy sometimes compel us to go into it. Ah! fly, fly the danger! as the wise Ecclesiasticus warns us: "Flee from sins as from the face of a serpent; for if thou comest near them, they will take hold of thee." Mark those words; we must fly sins, not merely as we would the poisonous bite of a serpent; but we must flee from them as from the face of a serpent; we must keep them as far off from us as possible. A wonderful thing sometimes happens to the nightingale; it is singing away cheerfully on a tree overhanging a brook, filling mountain and forest with its pleasing notes, when a poisonous toad comes creeping up, and looks open-mouthed at the songster. What follows? At the first glance the bird ceases its song; its joy is at an end; it feels a violence it cannot resist; its wings refuse to support it, and it falls from branch to branch until it falls into the open mouth of the toad and is swallowed by it. That may be the result of some secret power of fascination, or it may be caused by the poisonous breath of the toad; but in any case it is certain that the mere neighborhood of the latter is fatal to the poor bird, although the toad may not have bitten it, nor otherwise injured it. Athanasius Kircher writes of a similar occurrence that once happened to a man. In the year 1660, a hunter in Switzerland came across a winged dragon of about the size of a vulture; he at once took aim at the dragon with his loaded gun, and shot it through the throat, so that it fell dead on the ground. The hunter, overjoyed at the success of his shot, went to look at the dragon, and touched it with his hand; but the bare sight and touch of it was just as bad as if he had imbibed its poison. Hardly had he arrived home, when he died suddenly from the effects of the poison, which he had absorbed through his eyes and hand. Christian

Therefore we must shun all dangerous company and occasions.

¹ Quasi a facie colubri fuge peccata; et si accesseris ad illa, suscipient te.—Eccius. xxi. 2.

soul, there is a poisonous dragon for you in that young man who flatters and caresses you; in that young girl who smiles so invitingly at you; in that beautiful figure you admire so earnestly; be careful and do not venture to be too familiar with such dangerous company, for the bare sight of it is enough to attract your heart by natural sympathy; the mere vicinity, I will not say touch, of such persons is enough to infuse poison into your veins, and to take away the life of your soul. "Flee from sins as from the face of a serpent;" that is, avoid everything that could be even remotely an occasion of sin to you, although it is not directly sinful in itself, and may not appear to be dangerous.

Flight is
necessary to
save the
soul.

Fly! flight in this matter is commendable and necessary in order to conquer; our weakness is too great for us to conquer in any other way. Not without astonishment do we read in Holy Scripture of so many most valiant heroes flying from their enemies in order to avoid a contest with them. In the Book of Genesis we find Jacob flying from his brother Esau; in the Book of Exodus, Moses flying from Pharaoh; in the Third Book of Kings, Elias flying from Jezabel; in the Book of Jeremias, Urias flying from Joachim; in the Second Book of Kings, David flying from his son Absalom; and in the First Book, David himself flying twelve times from king Saul. In the same way, the Apostle St. Peter takes to flight out of his prison; St Paul escapes by means of a basket from the walls; Jesus Christ, the almighty God, flies from Herod, and He warns His disciples to fly also: "And when they shall persecute you in this city, flee into another." Flight was not a disgrace to these heroes, for they sought honor and glory therein. Certainly David boasted of it more than once, for he begins some of the psalms, as, for instance, the third, "The Psalm of David when he fled from the face of his son Absalom;"¹ and the title of the fifty-sixth is, "For David, when he fled from Saul into the cave."² And so, too, in the spiritual combat we must often take to flight, if we wish to overcome our enemies and to gain the victory. In every society, or company, or friendly conversation, there is perhaps a cruel Esau, a ferocious Saul, who can easily conquer you. There is perhaps a beautiful Absalom, who can ensnare you in the meshes of his curly locks; there is a tricked-out Jezabel, who can bewitch you by her caresses. Perhaps there is a Herod, who is meditating

¹ Cum autem persequantur vos in civitate ista, fugite in altam.—Matt. x. 23.

² Psalm David, cum fugeret a facie Absalom filii sui.

³ Cum fugeret a facie Saul in speluncam.

an attack on your virtue, and has already often made you his prisoner; there may be an Aretas, who tries to inveigle you by his presents and to win your heart. Oh, woe to you, Christian soul, if you come too near to them! If you do not wish to be overcome, you must avoid the combat by flight; flight alone can save the life of your soul. "O God," says David, "I have declared to Thee my life,"¹ or, as the Hebrew text has it, "I have declared to Thee my flight,"² I have made known to Thee that I took to flight, in order to show that in such occasions it is the same thing to take to flight and to preserve the life of the soul.

Yes, my God, I acknowledge that to be true, and I know by my own sad experience that I have often been overcome in dangerous company and occasions! Should I not, then, be on my guard against them? Ah, how often do I not complain of my weakness and frailty, and allege them as an excuse for my faults and sins! But it is not that weakness that will condemn me at Thy judgment-seat. I acknowledge, then, that my frailty is so great that it is only with difficulty that I can resist temptations when I am alone at home; why, then, did I lessen the little strength I have, by going without cause into such company, thus opening wide the door to the tempter; for I gave full liberty to eyes, ears, and the other senses to see, hear, and do as they pleased? No, in future I shall be more cautious, and shall try to guard my soul, as I have but one to lose, and to lose forever; to guard it in solitude, whether it is Shrove-tide or Lent, or whatever season of the year it may be. Let men think and say of me what they please; it is a matter of little importance to me. If they ask me, why are you so bashful? Why do you not do as others do? Why do you not go to parties like others of your age and condition? I will answer them as Demosthenes answered, when asked why he took to flight, "I am saving myself for my country."³ I am saving myself for paradise, I will say; heaven is too dear for me to run the danger of losing it. If thus I am deprived of the pleasure to be derived from such company, yet I have still the consolation and great happiness of possessing Jesus, my God, as my friend and companion here on earth, with the hope of having Him in the next life as my reward in the joyous company of the saints in the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

Conclusion
and resolution.

¹ Deus, vitam meam annunciaui tibi.—Ps. lxx. 8, 9.

² Fugam meam annunciaui tibi.

³ Servo me patriae.

SIXTIETH SERMON.

ON THE USELESSNESS OF RELYING ON THE DIVINE ASSISTANCE
WHEN WE VOLUNTARILY RUSH INTO DANGER.

Subject.

He who goes into dangerous company and occasions without necessity in vain expects the divine assistance to keep him from sin.—*Preached on the third Sunday after Epiphany.*

Text.

Domine, si vis, potes me mundare.—Matt. viii. 2.
“Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.”

Introduction.

Great was the confidence shown by this leper in the power and goodness of Jesus Christ. He did not complain, as other beggars are wont to do, of his misery; he did not assail Our Lord with importunate cries, Lord, heal me of my sickness! but he merely alluded to the almighty power of Christ: “Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.” He does not even doubt Our Lord’s good will. And moved by this appeal of the leper, Christ said to him: “I will; be thou made clean.” With like confidence, my dear brethren, we should make known to God in prayer the necessities of our souls. He is omnipotence itself, and can help us; He is wisdom itself, and knows our wants; He is goodness and mercy itself, and He will help us, if we only do what in us lies. And I add this last condition, because many have too much confidence in the divine assistance, not doing what they ought to entitle them to it. That is, however, not confidence, but presumption. Such are, amongst others, those of whom I spoke in my last sermon, who frequent dangerous company without necessity, and then trust in “the help of God to keep them from sin.” “Lord, if Thou wilt Thou canst help me,” they seem to say, although I am weak and frail, and inclined to evil; Thou canst keep me from sin, even in that danger, in that company, in that society, in those Shrove-tide amusements. But I am afraid they will have to wait a long time before God says to them, “I will;” go on confidently and trust in My assistance, you will not suffer any harm. No, presumptuous mortals that you are; I tell you straight out, though I am no prophet, that you are deceiving yourselves; God will not

assist you with His help and grace in such circumstances, as I shall now show by way of warning to all; and I say:

Plan of Discourse.

If a man goes without necessity into dangerous company and occasions, he has no right to expect the divine assistance to keep him free from sin; God will deprive him of His help in punishment of his presumption; and for that reason dangerous company should be all the more carefully avoided. Such is the whole subject.

Lord, we will be on our guard against those dangers, and then Thou wilt help us to keep in Thy grace. May we not hope to obtain that favor from Thee, provided Thou helpest us by Thy grace to carry into effect this firm resolution of ours? And that help we beg of Thee with confidence through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

It is true that even the weakest man is strong enough with the help of God's grace to resist the attacks of all the powers of hell, and to come off victorious in the greatest dangers. And it is also true that the good God never abandons a man, unless the latter first abandons Him; that He never refuses His help and grace to those who are disposed to receive it, and that He has promised not to forsake us in temptations, according to the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able, but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it."¹ But mark, my dear brethren, what the same apostle says in the same verse: "Let no temptation take hold on you but such as is human."² For there are two kinds of temptation, one which assails us without our seeking it, and which comes as it were by chance and of itself in the daily occurrences of life, and which often gives rise to inordinate desires, to faults and imperfections; and this kind, since it is only too common amongst us poor mortals, is called human temptation. The other kind is that into which one goes of his own accord and without being compelled by necessity: and of that the Apostle says in another place, "Give not place to the devil;"³ and it is therefore called diabolical temptation, because to rush open-eyed into the danger and occasion of sin is a malice more diabolical than human.

When we wilfully rush into danger, we cannot expect the help of God.

¹ *Fidelis autem Deus est, qui non patietur vos tentari supra id, quod potestis, sed faciet etiam cum tentatione proventum, ut possitis sustinere.*—I. Cor. x. 13.

² *Tentatio vos non apprehendat, nisi humana.*—*Ibid.*

³ *Nolite locum dare diabolo.*—Ephes. iv. 27.

Now, in those temptations that are human, and assail us against our will, there is no doubt that God will help us by His grace to overcome them without special difficulty, provided we earnestly co-operate with Him; but in the other class of temptations, that are wilfully sought for without necessity, we cannot reasonably hope for or expect the grace of God; nay, according to the general arrangements of divine Providence, even if one were to ask for grace in such circumstances, it would not be given him. By grace here I mean what St. Augustine calls victorious, efficacious grace, that is, a grace by which one really resists his evil inclinations and overcomes the temptation.

As a general rule God will not give His graces under such circumstances.

And what right or title have you to expect and to obtain this special help from God if you rush wantonly into the danger? Perhaps you have a right founded on justice? But God owes nothing to any one; otherwise the helps He gives would not be graces, which He does not bestow on us according to our will, but according to the decrees of His infinite wisdom, and He gives them when, how, and to whom He pleases, as St. Cyprian says. ¹ Perhaps you have a right founded on His goodness and mercy? But you make yourself altogether unworthy of it by your presumption. Lastly, perhaps your title is founded on His fidelity? But nowhere do we read that He has promised the special helps of His grace to any one under such circumstances. He rather threatens quite the contrary, by the wise Ecclesiasticus: "He that loveth danger, shall perish in it."² I will abandon him who seeks the danger, and allow him to perish in it. If, then, you wish to argue according to the rules of sound logic, you must come to the following conclusion: God is infinitely faithful and true in His words; what He has foretold must certainly come to pass, so that I will certainly sin and perish in the danger which I seek and into which I rush without necessity, because God has expressly said that such will be the case.

And justly. Shown by similes.

And with justice does God act in that way towards men. In fact, it is the way in which we men act to each other. If a respectable man is overtaken by a misfortune which he could not foresee, no one, unless a sworn enemy of his, but would pity him. But if you see a man, in spite of oft-repeated, friendly warnings, going headlong to ruin, running all sorts of risks in the most reckless manner, and finally going to the bad altogether, oh, you think, it serves him right! He was warned often

¹ Ordine suo, non arbitrio nostro, virtus Spiritus Sanctus ministratur.—S. Cyp. desig. char.

² Qui amat periculum, in illo peribit.—Eccles. iii. 27.

enough, and should have known better. You pity the innocent child that is bitten by a dog ; but if a naughty boy, who has been provoking the dog, gets bitten, you have no pity for him, and you think he has got what he deserves. Now, if such is the opinion of sensible men in such cases, has not the almighty God still more right on His side to act as He does ? Hear what He Himself says : “ Who will pity a charmer struck by a serpent, or any that come near wild beasts ? ”¹ A mountebank will caress a living serpent, and put his finger in its mouth, as such people often do on fair-days ; but if he is at last bitten by the serpent, so that he dies from the bite, who will pity him ? No one ; he is the cause of his own misfortune. Let me now represent to you, my dear brethren, two men, one of whom was a king, the other a philosopher ; the first was Ingor, king of Russia ; the other, Heraclides, a pupil of Plato. Both were killed by the bite of a serpent. The former was out hunting one day, when he knocked his foot by chance against the skull of a dead horse, in which an adder lay concealed ; the adder sprang out at once, and bit the unfortunate king in the foot. Thus perished the unhappy Ingor. Truly, it was an unfortunate thing for him to lose his life, where he had no reason to suspect any danger, and, no doubt, you have a heartfelt pity for him. But Heraclides was not so deserving of your commiseration. He had as pets two tame but poisonous serpents, which accompanied their master everywhere he went, as if they were his servants ; they used to eat with him at the same table, nay, sometimes even out of his mouth ; he often used to caress them with his hand, and at night they slept in the same bed with him. But one night it happened that Heraclides, turning over in the bed in his sleep, was bitten by one of the serpents, because he pressed rather too hard on it, and he died from the bite. And it serves him right, you will think ; he might easily have guessed that such would be his fate sooner or later ; for he who makes a pet of a poisonous serpent must expect it to bite him. “ So it is,” continues the wise Ecclesiasticus, “ with him that keepeth company with a wicked man, and is involved in his sins.”² For dangerous company and occasions are poisonous adders and cruel serpents ; if you go into them without necessity, and frequent them without scruple, and then fall under the assaults of

¹ Quis miserebitur incantatori a serpente percusso, et omnibus qui appropiant bestiis?—*Eccles. xii. 13*

² Et sic qui committatur cum viro iniquo, et obvolutus est in peccatis ejus.—*Ibid.*

temptation, who will pity you? Who will help you? The almighty God with His extraordinary graces? Oh, no; He has not placed them at the disposal of any one in such a way that we can deal recklessly in their regard. "Spiritual strength," says St. Cyprian, "is conferred on us to make us careful, not to encourage us to be reckless."¹

For God does not give grace to the presumptuous.

True, "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."² But that protection will be given "in thy ways," not in your headlong rushing into danger. In your ordinary ways; that is, in the occasions that you cannot avoid, and that you must go into, in order to fulfil the duties of your state, although there may be temptations and dangers of evil in them; in those the angels will perform their office, and endeavor to protect you from sin; but not in those occasions into which you rush without necessity, and for the purpose of gratifying your inordinate appetites, your sensuality, or your impure inclinations. Do you know the answer that Christ gave the tempter, when the latter brought Him up to the pinnacle of the Temple, asking Him to throw Himself down, to prove the truth of the divine promise, "He hath given His angels charge over thee, etc." ? No, said Our Lord to him; "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord, thy God."³ From this you may conclude that to expect the special help of grace in dangerous company that one seeks deliberately, or frequents for the sake of amusement, is not confidence in God, but rather presumption, and tempting God. True, God has prepared His special graces for men; but for what men? For the prudent, modest, and careful; not for negligent and careless Christians. He has prepared them for whom? For the just man, who is humble and cautious, who knows his own weakness and frailty, who watches over his outward senses, and shuns all danger as far as he can; but not for a reckless, heedless man, who without the least scruple gives all liberty to his senses, and rashly loves dangerous occasions. Not the vain, the dissolute, and the careless, but the modest and reserved, who are fond of keeping at home, are the souls in whom the grace of God loves to dwell.

Such as they are who rush into

You refuse to take any trouble to protect yourself, and place all your hope on the help of God; you despise the grace by which

¹ Ita nobis spiritualis fortitudo collata est, ut providos faciat, non ut præcipientes tueatur.

² Angelis 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.

³ Non tentabis Dominum Deum tuum.—Matt. iv. 7.

He tells you not to go into that house, that company, and expect Him to help you in a special manner when you are actually in the midst of the danger, that you may not be overcome by it; you have not the least hesitation in taking part in those amusements, in going with those persons, in joining in that Shrovetide merry-making, although you are liable to meet all sorts of persons who are dangerous to you; and you think that God will protect you, watch over your heart, and keep the unclean spirit from entering it; is not that presumptuously tempting God, and desiring Him to stretch forth His hand to work a miracle for you? Nay, is it not asking Him to be a partner and helper in your presumption? "Vain is the hope," says St. Augustine, "that expects to be safe in the midst of allurements to sin." Have you ever heard of any one venturing out to sea in a ship, after the sailors have told him that she is not seaworthy? Have you ever heard of any one going into a house, after the neighbors have warned him that the plague is in it? In the Life of the holy monk Simeon, who lived and died here in Treves, I read an account of a man whose recklessness cost him dear. The Saint was sailing on the Nile in a Venetian vessel, when they met another ship, the helmsman of which cried out in a loud voice: Do not go any farther, good people! there are pirates farther on, whom I have barely managed to escape; go back at once! The captain of the Venetian vessel disregarded the warning, and kept on his way. After a little they again met a ship, the whole crew of which shouted to him at the top of their voices to return, or he would fall into the hands of pirates and lose life and property, adding that they themselves escaped only, as it were, by a miracle. The captain acted as if he had heard nothing, and sailed along as before. Immediately after, a third ship came up, making off as fast as possible, while the pale countenances of the crew, who were almost disabled with wounds and were therefore unable to call out to warn the others, spoke as plainly as possible of an imminent danger, but the Venetian captain disregarded this third warning, too. Then St. Simeon said to him privately: "my brother, if Our Lord were to send an angel to warn you, you would be so terrified at the sight of him, that you would turn back at once; but since God has sent people like yourself to warn you to-day, yesterday, and the day before, you should not

danger
without
necessity.

¹ Lubrica est illa spes, quæ inter fomenta peccati se salvati sperat.

neglect their advice.”¹ But there was no moving the obstinate man; he thought he was surrounded by cowards, and so he kept on, and the next day he fell into the hands of the pirates. St. Simeon sprang from the ship into the river, full of confidence in God, and repeating the words of the Psalmist: “Thy way is in the sea, and Thy paths in many waters.”² He was enabled by the divine assistance to dive and to keep under water until he reached the shore in safety. But “the obstinate captain was the first of all the others to lose his head,”³ according to the historian. I could wish I had his head here to show to those reckless people who rush wantonly into danger, in spite of repeated warnings. God calls out to them in unmistakable accents, do not go near that house! he that loveth danger shall perish in it! The holy angels call out with their good inspirations, go back; the hellish pirates are lying in wait for you! The holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church call out with their exhortations; preachers and confessors implore them in the name of God to keep away from the danger into which necessity does not compel them to go. All agree in telling them that such occasions and company are a source of danger for their souls, that the Evil One is lying in wait for them there, and that they run the risk of being infected with a mortal spiritual malady. But they care nothing for it all; they trust in the help of God, and hope that He will keep them free from sin. Let them have their way, then; but they will see how it will end with them; they will be, not, indeed, the first, for in all likelihood thousands have already lost their heads in such occasions, but they will certainly be of the number of those who have left such company with their souls mortally wounded; nay, perhaps they may be amongst the wretched ones who have lost the lives of their souls forever. Once for all, “vain is the hope that expects to be safe in the midst of allurements to sin.”

The saints
convict
them of
presump-
tion.

If, says St. Bernard, God were prepared to help us with His powerful graces in those dangers which we seek of our own accord, then those holy people whose example we are exhorted to follow have acted imprudently and have given themselves unnecessary trouble in separating themselves from the society of

¹ *Frater, si Dominus Christus de caelo angelum misisset, tu territus aspectum illius ferre non posses; nunc vero, quia hodie, heri, et nudius tertius non unum sed plures legatos misit tui similes, legationem Dei non negligenter suscipere debes.*—*Evervius in Vita S. Simeon. monachi apud Sur. i. Jun.*

² *In mari via tua, et semitæ tuæ in aquis multis.*—*Ps. lxxvi. 20.*

³ *Ipsi nauclero primum caput amputant.*

men, and living in gloomy solitudes, continually mortifying their senses, in order to avoid the danger of sin. The innocent Job, whose holiness was attested by God Himself, made a compact with his eyes, so as not to admit even a thought of a person of the opposite sex: "I made a covenant with my eyes, that I would not so much as think upon a virgin."¹ St. John Chrysostom cannot sufficiently express his astonishment at this; it seems a strange thing, he says, for such a heroic man, who fought so bravely against the devil, and gained so many victories over him, to fear an innocent maiden and turn his eyes away from her, as if she were more to be dreaded than the evil spirit himself. When he saw the latter approach, he did not fly, but remained, boldly holding his ground and confident that he would be able to overcome him; but he did not dare to remain in the presence of a virgin, and as soon as he saw one approach, he turned his eyes in another direction. "For he thought that in a contest against the demons he should give proof of a manly courage and constancy, but when fighting in the cause of holy purity, that the victory was to be gained, not by seeking, but by avoiding the company of persons of the other sex."² St. John the Baptist, who came into the world endowed with sanctifying grace, and who, according to the testimony of Our Lord, was the greatest of all born of woman, went into the wilderness in his very childhood. St. Jerome, a man of consummate wisdom, took up his dwelling amongst the wild beasts, and used to beat his breast with a stone, while he became so emaciated by constant fasts and austerities, that he almost lost the semblance of a human being; and this he did in order to preserve his soul from danger; yet he complains most piteously that, although the sound of the last trumpet was always ringing in his ears, pictures of the dancing-women he had seen at Rome in his youth were constantly coming before his imagination and tempting him to impure desires. "I," he says, "who was the companion of scorpions and wild beasts, was often present in spirit among the dancing-girls."³ When Vigilantius asked him why he did not live like other men, and reproached him with a cowardice unworthy of a great man, in flying into the desert, he

¹ *Pepigi foedus cum oculis meis, ut ne cogitarem quidem de virgine.*—Job xxxi. 1.

² *Censebat nimirum in prælio contra dæmones virili et audaci animo opus; in continentia autem præparatione victoriam concedi non ex virginum consuetudine, sed secessu.*—St. Chrysos. de continent. Joseph.

³ *Ille ego scorpionum tantum socius et ferarum, sæpe mente choreis Intereram puellarum.*—St. Hieron. Ep. ii.

answered: "I acknowledge my weakness;" for, if my eyes happened to rest on a person of the opposite sex, "I might lose the victory."¹ The innocent St. Aloysius was afraid, as we have seen recently, not only to kiss the shadow of a young maiden, but even to remain in the room alone with his own mother, so that, as soon as he could find an excuse, he left her. See how the great friends of God take to flight in order not to look on anything dangerous, and how they do not dare to hope for any special help from God if they do not avoid such occasions; while you, who frequent company of that kind, and spend your time in laughing, joking, and amusing yourself, have nothing to fear? You hope to be free from all temptations, and to be able to overcome them if they should assail you, because you rely on the grace of God? Ah! that is a vain and deceitful hope!

God helps wonderfully His servants in dangers which He sends them to undergo; but abandons those who wantonly run into danger.

And if it were not, then, indeed, we might all leave our convents and roam about the world at will. Why? Because, whether I am alone or in company, whether I seek the danger or avoid it, I shall be always invincible, for the almighty God will always give me His grace in any case. "I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me,"² I might say with St. Paul. But how would it be with me if I were to depend on that hope? I am well aware that in former times the prophets lived in heathen courts amidst all the vanities of the world, when their duty obliged them to do so, and that they were constantly helped by the special grace of God; that, when acting on a divine inspiration, the hermits left their solitudes and went amongst the people to exhort them to penance, they were strengthened so wonderfully by the grace of God, that they had no reason to fear falling into sin; and when the tyrants of old exposed Christian virgins to shame and dishonor, the latter were protected by God so powerfully, that their purity did not suffer the least attain. But I know, too, that the same God abandoned those who were formerly innocent and dear friends of His, when they went into dangerous company without necessity.

Proved by examples from the Old Testament.

The innocent Dina, daughter of the patriarch Jacob, as we read in the book of Genesis, went out to see the women of the strange land into which she had come: "And Dina, the daughter of Lia, went out to see the women of that country."³ And her curiosity cost her her maidenly purity. But how is that? Did not

¹ Fateor imbecillitatem, ne perdam aliquando victoriam.—L. adversus Vigilant.

² Omnia possum in eo qui me confortat.—Philip. iv. 13.

³ Egressa est autem Dina, filia Liæ, ut videret mulieres regionis illius.—Gen. xxxiv. 1.

Judith venture into far greater danger, when, decked out in all her beauty, she went into the enemy's camp and spent a whole evening eating, drinking, and feasting with the amorous Holofernes? Why did God protect her from all danger, and abandon Dina? He protected Judith because she went into the danger in obedience to a divine inspiration, while Dina was influenced only by a vain curiosity. And what kind of a woman was Judith, in comparison with Dina? She was a God-fearing widow, who avoided carefully not only every evident danger, but also everything that might remotely tend to lead her into sin: "She made herself a private chamber in the upper part of her house, in which she abode, shut up with her maids, and she wore hair-cloth upon her loins, and fasted all the days of her life; she feared the Lord very much, neither was there any one that spoke an ill word of her."¹ What help and protection could not such a holy woman expect in all temptations and dangers from the God whom she loved so much? Nevertheless, before she went into danger, in obedience to the divine inspiration, and for her country's sake exposed herself to the temptations of an Assyrian camp, with what prudence did she not make her preparations? She first reflected deeply as to whether the idea she was about to carry into effect really came from God or not, and although modesty prompted her to say nothing of it to any one, yet she disclosed her design to two ancients of the people, who had authority in the town, with the sole intention of asking their advice, and of finding out whether their opinion agreed with hers as to the divine origin of the inspiration on which she was about to act; to this end she begged of them to pray fervently for light: "So that which I intend to do, prove ye if it be of God, and pray that God may strengthen my design."² She often asked them to pray for her: "Let nothing else be done, but to pray for me to the Lord, our God."³ Before adorning herself she shut herself up, clothed in sack-cloth, with her head covered with ashes, and prostrated herself before the Lord, praying to Him long and fervently, as we read in the Book of Judith. When she had finished all her preparations, she prayed as she was going out of the gate of the town; nay, she spent a great

¹ In superioribus domus suæ fecit sibi secretum cubiculum, in quo cum puellis suis clausa morabatur, et habens super lumbos suos cilicium, Jejunabat omnibus diebus vitæ suæ timebat Dominum valde, nec erat qui loqueretur de illa verbum malum.—Judith viii. 5, 6, 8.

² Itaque quod facere disposui, probate si ex Deo est, et orate ut firmum faciat Deus consilium meum.—Ibid. 31.

³ Nihil aliud fiat, nisi oratio pro me apud Dominum Deum nostrum.—Ibid. 33.

part of the night in the Assyrian camp in watching and prayer. Frequently she protested that the sole end she aimed at was the honor that would accrue to God, if it could be said one day that He conquered the Assyrians by the hand of a woman. Why should we be surprised, then, if God, who never abandons those who love Him with all their hearts and trust in Him alone, helped His handmaid and kept her free from dishonor and sin, even in the midst of danger? In the same way He protected the innocence of Joseph in Egypt against the caresses of an impure woman; and the conjugal chastity of Susanna He saved from the violence of the two elders; but neither of these dangers was sought voluntarily; for Joseph ran away, leaving his mantle behind him, while Susanna called for help as well as she could. If Joseph and Susanna had loved the dangerous company, as so many do nowadays, would they have gained such a glorious victory? Would they not rather have lost the grace of God, and sinned most shamefully, as a consequence of their foolhardiness?

From the
New Testa-
ment.

We have a still more striking example of this in the New Testament, in the persons of the apostles St. Peter and Paul. Both were, although at different times, in Jerusalem in the same occasion and temptation: Peter, in the court of the high-priest; Paul, amongst the furious Jews. The question for both of them was whether they would deny Christ, or courageously confess Him. Peter declared to his divine Master: "Yea, though I should die with Thee, I will not deny Thee."¹ Paul said to his disciples, "For I am ready not only to be bound, but to die also in Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus."² But how differently they acted in the hour of trial! Peter falls most deplorably, and denies his beloved Master three times on oath, while Paul confesses Him steadfastly. And why? Because Peter trusted too much in himself, and deliberately rushed into the occasion, against the express prophecy and warning of Our Lord; for what had he to do in the house of the high-priest? Why did he go into the company of servants that were enemies of Christ? He should have kept away from them. It was not so with St. Paul. "And now behold," he says, "being bound in the Spirit, I go to Jerusalem."³ It is the voice of God, and not my own will that urges me to go into the midst of the enemies of Christ. If Peter

¹ *Etiam si oportuerit me mori tecum, non te negabo.*—Matt. xxvi. 35.

² *Ego enim non solum alligari, sed et mori in Jerusalem paratus sum propter nomen Domini Jesu.*—Acts xxi. 13.

³ *Et nunc ecce alligatus ego spiritu, vado in Jerusalem.*—Ibid. xx. 22.

had gone into the house of the high-priest in obedience to a divine inspiration, he would doubtless have been strengthened by a powerful grace, and have avoided that lamentable fall, which he never ceased to deplore afterwards, as long as he lived. If Paul, on the other hand, had wantonly sought the danger, he would not have fought so valiantly, nor gained such a glorious victory. From this, too, my dear brethren, you may conclude that no one can rely on the help of God if he deliberately runs into danger, but can look on it as almost certain that he will not get the grace of God, and so will fall into sin. Therefore we must all profit by the warning of the Holy Ghost and fly, if we wish to avoid sin.

But, you will perhaps exclaim: what are you saying to us about company? It is not unlawful for the sexes to meet together, to speak and laugh with, and amuse one another! Common courtesy amongst friends and relations requires that. I was often in company of that kind, but I cannot say that I was anything the worse for it. But you are actually trying to make it sinful! No, you are mistaken. I do not say that it is unlawful, nor that it is an evident sin; I only maintain that, when such company is sought too often and without necessity, there is danger of being led away and of committing sin; for the infallible word of God assures us that he who loves the danger shall perish in it. Hear what St. Clement of Alexandria says of the matter: "They who wish to do everything that is lawful will easily be brought so far as to do what is unlawful."¹ If thy right hand scandalize thee," is the well-known warning of Our Lord, "cut it off and cast it from thee." St. John Chrysostom makes a beautiful remark with regard to these words; we must not only cut off the left hand, he says, that is, shun all that is unlawful and sinful; but also the right hand, that is, we must avoid things that are lawful and seem to be harmless, if they can be an occasion of sin to us.

I have often, you maintain, been in company of the kind, but I cannot say that it has done me any harm. St. Augustine answers your objection: "Presumption is an unfortunate and a dangerous thing; for it makes many think they have conquered, when in reality they are conquered."² I quite believe that the company you speak of did not lead you into the commission of

Even apparently respectable company is dangerous, if sought too often.

The excuse that nothing sinful happens is a deceit of the devil.

¹ Qui faciunt quidquid licet, facile delabuntur, ut faciant quod non licet.

² Infelix est et nimium periculosa præsumptio; multi enim putant se vincere, cum victi sint.—St. Aug. lib. de honest. mul.

any sinful outward action; but did you do no evil in your heart? And even if that remained pure for the first two or three times, still I tell you to be on your guard against the deceits of the devil. That crafty enemy sometimes acts towards souls as the leopard does with the ape; the leopard is most eager in pursuit of the ape, because he likes its flesh better than that of any other animal; but the ape, when it sees its enemy coming, climbs up a tree, where it is in safety. The leopard then has recourse to artifice; he lies down at the foot of the tree, restrains his breathing as much as possible, and pretends to be dead. When the ape has seen its enemy lie thus apparently lifeless for some hours, it descends and begins to leap and play about him, not suspecting any danger; but that is the leopard's opportunity, who at once seizes hold of the ape and devours it. I am afraid it will be something like that with you and the dangerous company into which you are so fond of going. For some time the devil pretends to be dead; he leaves you in peace and does not attack you with the least temptation, so that you really come away without committing sin; but why does he act like that? Simply to induce you to believe that you are in no danger, so that you may frequent such company and thus give him an opportunity of assailing you with grievous temptations and leading you into sin. Therefore I warn you in these words of the Holy Ghost: "Never trust thy enemy: for as a brass pot his wickedness rusteth: though he humbleth himself and go crouching, yet take good heed and beware of him."¹

Familiarity
with rela-
tions is dan-
gerous.

You say, too, that it is only respectable people and, in fact, your own friends and relatives with whom you associate. Ah, pretext of respectability! ah, friendship and relationship! how many souls you have brought to destruction! For those very things, good as they may seem in themselves, only add to the danger, since they put one off one's guard, encourage greater familiarity, and thus inflame the heart more strongly with the fire of unlawful love. And must we, then, avoid all friendship and society? No, I do not say that; but you must not seek such company too often, nor make too free in it, especially if you find your passions excited in it. St. Louis, the son of Charles II. of Naples, as Ribadeneira writes in his Life, once went to visit his mother, the queen who had not seen him for a long time, and therefore wished to embrace him. "Stop," said St. Louis, "that will not do!

¹ Ne credas inimico tuo in æternum: sicut enim ærumentum æruginat nequitia illius: et si humiliatus vadat curvus, adice animum tuum, et custodi te ab illo.—Ecclesi. xii. 10, 11.

“But I am your mother,” said the queen. “True,” he replied, “you are my mother, but you are a woman, and therefore a servant of God must not be too free with you.” St. Augustine says that, no matter who they are, persons of the other sex should not be treated with too much freedom: “They who think they can be familiar with women, and yet be victorious, do not know that they are guilty of a twofold sin in the sight of God, inasmuch as they run into danger themselves, and also give a bad example to others of a dangerous familiarity.”¹

St. Gregory gives the greatest praise to the virtues of the holy Bishop Andrew, especially to his angelic chastity. That holy man had given hospitality to a person consecrated to God. Now it happened that a Jew, who was travelling and could not reach Rome in time, was obliged to take shelter in an old temple that had been formerly devoted to the worship of idols. During the night he saw a great number of devils assembled in the place, who each in turn gave to Lucifer an account of what they had been doing during the day to tempt men to sin. One of them, especially, stood up and boasted of having done something great. On being asked what it was, he answered: I have inspired the otherwise holy Bishop Andrew with such an affection for a woman who is living in his house, that on one occasion he jocosely patted her on the back with his hand. Lucifer praised this act above all that the others had done; go on, he said, and in a short time you will conquer him altogether. The Jew, who had heard all this, went next morning to the Bishop, and told him all about it. Immediately the holy man acknowledged his fault most humbly, saw the danger in which he was, and sent the person out of his house. The Jew was thereby brought to see the light of faith, became converted, and was baptized. Here again, my dear brethren, we have an instance of how dangerous it is to cultivate a too great freedom and intimacy with persons of the other sex, although they may be near relations or may be holy people, consecrated to God. Hear the advice that St. Bernard gave his sister: “I warn you, not to allow any man, no matter how holy he is, to be familiar with you, nor, even if he is a religious, to be frequently in your company; lest the purity of both of you should suffer by a too great intimacy; lest, by seeing each other too often, you should lose your innocence; lest relig-

And even
with relig-
ious and
holy per-
sons.
Shown by
an example.

¹ Et qui cum mulieribus habitantes putant se obtinere triumphum, ignorant se apud Deum duppliciter reos existere; dum seipsum in periculum mittunt, et aliis exemplum perverse familiaritatis ostendunt.—St. Aug. ubi supra.

ion be brought into contempt by your conversing with each other too frequently; for familiarity often conquers those whom vice by itself could not overcome."¹

Exhortation
and resolution
to
avoid all
dangerous
occasions.

By way of conclusion, my dear brethren, I again repeat the words of the Holy Ghost, "Flee from sin as from the face of a serpent."² He who wishes to keep from all sin must imitate the penitent David: "I have hated all wicked ways."³ Mark how he says that he hates not merely all sin, but all the ways that lead to it even remotely. Fly, then, fly as well as you can, the dangerous occasion; I have no better advice to give you; our frailty is too great; God withdraws His grace from the presumptuous, and he who loves danger will perish in it. Ah, my Lord and my God, have I not, indeed, been blind! For such a long time I have been on the very verge of the abyss, and did not know the danger I was in! I have brought the same sin over and over again to confession, and never considered what might be the cause of such oft-repeated falls! Blessed be Thy mercy, which has spared me so long and has at last opened my eyes! Now I see and know what has been the cause of so many temptations and sins to me; that house, that person, that too great freedom in conversation, that company, that society was the stumbling-block over which I have so often tripped and fallen, to my great detriment. Now, since I have learned by experience, shall I again go into such company without urgent necessity? Truly, if I did that, my presumption and perversity would justly embitter Thee against me, and I should deserve Thy anger and the withdrawal of Thy grace! Oh, no; I will practise that humility and modesty to which alone Thou hast promised the special help of Thy grace: I will guard my five senses, particularly my eyes; I will shun with the greatest care all company and conversation which I know to be dangerous, nor will I allow either human respect or friendship to lead me astray in this matter. Thus I can have a firm confidence that Thy grace will always strengthen my weakness against all the other attacks of my spiritual enemies. Amen.

¹ *Moneo te ut vir, quamvis sit sanctus, nullam tamen tecum habeat societatem; quamvis sit religiosus, nullam tecum habeat assiduitatem; quare? ne visitandi familiaritate utriusque pereat castitas; et videndi frequentatione utriusque annihiletur honestas; ne loquendi iugitate utriusque religiositas infametur: sæpe familiaritas vincit, quos vitium superare non potuit.—St. Bern. Serm. lviii. in sororem.*

² *Quasi a facie colubri fuge peccata.—Ecclesi. xxi. 2.*

³ *Omnem viam iniquam odio habui.—Ps. cxviii. 128.*

On Promiscuous Nightly Gatherings, see the preceding Second Part. On the Shrove-tide Festivities, see the First and Second Parts.

SIXTY-FIRST SERMON.

ON CONFIDENCE IN THE DIVINE ASSISTANCE IN UNAVOIDABLE DANGERS.

Subject.

In the dangers and occasions of sin that daily beset us against our will, and that our duty prevents us from avoiding, each one must, according to the divine decree, trust in God, who will not abandon him who co-operates with His grace.—*Preached on Septuagesima Sunday.*

Text.

Multi enim sunt vocati, pauci vero electi.—Matt. xx. 16.

“For many are called, but few chosen.”

Introduction.

Terrible words! But it is wonderful how many there are on whom they make no impression. “Many are called” to the eternal possession of the kingdom of heaven; “but few are chosen” actually to possess it. And why? The fault does not lie with the Almighty God; He has called all men, without a single exception; all men, as far as He can, He has chosen for heaven. But we need not long consider to find out the cause. If we only look at the lives led by most people in the world, we must acknowledge that they are not chosen; for every day they close the gate of heaven faster against themselves by their sins. And whence come those manifold sins? From our inborn weakness and propensity to sin. But they are not content with that. “Opportunity makes the thief,” says the proverb; they take occasion from the example of others who live according to the flesh and to the vain world, and their rule is to follow that example; they seek occasions in dangerous company, which they frequent without necessity; they love even the proximate occasion, which they do not try to avoid, although they cannot go into it under any pretext without committing a

new sin, as we have seen already. That, I say, is the origin of those manifold sins, and the reason why few are chosen. Alas! I seem to hear some sighing, who are still men of good will, if that is the case, who can be saved? For, who can avoid all the dangerous occasions of sin? Although one may neither seek nor love them, yet he is exposed to them every day; and if he wished to shun them altogether, he would have to hide himself under the earth. And what you say is perfectly true. But this sermon and the following are intended for your consolation and instruction, that you may not despair of being chosen for heaven. I say then—

Plan of Discourse.

In the dangers and occasions of sin that daily beset us against our will, and that our duty prevents us from avoiding, each one must, according to the divine decree, humbly submit himself and trust in God, who will not abandon him who co-operates with His grace. Such is the whole subject of this instruction.

That we may do our part constantly, and so be amongst the small number of the elect, give us Thy light and grace, O God! which we beg of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

There are many dangers of sin that one cannot avoid.

It is an undeniable fact that men in the world are exposed to many dangers which they not only cannot but even dare not avoid or remove. Such is the married state, in which husband and wife are indissolubly bound together until death; and there are different offices and employments, which people are compelled to undertake by divine decree, in order to procure the means of livelihood for themselves and their families, or to further the common weal, or to show due obedience and reverence to their lawful superiors. There are also different degrees of acquaintanceship with all kinds of people, which are matters of necessity for most men in the world, according to the business in which they are engaged; and in those things many a circumstance must arise which might prove a hindrance to the divine service, or an occasion of temptation, thus exposing souls to the danger of sin and of eternal damnation. For occasion is given, and sometimes people are urged by a kind of violence almost, to anger, impatience, cursing and swearing, injustice and ill-treatment of others, pride and vainglory, impurity, intemperance, gluttony, drunkenness and other vices, so that people could often and easily sin against God, unless they are always on

their guard and strain every nerve of their spiritual faculties to overcome temptation.

Ah, God help us, is the cry of many, that is only too true! That is the very thing that makes me uneasy and dissatisfied with my state of life! I would willingly bear with everything, if I were not daily and hourly exposed to the danger of sin everywhere I go. For what else is my married life, but an unceasing source of trouble and annoyance, of impatience, of cursing and swearing, of quarrelling and dissension? My husband is bad-tempered and given to drink; my wife is fond of idleness and an easy life; my children are disobedient; my servants are lazy and obstinate, they must be told a thing twenty times before they think of doing it; one must almost make a servant of one's self in order to look after them; the neighbors pry into everything, and put the worst construction on every act; I cannot even trust my best friends at all times, for more than once they have deceived me, how can one practise Christian patience and meekness under such circumstances? Who can be so well grounded in virtue, as not sometimes to sin by anger and impatience, or by cursing and swearing? What else is my secret poverty and the hard work I must do, but a source of inordinate sadness, and almost of despair, as well as of the sins that arise from it? What is my office or employment, but a snare laid to entice me to commit sins of injustice, unless I am very careful? I have to deal with all sorts and conditions of people, to hear all kinds of talk, to see dangerous objects continually; who can be on his guard so as to keep his senses under control in such circumstances? Must he not now and then break out into unseemly language, or at least sin in thought and desire? In a word, wherever you turn, there are occasions of sinning in thought, word, and deed, and of losing your soul.

I acknowledge the truth of all that; but do you think you are the only one whose salvation is exposed to so many risks? You are not, by any means; for, poor mortals that we are! there is not one in the world who can boast with truth of being free from all danger. There is no state so holy, no order so strict, no household so pure as to exclude temptations; and he who wishes to avoid them all must leave this world altogether, as St. Paul says: "Otherwise you must needs go out of this world." Divine Providence allows temptations to assail men in every state of life, as a means of combat and victory; and they who

A fact of which many complain.

These dangers are common to all states, though greater in some than in others.

¹ Alioquin deheratis de hoc mundo exiisse.—I. Cor. v. 10.

wish to serve Him zealously are even more exposed to such assaults than they who live in sin. A holy monk once saw a whole legion of devils engaged in storming the convent in which he was living; they climbed up on the roof, entered the windows, and filled the corridors and passages, working diligently the whole time. But over the town he saw but one devil, who was sitting down quite lazily, doing nothing. Surprised at this vision, he began to ask himself how it was that poor monks, who do their best to drive away the devil by constant fasting, prayer, and mortification, are nevertheless surrounded by demons on all sides, while the citizens of the town, who do not fast, or pray, or scourge themselves, are free from the attacks of the Evil One. While thus debating with himself, an angel appeared to him, who at once solved his doubt; because, he said, the monks fight valiantly against temptations, a whole legion of devils comes to oppose them, in the hope of conquering even a few of them. But in that wicked town, in which there is hardly any one to resist them, one single demon is enough to keep all the inhabitants under subjection. Let no one, then, be surprised, nor give utterance to a complaint that is common enough, if he finds that, after having done true penance and freed himself from the state of sin, and commenced to love God sincerely, he is more vigorously assailed by temptation than formerly; for that is an evident sign that he has escaped the snares of the devil, who is now attacking him more fiercely, in order to lead him again into sin. "The more the devil sees that we oppose him," says St. Gregory, "the more trouble does he take to overcome us; for he leaves alone those whom he knows he has peaceable possession of; but his attacks against us become more violent, when he sees that we have driven him out of our hearts, which he wishes to look on as his own property."¹ "And" continues the Saint, "after a man by true penance has overcome the first temptation, God allows the combat to be renewed more vigorously after his conversion, that we may not be too sure of ourselves or look on ourselves as already holy, lest a deceitful security should cause our downfall after we have gained the victory."² Therefore no one who is earnestly resolved to

¹ Quanto magis nos sibi rebellare conspicit, tanto amplius expugnare contendit; eos enim pulsare negligit, quos quieto jure possidere se sensit; contra nos vero eo vehementius exaltatur, quo ex corde nostro quasi ex jure propriæ habitationis expellitur.—S. Greg. l. xxix. moral. c. 7.

² Ne conversus quisque jam sanctum seesse credat, et quem mœroris pugna superare non valuit, ne ipsa postmodum securitas sternat; dispensante Deo permittitur, ut post conversionem suam tentationis stimulis fatigetur.

gain heaven and to serve God has reason to complain of danger or temptation. Still, I freely acknowledge that, while each state has its own dangers and temptations, yet in some states those dangers are greater than in others; and also in some states it costs a man more trouble to overcome temptation than in others.

Now, if God has placed you in a state in which you are more exposed to danger, if He has ordained that you should have greater difficulties to contend with, and to use more violence than others to gain heaven, dare you, nay, can you complain of that, or ask why He has dealt with you so? He can offer you His heaven at whatever price pleases Him; and if He required you to overcome a thousand times more difficulties in order to gain it, certainly heaven is worth striving for, even on those terms. Can He not give a penny to those who come at the last hour to work in His vineyard, as well as to those who have borne the heat and burden of the day? Now, by an all-wise decree of His Providence He has placed you in the state in which you are, and He has arranged, too, all the circumstances of that state (for I take it for granted that you have not entered it knowingly against the divine will); He knows and has known from all eternity all the occasions, allurements, and temptations to sin that are to beset you, or that under any circumstances can come in your way (I again presume that you do not wilfully seek the danger of sin); He knows your strength, too, and how much you can bear; and moreover, as St. Paul says, He is a good and faithful God, who will not allow a heavier burden than you can bear to be placed on your shoulders, nor permit a temptation to assail you that you cannot overcome; nay, He will even make temptation profitable to you.¹ Besides all this, He is the almighty Lord, who will not allow you to fight alone, but will take the greater share of the work and trouble on Himself, and will help you with His grace, so that, if you only will, you may easily overcome the temptation. The observance of the commandments of God is called by Christ Our Saviour, who knew well the difficulties and dangers of every state, “a yoke,” and in fact He calls it “My yoke,” giving us thereby to understand that we are not alone in bearing the divine law, but that God, who helps us, bears it with us; and by His help that which otherwise would be difficult becomes sweet. For the same reason He calls the burden of the commandments, “My burden,” because He shares

They who are exposed to great dangers must be contented and trust in God.

¹ *Fidelis autem Deus est, qui non patietur vos tentari supra id quod potestis, sed faciet etiam cum tentatione proventum.* I. Cor. x. 13.

it with us, so that it becomes easy and light. St. John Chrysostom makes a beautiful remark on this: we must not look on the law of God as too difficult, nor as too easy; not as too difficult, lest we should give way to pusillanimity; nor as too easy, lest we should become careless and run the risk of transgressing. Christ did not call His law a yoke alone, nor did He say that it was sweet alone; nor did He call it a burden alone, nor say that it was light alone; "to teach us how careful we must be, He did not conceal from us the fact that it is a burden, nor that it is a light burden; but He put the two together and called it a sweet yoke and a light burden; so that we should not avoid His law as too difficult, nor treat it carelessly as too easy."¹ If you are walking alone up a rugged mountain-side, you have great difficulty in making progress; but if you have with you a strong companion, who gives you his arm to assist you, and tells you now and then how you will best get on (for instance, he says to you, go a little to that side; do not put your foot there, or you will fall; tread on this stone, it is firm, etc.), and, if he sees you stumbling, keeps you from falling, you will find the way much easier. Such is the manner in which God deals with us, if we are in earnest about walking in His ways. "With the Lord shall the steps of a man be directed," says the Psalmist, "and he shall like well His way."² If I wish, God will make the way smooth for me, and will show me where to put my foot, and where not to put it; but on my part it is necessary that I should "like well His way." Sometimes the devil or the world will try to make me stumble against a stone; men will try to lead me into sin by bad example; my own evil inclinations will help them; but if I only wish to keep on the right road, God will be my guide and my faithful and powerful companion, who will stretch out His hand to protect me in all those dangers: "When he shall fall, he shall not be bruised; for the Lord putteth His hand under him."³ Now, O man! if you think the dangers of the state in which you are, and which you cannot change, are greater than in another, you must say to yourself: it is the Lord who has ordained this for me, it is He, too, who is my companion in those dangers; with His help, then, I must and will protect

¹ Ut quanta cura vigilandum esset certiores nos redderet, non scilicet onera nec suavita tacuit, sed utrumque complexus et jugum dixit et suave appellavit, onus apposuit et leve adjecit; ne aut tanquam laboriosa fugeres, aut tanquam nimium facile contemptu prosequeris. S. Chrysos. Hom. 39, Matt.

² Apud Dominum gressus hominis dirigitur; et viam ejus volet. — Ps. xxxvi. 29.

³ Cum ceciderit, non collidetur; quia Dominus supponit manum suam. — Ibid. 24.

myself as well as I can, and that help will never be wanting to me if I fly to Him for refuge with confidence. I have spoken of this matter more in detail when treating of the necessity of each one being satisfied with his state of life, as far as his salvation is concerned.

Once more I say that it is and remains certain that the good God has prepared powerful graces and helps for men to enable them to avoid sin in the dangers that are inseparable from their state, provided they work with His grace as they ought. The Holy Scripture gives us abundant proof of this in the conversation that God had with Moses on Mount Horeb. Moses was sent by God as ambassador to Pharaoh in Egypt, to persuade him, or, if necessary, to compel him to allow the Israelites to go out of slavery. "Come," said God, "and I will send thee to Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."¹ Learned and prudent, brave and courageous as Moses was, the thought of the dangers he would run in an idolatrous court frightened him from undertaking the duty; and therefore he humbly begged of God to spare him and to send some one else, who was better fitted for such a task. "And Moses said to God: Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?"² I am too weak for a task like that. In order to encourage him, God told him to throw on the ground the rod which he held in his hand, and it was immediately changed into a serpent. See, Moses, what you can do with such a weak instrument; are you still afraid on account of your weakness and incapacity? But Moses was not yet satisfied; it is true, he thought, I have worked a miracle; but it was done in the desert, where God is with me to help me. To work miracles when there is no occasion for them, and when God is there to help, is one thing; but to work them when there is really necessity and danger, is another thing. He then put forward his want of eloquence: "I beseech Thee, Lord, I am not eloquent from yesterday and the day before; and since Thou hast spoken to Thy servant, I have more impediment and slowness of tongue."³ "I beseech Thee, Lord," he continued, "send whom Thou wilt send,"⁴ but do not send me. In order, then, said the Lord, that thou mayest lay aside all

Who gives special graces to those who are in unavoidable dangers. Shown by an example from Scripture.

¹ Veni, et mittam te ad Pharaonem, ut educas populum meum, filios Israel, de Ægypto.—Exod. iii. 10.

² Dixitque Moyses ad Deum: quis sum ego ut vadam ad Pharaonem?—Ibid. 11.

³ Obsecro, Domine, non sum eloquens ab heri et nudius tertius; et ex quo locutus es ad servum tuum, impeditioris et tardioris lingue sum.—Ibid. iv. 10.

⁴ Obsecro, Domine, mitte quem missurus es.—Ibid. 13.

fear, and mayest look on thyself as safe even in the midst of danger, I tell thee, "Go therefore, and I will be in thy mouth; and I will teach thee what thou shalt speak."¹ "Behold, I have appointed thee the God of Pharaoh;"² thou shalt exercise over him, not a human, but a divine power. At last Moses was convinced; he went, and performed the duty entrusted to him with the greatest success. "Moses," says St. Gregory, "fearful of his own weakness, was unwilling to go; but at last he consented, trusting in the strength of Him who commanded him."³

Confirmed
by another.

The holy Apostle St. Peter, as we read in the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew, was once out in his boat fishing with his companions, when they saw Christ coming towards them on the water. "Lord, if it be Thou," cried out Peter, "bid me come to Thee upon the waters."⁴ And Christ said to him: "Come!" and Peter, getting out of the boat, walked on the water as if it were dry land; but a storm arose and he got afraid: "But seeing the wind strong, he was afraid; and when he began to sink, he cried out; and immediately Jesus, stretching forth His hand, took hold of him."⁵ On another occasion Peter heard John saying that their Master was on the shore, whereupon he "cast himself into the sea."⁶ Mark the difference; on the first occasion he walked on the water, but now he goes to land by swimming, as the Venerable Bede says.⁷ But why so? If his love for Christ was so strong, his faith and confidence so great, why did he not walk on the waters on this occasion, too? If he succeeded in doing so before, and that, too, in the midst of a storm, why should he not do it now, when the sea was calm? And had he not reason enough for wishing to come as quickly as possible to where Christ was? Yes, thought Peter, the first time I was in danger of sinking, but as the Lord called me, He stretched forth His hand to save me; now He has not called me, and it would be presumption for me to expect Him to help me, so that I will swim to the shore.

Which
should en-
courage

What a beautiful lesson, my dear brethren, St. Peter gives us here. In the first instance, when Our Lord called him, he

¹ Perge igitur, et ego ero in ore tuo, doceboque te quid loquaris.—Exod. iv. 12.

² Ecce constitui te Deum Pharaonis.—Ibid. vii. 1.

³ Moyses seipsum metiendi noluit, et tamen de Imperantis virtus præsumendo consentit.

⁴ Domine, si tu es, jube me ad te venire super aquas.—Matt. xiv. 28, 29.

⁵ Videns vero ventum validum, timuit, et cum cœpisset mergi, clamavit; et continuo Jesus extendens manum, apprehendit eum.—Ibid. 30, 31.

⁶ Misit se in mare.—John xxi. 7.

⁷ Non intelligendum est Petrum super fluctus venisse, sed natando.

walked without hesitation on the stormy waters, and when he was in danger, he cried out with the greatest confidence, "Lord, save me;"¹ and he was helped by his Master's hand. In the same way, if God's Providence has called you to the state, office, or occupation in which you are, if you have entered on it after due deliberation with God, and with a reasonable motive, oh, then be comforted and have courage! Even if a violent storm should trouble the waters, if many dangerous occasions and temptations should assail you in that state or employment, you will not be obliged to sink; only have confidence in the almighty God; call out to Him often with Peter: Lord, save me, or I am lost! and He will stretch out His hand and help you with His grace, that you may pass safely through the danger without any injury to your own conscience. Say with David: "The Lord is my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the protector of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?"² There are many others in the world, of different ages and sexes, living in all sorts of conditions and situated just as I am, and yet they keep from grievous sin with the help of God's grace; why should not I do the same, with the same grace to help me? I am one of the weakest of men, but God will make me strong, if I only co-operate with Him. Yes, O my God, I acknowledge with Thy servant Thomas à Kempis, "if left to myself I am nothing, and am filled with weakness; but if Thou but castest Thy eyes on me, I am at once strengthened."³

those who are called by God to a dangerous state.

But we must not forget that Peter did not trust himself to walk on the water when he did not hear the voice of Christ calling him. Alas, how many there are who fail in this particular, by embracing a state of life without consideration or reflection, without invoking the assistance of the Holy Ghost, merely following their own fancies, and led on by their evil inclinations and desires; so that they enter the married state only through impure passion, or make choice of an employment through pride, ambition, or avarice, while they must often acknowledge that they are not at all capable of performing the duties they have undertaken! Is it surprising that amongst the many dangers of sin and opportunities of gratifying their evil propensities offered them by their state, they make a lamentable shipwreck

While they who are not called, but rush into the danger, must ascribe their fall to themselves.

¹ Domine, salvum me fac.—Matt. xiv. 30.

² Dominus salus mea, quem timebo? Dominus protector vitæ meæ, a quo trepidabo?—Ps. xxvi. 1.

³ Si mihi ipsi relinctor, nihil sum et totus infirmitas; si autem subito me respexeris, statim fortis efficiar

of their souls? Or else, if they are called to that state by divine Providence, but go without necessity into dangerous company and occasions of sin, under the pretext of a necessity that does not exist, or of Christian charity that does not oblige them in the case, or of a duty that is only an imaginary one, and indulge in all kinds of conversations and amusements, should we be surprised to learn that they fall into a multitude of sins? Not without reason does Christ warn us: "Watch ye and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." Mark well the words "that ye enter not" wantonly. Many, says St. Augustine, are neither conquered nor assailed, and yet they are sinners; for they fall into sin without inducement or temptation; sin does not offer itself to them, nor stretch out its hand to them, but they seek it themselves and go out to meet it, when they rush into the dangerous occasion.² Is it wonderful, then, that in punishment of their presumption God should withdraw His helping hand from them, even in the dangers that are incidental to their state, and allow them to fall miserably into sin? No; if you are one of those people, in vain do you expect God to help you, as we have seen already.

Both represented in a wonderful example.

Cagnolius tells us of a wonderful thing that happened in Piedmont. A dissolute soldier, who had gone some distance away from his comrades, and was walking about in a field, saw a girl on a hill herding sheep. He went up to her, but the innocent girl was afraid of him, and, as she was quite alone, and there was no one near to help her, she ran off at once and left the sheep behind her. The soldier drew his sword and pursued her, until she came to the top of a steep rock, and there was nothing left for her then but either to cast herself down and break her neck, or allow the soldier to work his wicked will on her. Either fate was hard. She reflected for a few moments as to what course she should follow, but the love of purity and the fear of offending God sank so deeply into her heart that she resolved to sacrifice her life rather than lose her virginal chastity. Abandoning herself to divine Providence, she cast herself from the rock, at the foot of which flowed a deep river. But see how God protects virtue even in extreme danger; her guardian angel bore the maiden up, so that she came down gently on the bank of the river, quite unhurt. On another occasion the same girl

¹ Vigilate et orate, ut non intretis in tentationem.—Matt. xxvi. 41.

² Sunt multi qui, ut peccent, non solum non vincuntur, sed ultro se peccato offerunt; nec expectant tentationem, sed præventunt.—S. Aug. de vera et falsa poenit.

was on the rock with her sheep, when she thought to herself, how easily I came down here the other day! I must try it again. And she actually leaped from the rock, but before arriving on the ground she broke her neck. She succeeded the first time, because necessity and love of holy purity compelled her to go into evident danger, and therefore she was helped by the hand of God; but the next time she was influenced only by curiosity and childish daring, and she lost her life. So it is also with us in the dangers of sin; when we go into them out of necessity and on account of the requirements of our state, with a good end in view, we may well rely on the special help of grace, but not when we wantonly seek the danger.

Yes, many a one will say, but I am so weak and frail in the occasions that are inseparable from my state that, although I do not seek any other occasions, I fall and commit sin frequently, so that I always bring the same sins to confession. But how do you manage that? Have you heard what I said in the *Plan of Discourse*? The special grace of God will help us in the dangers inseparable from our state, if we do what in us lies. "Help yourself, and God will help you," says the proverb. Do you do that? Oh, how many fail in this respect, too! They toil and moil the whole week in the state, duty, trade, or employment, in which they know they have occasions enough of sin, and yet they hardly know what spiritual weapons are, or how they are to arm themselves against temptations. They seldom go to confession or Communion; they think it enough to receive those holy sacraments once a quarter, and would that even then they received them properly. They hear nothing good for a whole week at a time, seldom read spiritual books, hardly ever think of God during the day, rarely come to a sermon, which would encourage them to do good, deter them from evil, and remind them of the duties of their state, for they come once and remain away six times; they have not a constant, earnest desire to be instructed in good; except on Sundays and holy-days, they never hear Mass, nor do they practise any morning devotions, or make the examen of conscience, or guard their senses during the day; their whole occupation, nay, their whole hearts are almost directed to temporal things. What wonder is it then, that, as such people forget God, they are forgotten by Him in turn, so that, when the occasion presents itself, they fall into sin and finally lose their souls?

All must use the proper means to guard against danger, if they do not wish to fail.

Therefore, my dear brethren, if we wish to keep ourselves al-

They must constantly

beg of God
to help
them.

ways in the friendship of God, amidst the dangers that are inseparable from our state, let us make constant use of the spiritual means that we have at hand, as I have told you on another occasion; namely, besides cautiously avoiding dangers and occasions of sin into which we are not compelled to go, let us first humbly acknowledge our own weakness, which can do nothing without the divine assistance, and then with undiminished cheerfulness often fly to God in heaven for refuge, with the firm faith and child-like confidence that our heavenly Father will not desert us. Such is the instruction that St. Augustine gives us, if we wish to lead Christian lives and to serve God without difficulty, namely, to pray, again to pray, and to pray unremittingly. "One must pray with sighs of the will, that he may obtain the gift of facility."¹ Jesus Christ encourages us to that prayer when He says: "If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father from heaven give the good Spirit to them that ask Him?"² "He that dwelleth in the aid of the Most High shall abide under the protection of the God of Jacob,"³ such is the assurance David gives us. Mark the words, "he that dwelleth;" not he that asks for it but once and coldly, but he that begs for it constantly and with a firm trust and confidence in God, can assure himself of the divine help. "He shall say to the Lord, Thou art my protector, and my refuge; my God, in Him will I trust. For He hath delivered me from the snare of the hunters."⁴ And David adds an express promise on the part of God, that He will not abandon one who appeals to Him in that way. "Because he hath hoped in Me, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he hath known My name."⁵ If we fall sometimes through weakness, we must not lose courage, but after humbly acknowledging and humbly repenting of our fault, begin with renewed zeal to resist our inordinate inclinations, like one who, engaged in a contest, becomes more eager for the attack when he has received a good buffet from his adversary.

And often
ask the

To the same end we must often invoke the aid of the saints in heaven, that by their powerful intercession they may obtain ef-

¹ Oret gemita voluntatis, ut impetret donum facilitatis.—S. Aug. de perfect. just. contra Cœlest.

² Si ergo vos, cum sitis mali, nostis bona dare filiis vestris, quanto magis Pater vester de cœlo dabit spiritum bonum petentibus se?—Luke xi. 13.

³ Qui habitat in adjutorio Altissimi, in protectione Dei cœli commorabitur.—Ps. xc. 1.

⁴ Dicet Domino: susceptor meus es tu, et refugium meum; Deus meus, sperabo in eum. Quoniam ipse liberavit me de laqueo venantium.—Ibid. 2, 3.

⁵ Quoniam in me speravit, liberabo eum; protegam eum, quoniam cognovit nomen meum.—Ibid. 14.

ficacious graces for us from God to overcome all difficulties and to resist temptations. Oh, how many there are who, having almost despaired of being able to lead a pious life and to save their souls, have been so much encouraged by this means, that they overcame their evil inclinations and kept the commandments, not only without difficulty, but actually with ease! A man who had grown old in impurity thought it impossible for him to live chastely; but after he had recommended himself to the intercession of the holy Apostle St. Andrew, he never again sinned against purity. A religious at Modena, after hearing a sermon preached by St. Dominic, went to the holy man and acknowledged with tears his weakness and the great difficulty he experienced in resisting temptations to sins of the flesh. "Go," said the Saint to him; "do manfully; despair not of the immense mercy of God; I will obtain the gift of continence for you."¹ And so he did, "for he who was before unclean and impure, became chaste and pure."² Two thieves who were sentenced to the gallows were so hardened that their conversion was despaired of. St. Catherine of Siena saw them from a window as they were passing by, and beheld at the same time a great number of devils who were exulting over the unhappy wretches, in the sure hope of having them in a short time. The holy virgin begged of God to convert them, and obtained that grace for them, so that in a moment their hearts were changed, they burst out into expressions of the most sincere sorrow, offered to undergo even more severe punishments, confessed their sins, and gave up their lives joyfully by way of atonement. "They hastened to death as if they were going to a banquet, consoled by the hope that the temporal punishments they were about to suffer would be the means of admitting them all the sooner to eternal joys."³ Such is the account given by Surius in the Life of St. Catherine. An unchaste man, who was on the verge of despair, because he thought it impossible for him to give up sin, recommended himself to St. John of Nepomuc; the Saint appeared to the poor man in his sleep, and said to him that he would not commit any more sins of impurity; the man awoke, full of repentance, and during the remainder of his life never felt the least temptation. Very many who had concealed

saints to
help them.

¹ Abl, viriliter age, nihil de immensa misericordia Dei desperans: ego tibi carnis continentiam impetrabo.—Surius, in vita S. Dominici.

² Qui enim antea lubricus et immundus fuerat, castus et pudicus effectus est.

³ Denique illi ad mortem non secus atque ad epulas festinant, spe bona freti, se per supplicia temporalia citius venturos ad gaudia sempiterna.—Idem, in vita S. Catherinæ.

some disgraceful sin in confession, and had, as they thought, an insuperable difficulty in getting the hideous burden off their consciences, had recourse to the same holy martyr, and their difficulties vanished at once, to their great surprise and consolation. Countless numbers of people have by the intercession of this Saint received great graces, and they learned by experience that it is an easy thing to lead, not merely a Christian life, but even the life of a good religious. To say nothing of others, St. Aloysius Gonzaga is famous for his power of obtaining spiritual graces. But above all let us have recourse with child-like confidence to the Mother of God, whom Christ has given us as our Mother. From her we have the greatest certainty of obtaining the grace of serving her beloved Son faithfully, and persevering in His friendship.

And arm
themselves
with the
constant re-
collection of
the presence
of God,
frequenting
the sacra-
ments, etc.

We must also accustom ourselves in all our undertakings to remember God, and not to lose sight of His presence. That we can do even in the midst of our work and of weighty occupations, by a passing thought, or a so-called aspiration. For the human will can hardly be turned to sin, before God is excluded from the memory; while, on the other hand, it is almost impossible for a good Christian, who is really desirous to save his soul, to commit a mortal sin, as long as he has a lively recollection of the presence of God. The third means is the frequent reception of the holy sacraments, for they are the channels by which divine grace flows into our souls; but more especially should we be careful to confess frequently to a learned and prudent confessor, not changing him without necessity. Nor should we omit the evening examen of conscience, in which we can see what sins and faults we have committed during the day, repent of them, and make a resolution of amendment. A garden cannot run wild when one pulls up the weeds daily; and a bad habit must be gradually got rid of when the conscience is daily cleansed and purified. The fourth means is to hear the word of God in sermons constantly, as far as possible; for, as experience teaches, that will at least fill the mind with good thoughts, and encourage and strengthen us to persevere in the divine service. The hearing of sermons is necessary, too, for those who are well educated and imagine they know all about what might be said in the sermon; for the end and object of preaching is not merely to instruct us in what we are ignorant of, but also, and especially, to move and incite us to do what we know to be advantageous for the salvation of our souls. Fi-

nally, we must be careful to give the first fruits of the morning, after we awaken from sleep, to no other but God, for to Him alone belong the first fruits of all our undertakings. Generally speaking, the manner in which we spend the day depends on how we begin it, and doubtless they who begin it by zealously performing their morning devotions may notice that during the course of the day they feel a special impulse to good, as well as consolation and spiritual joy in God during their work.

It would be well, too, after having made the good intention, to bring before one's mind the occasions of sin that are apt to arise during the day; the places in which one has to go; the persons he has to meet with; the business he has to do; the troubles and annoyances he has to contend with; the faults and sins he generally commits; and then to fortify his mind and will by a firm resolution, and to say to himself: I must be careful not to commit sin in this or that occasion; I must see that I meet with meekness and charity those who are apt to contradict me, that I bear this or that cross with patience for God's sake, etc. I am prepared rather to die than offend God by sin this day. But if you break your good resolutions, for instance, if you get angry and curse, you must at once strike your breast, or say to yourself: God, be merciful to me, a sinner! and then renew your good resolution. In order the better to carry it into effect, we must recommend it every day to God with child-like confidence: behold, O dear Lord, Thou knowest the state in which I am, the dangers and occasions of sin that surround me; but Thou knowest, too, that I do not seek them wantonly, and Thou art well aware of my poverty and misery, and that of myself I am unable to resist temptation; therefore Thou must help me! Help me, then, since Thou hast promised to do so! I will co-operate with Thee as well as I can; clasp me in Thy fatherly and protecting arms, and let what will happen to me this day. One sole request I have to make of Thee: do not allow me to offend Thee, my heavenly Father and only and supreme Good, by a mortal sin; but grant me to fulfil Thy holy will in all things, as far as I know it, to persevere in Thy love to the end, and to come to Thee with Thy elect in the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

Every morning they must renew their good resolution, and commend it to God.

For other Sermons on the same Subject, see the First Part.

*SIXTY-SECOND SERMON.***ON THE MERITS TO BE GAINED BY HIM WHO HAS TO ASSOCIATE WITH THE WICKED.****Subject.**

God makes use of His intercourse with sinners to His honor and glory; we, too, must use to the merit and glory of our souls the intercourse which our duty obliges us to maintain with the wicked. *Preached on Sexagesima Sunday.*

Text.

Ad tempus credunt, et in tempore tentationis recedunt.—Luke viii. 13.

“They believe for a while, and in the time of temptation they fall away.”

Introduction.

Oh, how often it happens amongst Christians that the seed of the word of God falls on their hearts as on a hard rock, where it cannot take root, nor bear fruit! It is true, they come to sermons, listen often with pleasure and satisfaction, and make the best resolutions: now I will begin to give up this bad habit; henceforth I will never offend God deliberately, and so on; and those resolutions are confirmed by confession and Communion. That is all very good; and if they acted up to their resolutions, they would be sure of heaven. But, “they believe for a while;” their goodness is only of short duration. They go amongst people as before, and when the least occasion of sin is offered them, “in the time of temptation they fall away;” they relapse into their former sins. Such is, indeed, the case, many of you will perhaps think, my dear brethren, but who can help it? The wicked people one has to associate with, the many occasions and dangers of sin that one’s state of life brings with it, lead one astray and compel him to sin. What? compel him? No, you must not say that; for if you only do what you can in company and occasions of the kind, the help of God’s special grace will not be wanting to keep you from falling so soon, as I have explained in my last sermon. But that should not be enough for you; in that company and those occasions of sin which one’s state of life does not allow him to avoid, a good Christian

should not only find no occasion for sin, but he can and should use them as a means of gaining great merit and profit for his soul. How can he do that? you ask. In the same way in which God deals with sinners.

Plan of Discourse.

God makes use of the intercourse with sinners to His honor and glory; we, too, must use to the merit and glory of our souls the intercourse which our duty obliges us to maintain with the wicked. There you have the subject of to-day's instruction.

Do Thou, O Lord! grant us by Thy grace, which we humbly beg of Thee through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary and of our holy guardian angels, to imitate Thee in this particular, so that we may not be in the number of those of whom Thou sayest: "They believe for a while, and at the time of temptation they fall away."

So great and bitter is the hatred that God has of sin and of those who are in the state of sin, that, according to the teaching of theologians, if it were possible for Him to withdraw His omnipresence, by which He is always in and with all His creatures, from any place in particular, He would withdraw it from sinners. Hence St. John Chrysostom remarks that omnipresence is, indeed, one of the chief attributes and perfections of God, but it is also that attribute which, to speak of it in our human way, causes Him most trouble and annoyance; for it compels Him to remain with sinners and to have intercourse with them, although they are objects of hatred, aversion, and execration to Him. "But to God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike,"¹ as the Wise Man says. But, my dear brethren, if that is the case, why does not God at once destroy the sinner, since He can do so at any moment? No, such is not the way in which He acts; He preserves the sinner, and so many sinners, too; He has patience with them for years and years; He feeds and looks after them with as much care as He bestows on His beloved children. Why does He act thus?

If it is true, as St. Paul says, that God has ordained everything He has created for His own honor and glory:—"Who worketh all things according to the counsel of His will; that we may be unto the praise of His glory,"²—what glory can God

God deals with sinners and preserves them, although He hates them.

And furthers His honor and glory thereby.

¹ Similiter autem odio sunt Deo Impius, et impietas ejus.—Wisd. xiv. 9.
² Qui operatur omnia secundum consilium voluntatis suæ; ut simus in laudem gloriæ ejus.—Ephes. i. 11, 12.

have from sinners, who dishonor Him, despise His law, and defy Him to His face; who blaspheme His holy name, and by their bad example and the scandal they give lead others into sin? Certainly, my dear brethren, He can have honor from them; for He can use the very contempt with which He is treated and the most wicked sinners as means to promote His glory, as St. Augustine says: "There is no doubt that God makes a good use of the sinner; for He would not even allow him to exist, if He could not use him for some good purpose."¹ Do you wish to know, my dear brethren, he continues, in what way even the most wicked, scandalous, and obdurate sinners in the world can contribute so wonderfully, even against their will, to the honor and glory of God? Then consider the number of men in the world who are shut out from the light of the true faith; look at the idolatrous heathens, the superstitious Turks, the hardened Jews, the rebellious heretics and schismatics; does not the God of infinite wisdom use them all to further His most important undertakings?

And uses
even the
worst sin-
ners to this
end.

"Does He not make use of the gentiles to carry out His designs?"² are the words of St. Augustine. Does He not make the gentiles serve to manifest the wonders of His grace? A heathenish world converted and changed by twelve poor fishermen, as we see it to-day; what greater proof could there be of the divine power and Providence? What greater confirmation of the evident truth of our holy religion? Does He not make use of heretics for the explanation and spread of His doctrine,³ and to strengthen us in the one, true Catholic faith, in which alone salvation can be found? Never is the truth of that faith better investigated, or more clearly proved and brought to the light of day, than when it is attacked and opposed by different errors and heresies; and generally speaking, never do Catholics show more zeal in defending their religion, than when they have to live in the midst of heretics. Does He not make use of schisms and disunion as means and instruments to make evident the indestructible solidity of His Church, foretold by Jesus Christ, so that the gates of hell shall never prevail against her?⁴ In spite of many schisms the body of the Church still remains in its substantial unity under the one head on earth, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, while we know from experience that sects and heresies

¹ Ille utique peccatore bene utitur, qui nec eum esse permetteret, si illo uti non posset.

² Nonne utitur gentibus ad materiam operationis suæ?

³ Hæreticis ad probationem doctrinæ suæ?

⁴ Schismaticis ad documentum stabilitatis suæ?

change and decay constantly. The Jews, that unhappy remnant of the once chosen people of God, scattered as they are through the world, without king, priest, temple, or head, are they not, even against their will, living proofs that Jesus Christ is the true Messiah and Saviour of the world, and that His prophecies with regard to their dispersion have been fulfilled up to the present day? What have the tyrants and persecutors of the Christian name effected? The very means they made use of to destroy the Christians have only added to their number, given martyrs to Christ, filled His Church with saints and heaven with elect. And all the other sinners in the world, no matter how numerous they are, serve to make known to men the perfections of the Lord God; they are instruments by which the erring are chastised, and the pious proved; they are proofs of His wonderful goodness, mercy, patience, and fatherly love, since He bears with them so long; they will be proofs, too, if they are not converted, of His strict justice; for they will feel for all eternity, in the fire of hell, what a great God, worthy of all fear and love, they have offended. Therefore it is true that God makes use of sinners and their wickedness to further His honor and glory.

And there, too, you have an example of how we are to act with wicked and dangerous companions. For we must fly and avoid them as well as we can; but if our state of life and our duty compel us to have intercourse with them, we must use them in the same way as God does, for the profit and advantage of our souls. We have abundant opportunities of doing this every day, although we may not seek them; for, as St. Ambrose says, as His toleration of sinners serves the Lord God to make known His perfections, so our unavoidable intercourse with the wicked must serve us in the practice of the chief virtues. If, for instance, I have to live with people whose conduct occasions me much annoyance, either because I have a natural dislike for them, or because they maliciously persecute and trouble me, what a splendid opportunity I have there for the practice of Christian patience and mortification! If I have to live with obstinate, passionate, and hot-tempered people, what a grand opportunity I have for practising Christian meekness! If they contradict me, or vent their ill-humor on me, can I not give them an example of Christian charity by returning good for evil, as I am bound to do? If they are proud and puffed-up, and conform more to worldly vanities than I do, I can learn Christian humility and modesty, according to the example of Our

We, too, should use our unavoidable intercourse with the wicked to increase in virtue.

Lord, who was as the least of men on earth. If they are given to gluttony and drunkenness, I can learn from their excesses how odious those vices are, and how necessary it is to practise Christian sobriety and temperance. If I hear them cursing, swearing, blaspheming, detracting from their neighbor's good fame, that hellish language should teach me to restrain my tongue, and be more fervent in blessing the holy name of God. If they give me occasion for sins of impurity by their flatteries, caresses, unchaste talk, scandalous behavior, or indecent dress, I am compelled to mortify my eyes and other senses, and to fly to God for refuge by humble prayer, that I may not be overcome by temptation. If they are addicted to many vices that I cannot prevent or induce them to amend of, they compel me to acknowledge with gratitude the special graces and benefits that God has conferred on me, since He has preserved me, in preference to so many others, from those sins; for, according to the testimony of St. Augustine, without those graces I should be just as bad as they are; they force me to know myself and humbly to confess my own weakness, so that I am obliged to walk more cautiously, lest I should fall into the vices that I see others addicted to, as St. Paul says: "He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall."¹ They compel me to be more zealous in the service of God, partly in order to atone for the insults offered Him by the greater number of men in the world, and partly to obtain His help and special assistance in so many occasions and dangers of sin. Therefore, if I am in earnest about seeking the salvation and advantage of my soul, the very occasions of evil which my duty or occupation throws in my way will become for me the best opportunities of advancing in the chief Christian virtues.

It requires
no great
virtue to
be good
amongst the
good.

Nay, the holy Pope St. Gregory ventures to say that, in the ordinary course of things, no one can practise true virtue, or, at all events, practise it perfectly, unless he is now and then by divine decree forced to live amongst the wicked. For, how could a man know whether he has a virtue or not, if nothing occurs to prove and try him? There is no great art required to be patient amongst the patient, where there is no one to contradict you; nor to be meek amongst the meek, where no one says a word to displease you; nor to be charitable amongst the charitable, where you receive kindness from every one; nor to be temperate amongst the temperate, where there is no occasion given for in-

¹ Qui se existimat stare, videat ne cadat.—I. Cor. x. 12.

temperance; nor to be humble amongst the humble, where there is no example of pride or worldly vanity; nor to be chaste amongst the chaste, where that virtue is never assailed by any temptation. In a word, what great art is required to be pious amongst the pious, where one incites the other by his example to lead a holy life? Truly, it would be a desirable thing for all the inhabitants of a town to be united in that way in God, to be of one heart and soul, and to work together to serve their God zealously; but in that case, virtue, since it would have no combat to sustain, would not deserve to be called heroic, nor would it be so meritorious, or gain such a great reward.

But on the other hand, to have to live and deal with wicked, sinful men, whose vices are daily before our eyes, and yet, in the midst of them, to be so constant and steadfast, with the help of God's grace, that we have no part in their wickedness, that we always resist and oppose their solicitations to evil, not allowing either their promises or threats, their flatteries or caresses, the ridicule or the annoyance they subject us to, to get the better of us and to lead us into sin; to have the example of more than half the world before us, who make a common practice of sinful abuses, and yet to set aside all human respect, utterly disregarding what others do or say, and their remarks and sarcasms, and not to depart a hair's breadth from the principles that Jesus Christ inculcates in His Gospel; it is in that, that real, heroic, and praiseworthy virtue consists; that it is which proves that we love God above all things. The climax of wickedness in the sinner is, according to the testimony of the Prophet Isaias, to be wicked amongst the good and pious: "In the land of the saints he hath done wicked things, and he shall not see the glory of the Lord,"¹ nor will he be admitted into the land of the elect. What a terrible fate! From this it may be inferred that the perfection of justice and the greatest holiness consist in being and remaining pious amongst the wicked.

Moses, in a heathen, idolatrous court, in spite of all the efforts of the magicians, and all the threats of the king, did not swerve an iota from what God had appointed for him to do. A Tobias in the midst of idolaters, "when all went to the golden calves, which Jeroboam, king of Israel, had made . . . alone fled the company of all, and went to Jerusalem, to the temple of the Lord, and there adored the Lord God of Israel, offering faith-

Virtue is best proved in the society of the wicked.

The best proof of perfect virtue is to be good amongst the wicked.

¹ In terra sanctorum iniqua gessit, et non videbit gloriam Domini.—Isa. xxvi. 10.

fully all his first fruits and his tithes.”¹ A Louis on the throne of France knows nothing of the pomps and vanities of the world, and a soldier, amidst the tumult and dangers of war, keeps God always before his eyes, so that he never consents to a grievous sin. That man, in the course of his business or occupation, which compels him to associate with all kinds of people, amongst whom are avaricious, selfish, unjust, faithless, dishonest, and deceitful characters, who try to enrich themselves by unlawful practices, keeps his hands clean from all injustice, and will rather lose all he has than go against his conscience. That woman in her household, in which there is little fear of God, where the name of God is seldom heard, but that of the devil often in oaths and imprecations, ill-treated by her passionate, drunken, or adulterous husband, laughed at by her disobedient children or her obstinate servants, is and remains patient, meek, submissive to the will of God, and always satisfied with the cross He has laid on her shoulders, heavy as it is; while, in spite of all her troubles and trials, she never omits to urge her children and servants, as well as she can, to serve God. That other woman, often requested by her neighbors and friends, who give her the example, to join them in going to parties, or in paying unnecessary visits, or in leading an idle, useless life, never allows herself to be persuaded to waste her precious time as they do. That young girl, although she sees nearly every one else of her age following the vain, luxurious, and scandalous customs of the world, keeps strictly to the humble law of Jesus Christ, in spite of what may be said or thought of her, or of the ridicule that may be heaped on her. That young man, who is invited by his comrades to go with them to the ale-house, or to associate with dangerous companions amidst the amusements of Shrove-tide, cannot be induced to have anything to do with them. There you have a sure sign of real, solid virtue.

That virtue is most prized by Our Lord.

These are they whom Jesus Christ praises so highly, as He formerly did His disciples: “And you are they who have continued with Me in My temptations.”² While others, with whom you have to associate, have abandoned Me, while they have been ashamed of Me and My example, and have sworn fidelity to the world and its perverse laws, despising My commands, you have been My true servants, who have remained constantly at

¹ Cum trent omnes ad vitulos aureos, quos Jeroboam fecerat, rex Israel, hic solus fugiebat consortia omnium, sed pergebat in Jerusalem, ad templum Domini, et ibi adorabat Dominum Deum Israel, omnia primitiva sua et decimas suas fideliter offerens.—Tob. i. 5, 8.

² Vos autem estis, qui permansistis mecum in tentationibus meis.—Luke xxii. 28.

My side, following Me and My doctrine in spite of human respect. To remain with Me when there is nothing to suffer for My sake, when there is nothing to take you away from Me, when everything combines to incite hearts to love Me, that is an easy and a common virtue. But to stand steadfastly at My side and be My faithful servants in the midst of temptations and dangers, so that one must overcome himself in many things; to remain with Me, when one must constantly fight and gain the victory; to remain with Me in spite of contradictions, ridicule, and sarcasm, that is what I look on as real fidelity, as true love and friendship, as heroic constancy; and that is the virtue that I have promised to reward in a special manner. "You are they who have continued with Me in My temptations: and I dispose to you as My Father hath disposed to Me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom."¹ Would you ever have imagined, my dear brethren, that the otherwise so dangerous intercourse and conversation with the wicked could be so profitable and advantageous for the salvation, so meritorious for the soul of the just man, who really means to serve God to the best of his ability?

But, alas! what happens most frequently? As a general rule, we invert the order of things, and of the means of salvation and sanctification we make a stumbling block, over which we often lamentably fall and hurt ourselves. The intention of divine Providence is, that our intercourse with the wicked, when our state of life does not allow us to avoid it, should serve to sanctify our souls and to increase our virtue; but we, generally speaking, allow it to pervert us, so that we become worse on account of it; we howl with the wolves that surround us, and according to the laws of the world. Monkeys are sometimes caught in a ludicrous manner: the hunter goes into the forest where those animals are to be found, bringing with him a number of boots, large and small; these he scatters about under the trees, and then takes one of them up and puts it on his foot, and another on his arm. This he does until he sees that he has attracted the attention of the monkeys, when, knowing their curiosity and love of imitation, he leaves the boots there and goes a short distance away. By-and-by the monkeys come down from the tree and begin to imitate the hunter; they take up the boots and pull them on, one on his arm, another on his feet; all wish to be

Generally speaking, we become perverted with the wicked, instead of making a good use of them.

¹ Et ego dispono vobis, sicut disposuit mihi Pater meus regnum, ut edatis et hibatis super mensam meam in regno meo.—Luke xxii. 29, 30.

booted. But what is fun to the hunter is death to them. The boots are filled inside with bird-lime, which sticks to the hair on the legs and arms of the monkeys, and thus holds them fast; when they try to stand up, they fall down again, and the more they struggle, the tighter the bird-lime holds them. After a time the hunter comes up, and when he has laughed his fill at their antics, he puts chains on the foolish animals and leads them away. Are we not monkeys of that kind, my dear brethren, when we are so ready to imitate others, so apt to pick up bad habits from the wicked, and so thoughtless as not to consider what the result of that mode of action must be? We quarrel with the quarrelsome, curse with the profane, indulge in invective with the contumelious, drink to excess with drunkards, gamble with gamesters, dance with dancers; we do without hesitation what we see others doing; we speak as they speak; nay, mere fashion and custom has in our eyes the power of making everything lawful. Thus, while God furthers His honor and glory by bearing with sinners, we seek in our intercourse with them a cause of our ruin and eternal damnation. That intercourse should be to us a means of becoming better and of increasing in virtue; but we take occasion from it to become worse and more vicious, and thus, like the monkeys, we fall into the snare of the hellish hunter, who drags us off as his prisoners and slaves. Would to God that this were not too true!

Deplorable
the folly of
those who
make their
state of life
an occasion
of sin.

It gives me the heart-ache to hear a man complain of his state of life or employment, trying thereby to palliate and excuse his faults and sins, and saying that one cannot be other than bad when one has to live with wicked people. Nor does it cause me less pain to hear a woman lamenting her sad condition, and pretending that the greater number of her sins can be attributed to the drunken, ill-tempered, dissolute husband with whom she has to live. What must I say to such people? I pity them, indeed, not on account of the unhappy state of which they complain, for it is that in which they are placed by divine Providence, but on account of the bad use they make of it, contrary to God's will and intention; for the means that should serve to increase their merits and further their salvation they pervert into an instrument of their own ruin. I pity the woman, not because she has so much trouble and misery to suffer, but because she bears so badly the cross that is laid on her shoulders, inasmuch as she either does not know, or does not consider that her ill-conditioned husband is a cross imposed on her by the inscrutable de-

crees of divine Providence, to serve her as a ladder by which to ascend to eternal joys. Now, since such is the case, and it is the teaching of theologians, is it not a deplorable fact that there should be men who suffer and suffer daily the annoyances that arise from such intercourse, while all their suffering is without the least profit or advantage for their souls, since they turn a wholesome medicine into a deadly poison, and pervert the benefits of God into a constant occasion of sin, and thus, as a necessary consequence, leave the sufferings of this life only to go into the eternal torments of the next? Is not that a fact, I ask, that should be deplored with tears of blood?

Still more do I grieve, nor can I always restrain my displeasure, when I hear some, on being exhorted to give up this or that sinful custom, say, in the words of the Prophet *Isaias*: "I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people that hath unclean lips."¹ That is, they appeal at once to the example of others, and to the custom of the world. I speak and act in this or that way, they say, but I cannot do otherwise, for I am living amongst people who speak and act in that way; what others of my condition do, I must do also. If they amend, then I will follow their example. What answer could I make to such people? I might tell them to amend their lives, and thus to give the lie to the hackneyed saying, "every one does it;" for then others could see that they, at least, were exceptions. I might say to them, in the words of *St. Peter*: "Having your conversation good among the gentiles," amongst those of your own condition; "for so is the will of God, that by doing well you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men."² But my words would have little effect on them, so that there is nothing left for me but to bewail their folly and blindness, in misusing a grand opportunity of showing their fidelity and love to God, and in turning it into an occasion of dishonoring Him all the more, of despising His holy law, and of helping to make vice more common and shameless by imitating the example, as they say, of others like themselves; so that, instead of following with the small number of the elect the narrow path traced by Christ, that leads to heaven, they prefer to go with the majority on the broad road that leads to everlasting ruin.

Still more
that of those
who follow
sinful cus-
toms.

¹ *Vir pollutus labiis ego sum, et in medio populi polluta labia habentis ego habito.*—*Isa.* vi. 5.

² *Conversationem vestram inter gentes habentes bonam; quia sic est voluntas Dei, ut benefacientes obmutescere faciatis imprudentium hominum ignorantiam.*—*1. Pet.* ii. 12, 15.

There will be no excuse for either before the divine Judge.

O divine Judge, who wilt search with a lantern every idle word, every act committed through ignorance, nay, even the justices of Thy pious servants on the last great day, shall we be able to palliate our sins in Thy sight by alleging as an excuse for them that the dangers we had to contend with in our state of life were too great and manifold; that we only followed the example of the majority; that we could not under the circumstances avoid sin; that we had to do as they did with whom we associated? Alas, that feeble excuse will only make our malice all the more evident, and our damnation all the deeper! For Thou wilt show to us the arrangements of Thy all-wise Providence, and wilt prove beyond contradiction that the very circumstances in which Thou didst place us were so many graces and helps to attain true virtue and to increase our merit in heaven, while we shall have to acknowledge that we have accepted those means from Thee, and have misused them to ruin our souls and to offend Thee more grievously by rejecting Thy inspirations, neglecting Thy graces for fear of mortification and of the cross; or through human respect, in order to please people or through fear of displeasing them, dreading what they might say of us!

They will be put to shame by others.

And what shall we have to say at Thy judgment-seat, when an Abraham, a Lot, a Job, who lived amongst Chaldeans, Sodomites, and in the land of Hus, shall rise up against us? They and countless others will condemn us. I have lived, Abraham will say, amongst idolaters, but I have always adored the true God; I have lived in the midst of a people who were addicted to the most shameful forms of impurity, Lot will exclaim, but I never violated conjugal chastity; I have lived with men who were worse than wild beasts, Job will say, and yet I led a holy life. And that life we led without having preachers to exhort us to avoid vice, or to encourage us to practise virtue; we had no pious pictures to arouse our devotion, no sacraments so perfect as to bring down abundant graces on our souls. But you, Christians, to whom the word of God was so often and so impressively preached to spur you on to lead holy lives; who had daily before your eyes the example of so many pious souls; who were provided with real sacraments to strengthen you against all attacks, you have not had the courage to prefer for your souls' sake the will of God, although you knew well what it was, to the custom of a few men. It is no excuse for you that you had to live amongst wicked people. What shall we say when an Agnes, a Lucy, an Agatha, and

so many other innocent and holy virgins shall appear against us? What? they will exclaim; you put forward the dangers of the state in which you had to live as a palliation for your sins? Neither caresses, nor promises, nor threats were spared to induce us to sin against holy purity; nay, we actually had to suffer violence; but still we were able with the help of God to overcome all the attacks that were made on us, and to preserve our chastity untarnished. Why could you not have done the same in the far lesser dangers to which you were exposed? What answer shall we make when a Nicetas, a Thomas of Aquin, a Pelagius, and so many other holy youths shall appear against us, of whom the first was bound hand and foot and was thus exposed to the attacks of a shameless woman; having no other means of defence, he bit off his tongue and spit it in her face; the second drove away with a fire-brand a woman who had come to tempt him; while the third, then a youth of thirteen years of age, having been taken prisoner by the Saracens, and kept in confinement for three years, at last attracted the notice of the king, Abdarrahan, who, enticed by his beauty, endeavored to caress and fondle him; but the holy youth, indignant at such treatment, and not fearing either the majesty or power of the king, drew back his hand and gave him a blow in the face, crying out at the same time: I am a Christian! I would rather suffer any torment (and he was afterwards put to a cruel death) than allow myself to be dishonored by your caresses! What? they will say; we were able to fight and to conquer in such great and extreme danger, and you have not been able to resist a flattering word, a laughing eye, or a caressing demeanor? You were obliged to sin, because others of the same condition gave you the example of it, although they never offered you the least violence, and you followed the custom of the world solely to be like others? How can you imagine that the state in which you had to live will excuse your shortcomings?

O my God, I am struck dumb, and am filled with confusion at those reproofs which I so richly deserve! Alas, I cannot conceal my guilt from Thee, who searchest the reins and the heart, nor from my own conscience, which convicts me. I acknowledge with sorrow of heart that I have sinned, that I have too easily allowed myself to be led astray in the past. I have tried to throw the blame of my sins on my state of life, on the people with whom I have had to live, on my own weakness and frailty, as if I could not overcome the temptations to which I was ex-

Repentant acknowledgment of the faults committed in this respect, and purpose of amendment.

posed, and on the perverse judgments of the vain world, that tried to convince me that good was evil, and evil good. But now I confess that all these excuses will be of no avail before Thy judgment-seat, but will rather make things worse for me. It is not my state that is to blame, for in it I could have kept Thy commandments and performed the duties imposed on me by Thee; nor the example of other men, which I should not have followed; nor my own weakness, for which Thou hadst prepared the help of Thy special graces, if I had only been willing to work with them, as I should have done; nor the customs and usages of the world, for I had the maxims and principles of Thy holy Gospel, that I might easily have learned and understood, if I had wished. None of all these things can justify me in Thy sight, for it was my own slothful, unmortified, and wicked will that was the sole cause of the sins I have committed. I confess humbly to Thee, in the words of Thy servant David, who expresses exactly the miserable state of my soul. "My soul is filled with evils; and my life hath drawn nigh to hell."¹ The cause of my soul was almost lost, and I was amongst the number of those who go down to eternal torments: "I am counted among them that go down into the pit."² I was like one who had no help to expect, and was already looked on as dead, although I could have risen out of the grave if I had wished: "I am become as a man without help, free among the dead."³ Nor did that happen to me because Thou didst refuse me Thy help, or deprive me of my freedom; but, as I must confess to my own shame, because I did not use Thy help and my freedom to lead a better life; because I preferred to remain amongst the dead, rather than to rise and be with the living, "free among the dead." I was not a whit better off than those who, having received a mortal wound, are lying dead in their graves, whom Thou dost not intend to help any more, and who are rejected by Thee; not, indeed, O my God, because Thou wert not willing to help me, but because I did not wish to avail myself of the assistance Thou wert ready to give me, since I preferred to be with those who are lying in the grave of sin: "Like the slain sleeping in the sepulchres, whom Thou rememberest no more; and they are cast off from Thy hand."⁴ And what was

¹ Repleta est malis anima mea, et vita mea inferno appropinquavit.—Ps. lxxxvii. 4.

² Estimatus sum cum descendentibus in lacum.—Ibid. 5.

³ Factus sum sicut homo sine adjutorio, inter mortuos liber.—Ibid. 5, 6.

⁴ Sicut vulnerati dormientes in sepulchris, quorum non es memor amplius, et ipsi de manu tua repulsi sunt.—Ibid. 6.

the end of it all with me? I was in the midst of those who had already fallen, and I allowed them to drag me down with them: "They have laid me in the lower pit; in the dark places and in the shadow of death."¹ All this misery I can attribute only to my own malice. Therefore, O my God, since I now know the truth, I will be more careful for the future in this respect, and will use the dangerous company and occasions that my state obliges me to frequent, and that I cannot avoid according to Thy decree, for the good of my soul, as Thou usest them for the furthering of Thy honor and glory. But I now acknowledge that Thy powerful help and grace is necessary for me, in order to enable me not to be perverted by bad example, wicked proposals, sinful conversation, or unlawful customs; and for that grace I ask Thee most earnestly in the words of Thy servant David, "Keep me from the snare which they have laid for me, and from the stumbling-blocks of them that work iniquity."² If Thou favorest me with Thy protection, I shall have courage to oppose single-handed, when necessary, bad example with an edifying life; and if the whole world were on that account to turn me into ridicule, and make sport of me as a fool, yet I will not cease to be faithful to Thy service as long as I live, until, having happily escaped all dangers and overcome all temptations, I shall find myself in safety with Thee, where there shall be neither fear, nor danger, nor occasion of sin for all eternity. Amen.

SIXTY-THIRD SERMON.

ON GIVING EDIFICATION TO OTHERS, IN OUR UNAVOIDABLE INTERCOURSE WITH THE WICKED.

Subject.

Just as God makes use of His dealings with sinners for their conversion and amendment, so should we, too, in our unavoidable intercourse with the wicked, seek to edify others and give them good example.—*Preached on the first Sunday in Lent.*

¹ Posuerunt me in lacu inferiori: in tenebris, et in umbra mortis.—Ps. lxxxvii. 7.

² Custodi me a laqueo, quem statuerunt mihi, et a scandalis operantium iniquitatem.—Ibid. cxl. 9.

Text.

Omnis plebs ut vidit, dedit laudem Deo.—Luke xviii. 43.

“And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.”

Introduction.

Christ, the Son of God, knew well what was to happen to Him in a short time in the city of Jerusalem, amongst the wicked Jews; for He had foretold it to His disciples: “Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things shall be accomplished which were written by the prophets concerning the Son of man; for He shall be delivered to the gentiles, and shall be mocked and scourged and spit upon, and after they have scourged Him, they will put Him to death.” Why, then, did He not remain away? Nay, why did He make such haste to go to Jerusalem? So great was His love for all men, and His desire to save them from hell by dying a painful and disgraceful death, that, while He was on the way to Jericho, He converted a great number and impelled them to praise God, by miraculously giving sight to a blind man: “And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.” Here again, my dear brethren, we have a pattern and example of the use we should make of those bad companions and occasions of sin that our state of life does not permit us to avoid. The almighty God makes use of His dealings with sinners to further His own honor and glory, and we, too, should use our intercourse with them for the good of our souls, as we have seen in the last sermon. Now I say further—

Plan of Discourse.

Just as God makes use of His dealings with sinners for their conversion and amendment, so should we, too, in our unavoidable intercourse with the wicked, do our best to edify others and give them good example. Such is the subject of to-day's instruction.

Give us all Thy powerful grace to this end, O God! We ask it of Thee through the intercession of Thy most holy Mother Mary and of our holy guardian angels, that all who in future see how we live may take therefrom occasion to love and praise Thee.

The combat
between
two angels
teaches us
to deal
with men
as God does.

The Holy Scripture mentions in a few words a remarkable combat, when it gives a description of the vision seen by the Prophet Daniel. This combat took place between two angels, and not, as the Abbot Rupert thinks, between a good angel and a bad one, but, according to the interpretation of St. Jerome

and of the other holy Fathers, between two good angels, who are constantly adoring God in heaven and attending on Him. "The prince of the kingdom of Persians," said one of them to Daniel, "resisted me one and twenty days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me;" and again he said: "And now I will return to fight against the prince of the Persians."¹ The first was the guardian angel and protector of the Jewish nation; he wished to bring the people entrusted to his charge at once out of Persia, so as to save them from the danger of being led into idolatry. The other angel, the guardian of Babylon, resisted him and begged of God not to allow the Jews to leave Babylon, but rather to keep them there, that by their pious and edifying lives they might convert the Babylonians to the true religion; and in fact, we read in the Book of Esdras that some time afterwards three Persian kings renounced idolatry and adored the true God. What does this contest between the angels signify, my dear brethren? A twofold expression of the divine will, answers the holy Pope St. Gregory, by which God commands us to avoid the society of the wicked, and also to remain in it; both these commands are given under certain conditions, and therefore they do not contradict each other. For, God commands us to avoid the company of the wicked, on account of the danger of being perverted, when necessity or decency does not oblige us to go into it. And this is signified by the efforts of the first angel to have the Jews removed from Babylon. But when duty renders it necessary for us to have intercourse with the wicked, so that we cannot avoid them, then God commands us to help as far as we can in converting them and saving their souls; and this is what is signified by the efforts of the second angel.

Here, too, we must imitate the manner in which God acts in bearing with sinners and wicked men in this life. He is so good that He is not satisfied with merely preserving their lives, being present with them at all times, in all places, even when they are offending and insulting Him, and with making His patience in bearing with them serve to further His honor and glory; but His wish and desire is, and many are the means He uses to carry it into effect, to bring them to see the unhappy state in which they are, to repent of their sins, be converted to Him

God, in
patiently
bearing
with sinners,
seeks their
conversion.

¹ Princeps autem regni Persarum restitit mihi viginti et uno diebus; et ecce Michael, unus de principibus primis, venit in adiutorium meum. . . . Et nunc revertar, ut proelium adversum principem Persarum. — Dan. x. 13, 20.

with their whole hearts, and thus be saved. Such is the effect of the inspirations that He gives them sometimes immediately, sometimes by the holy angels; of the words that He places in the mouths of preachers and confessors, to exhort them to give up their vicious habits; of the promises of complete pardon, by which He assures them that He will forgive all their sins without exception, if with contrite heart they make an earnest purpose of amendment; of the terrible threats of a sudden and unprovided death, a strict judgment, and eternal punishment, if they continue in their vicious mode of life; of the bitter sting of remorse, which gnaws at them day and night; of the many benefits He bestows on them constantly, in spite of their wickedness; of the wonderful patience He shows in tolerating them for so many years, that the thought of those benefits may move them, if they have any sense of decency left, to cease offending so good a God; of the sickness, misfortune, death, poverty and want, humiliation, troubles, and other crosses by which He sometimes chastises them, that, becoming wise in the school of adversity, they may enter into themselves, open their eyes, and leave the state of sin. Thus the wisdom, goodness, justice, providence, and nearly all the perfections of God are constantly employed for the advantage, conversion, and salvation of sinners. And what should surprise us most of all, He employs the same trouble and care for the good of those who, as He has foreseen from all eternity, will reject the means of salvation He offers them, continue in their evil ways, and be lost forever; and He acts towards them as if He did not know that they would not profit by His goodness to them.

We, too, must seek the conversion of the wicked when we have to associate with them.

There is the example that God gives us, and at the same time it explains what a Christian's duty is, a duty that is unfortunately ignored by so many. For in the society and intercourse with the wicked, which we cannot avoid, we must seek, not merely the advantage of our own souls, but we must also endeavor, as far as we can, to convert others and bring them to God. Such is the obligation incumbent on every Christian, no matter what may be his state, occupation, or condition; and it is an obligation that specially binds people in certain states of life.

Some men are under a special obligation to this effect.

And with regard to this latter assertion, that certain people are bound in a special manner to work for the conversion and amendment of others, there is no one who will call it into question. For, tell me, whose duty is it to keep in order and to chastise a disobedient, dissolute, drunken, and wicked son? Who is bound

to undertake that task, if not his own father? If a vain young girl spends her time in idleness, sitting at the window or standing at the door in order to see the passers-by and be seen by them; if she sleeps till late in the day, and hardly knows how to do anything but trick herself out in the latest fashion; if she is far too familiar with persons of the opposite sex, and prefers frequenting balls and parties, taking part in the amusements of Shrove-tide, paying visits, and spending her time in dancing and amusing herself, to hearing the word of God in sermons and going often to the sacraments; who is bound to instruct her, to make her give up those vanities, to keep her at home, and to occupy her with some work suited to her condition, if not her mother? And if the latter neglects to perform this duty, who is bound to correct and to punish both, if not the father, again? If the servants and other members of the household are given to cursing and swearing; if they are ignorant in many things that concern their eternal salvation; if they are known to maintain improper intimacies, either in the house or in the neighborhood: who must endeavor to make them give up that hellish language, or that impure passion, and to urge them to learn the Christian doctrine, and to instill into them the fear and love of God? Who, if not their master and mistress, to whose care God has entrusted them for that very end? Who is bound to repress public abuses in a town or community, but those superiors who have received authority from God to that effect? No one, I repeat, can doubt that in all those cases there is a special obligation to work for the salvation of others.

But, alas, where is this zeal for souls to be found in the proper measure? They who should correct others are sometimes the very ones to give them bad example. The father, who should correct his drunken son, is himself addicted to drink; the mother, who should reprove her vain daughter, goes with her to balls and parties, is just as eager in following the fashions, and leads just as idle a life; or, if she is too old to do that, she commands her daughter to follow the customs of the vain world. The master and mistress, who should correct their servants' faults, are as bad themselves; they curse and swear, and are seldom to be found hearing a sermon, or assisting at public devotions. But in nearly every other matter where there is a fault to be reformed, there is no want of zeal, and on the least provocation expression is given to it. If the son is somewhat awkward in company, or the daughter careless in dress, and unable to follow

But they
very often
neglect it.

the customs of polite society; if she is too stiff and formal in company, which is much more becoming a young girl than a too great freedom of manner; if the servants do not do all they are told, or if they happen to break a dish or a jug, etc.; oh, then there is zeal enough in parents and masters! Then there are sharp words enough to reprove such faults, and means enough of punishing them. But when the fault is one that concerns only the divine service, and the salvation of an immortal soul, it is overlooked, as if it were of no account, nor is the least trouble taken to amend it. Alas, what a strict account such people will have to render for having been so careless of an obligation that, as they know well, God has imposed on them, of helping in the conversion and salvation of those subject to them! But enough of this, as I have spoken of it frequently already.

The law of charity binds all in general to help their neighbors to amend.

I intend speaking to-day chiefly of the general obligation incumbent on all men, no matter what may be their state of life or condition, to work as well as they can for the conversion of the wicked with whom they are compelled to associate. There is no one in the world, says the wise Ecclesiasticus, whom God has not obliged in some way or other to look after his neighbor's salvation: "And he gave to every one of them commandment concerning his neighbor."¹ How is that? Because there is no one in the world who is not bound by the precept of Christian charity to help his neighbor when he can, and from that springs the general obligation, binding on all, of assisting the poor and needy according to one's means. Now, if the law of charity binds every one to show mercy and charity to the poor in their temporal wants, how much more does not the same law oblige each one to show mercy and compassion to sinners in their spiritual necessities! And if we cannot, without sinning against the law of charity towards God and our neighbor, refuse to help him who is in want in those things that concern his body and this mortal life, can we be said to satisfy the requirements of that law, if by our carelessness or indifference we allow the immortal souls of our brethren, purchased so dearly by the precious blood of Christ, to go to ruin?

Shown by an example by way of simile.

We are told of a young man in Jerusalem who, having taken unawares some food from a witch, lost the appearance of a man, and assumed that of an ass. While thus transformed, he still retained his reason, but lost the power of speech, so that he

¹ Mandavit illis unicuique de proximo suo.—Eccclus. xvii. 12.

heard everything that was said in his presence, but was not able to make known who he was. The first who drove him away were his own former comrades. He made several attempts to enter houses and to stretch out his front hoofs, as if they were hands, to implore help; but he was always looked on as a stupid beast and was driven from the door with blows. For three years he continued in this state, and had to carry heavy burdens on his back. One day he happened to pass by a church, in which the priest was just elevating the sacred Host; the miserable wretch fell on his knees, in spite of the load he was carrying, and made every sign of adoring God, so that those who saw him might at least suspect that he was a human being under the influence of witchcraft. Nor was he disappointed; for his mistress took charge of him and after a diligent examination found out the whole story. The witch was burnt alive, and the young man recovered his former appearance. Suppose now, my dear brethren, that some one knew the supposed ass to be a human being, and had the power of easily restoring him to shape again, but refused to take the trouble of doing so, would you not look on that man as most unmerciful and cruel? Now, there is no witchcraft that can cause such a hideous transformation in the body, as mortal sin causes in the soul; nay, the Holy Scripture speaks of sinners as animals, beasts of burden. "I am become as a beast before Thee,"¹ says the penitent David, comparing himself to a horse or a mule. "Do not become like the horse and the mule, that have no understanding,"² such is the warning he gives to all to deter them from sin; and speaking in the person of Jesus Christ, surrounded by the wicked Jews, he calls them calves, bulls, lions, and dogs: "Many calves have surrounded me: fat bulls have besieged me."³ "They have opened their mouths against me, as a lion ravening and roaring; many dogs have encompassed me."⁴ Oh, what horrible monsters we should behold, if we could see the souls of those who are in the state of mortal sin, and if the outward aspect of their bodies corresponded to their spiritual deformity! How many proud, angry, raging lions; how many unchaste and impure bulls; how many dissolute and wanton calves; how many envious dogs; how many gluttonous wolves, filthy swine,

¹ Ut jumentum factus sum apud te.—Ps. lxxii. 23.

² Nolite fieri sicut equus et mulus, quibus non est intellectus.—Ibid. xxxi. 9.

³ Circumdede runt me vituli multi: tauri pingues obsederunt me.—Ibid. xxi. 13.

⁴ Aperuerunt super me os suum, sicut leo rapiens et rugiens. Circumdede runt me canes multi.—Ibid. 14, 17.

foul goats, and stupid and slothful asses, who are careless in the service of God! And, Christians, should not such a lamentable spectacle touch our hearts! Shall we unmercifully refuse to help, as far as we can, to free our brethren from that loathsome transformation? Nay, what is of far greater importance, should we not do our utmost to save their souls from eternal death, from the flames of hell, and to bring them back to the right path, by which they may arrive at the everlasting joys of heaven! If we refuse to do that, where is even a spark of charity to be found in us? How could we say that our hearts are those of reasoning men?

All can do that by fraternal correction.

But it is in our power to perform that act of charity towards our neighbor. "My brethren," says the Apostle St. James, in his Epistle, "if any of you err from the truth, and one convert him, he must know that he who causeth a sinner to be converted from the error of his way shall save his soul from death."¹ Amongst the sinners and wicked people with whom we have daily to associate, says St. Augustine, there are many who, as God foresees, will be in the number of the elect, provided other men help them to be converted, while, if that help and zeal on the part of others is wanting to them, they will be lost forever. Now we do not know who those sinners are, nor do they know themselves how they will fare in the next life; for the good and bad, the elect and the reprobate, are so mixed up together in this life, that we cannot distinguish them from each other. For this reason, then, our charity must be general, and our zeal for souls, as far as possible, must be extended to all men, that they whom God perhaps wishes to convert by our means and to bring to heaven may not be defrauded by us of the means that God has prepared to save their souls. Therefore St. Paul so often warns the faithful to give a good example to the heathens and idolaters with whom they had to live; and he praises the Corinthians for having done much good in that way: "Your emulation hath provoked very many."² The Apostle himself, before giving those exhortations to the faithful, taught them by his own example; for after his conversion, hardly had he refreshed his body, worn out by a three days' fast, when he began to work for the conversion of the Jews and other sinners: "And immediately he preached Jesus in the synagogues, that He is the

¹ Fratres mei, si quis ex vobis erraverit a veritate, et converterit quis eum, scire debet quoniam qui converti fecerit peccatorem ab errore viae suae, salvavit animam ejus a morte.—James v. 19, 20.

² Vestra aemulatio provocavit plurimos.—II. Cor. ix. 2.

Son of God.”¹ Our Lord Himself gave a similar exhortation to St. Peter, when foretelling to him his miserable fall and subsequent repentance. Peter, He said, thou wilt rise again after thy fall; but remember then thy obligation of helping others: “And thou, being once converted, confirm thy brethren.”² Long before, David had acknowledged this duty; after having repented of the crimes of murder and adultery, his first resolution was to turn teacher and apostle, in order to bring back to the right path those who had strayed from it: “I will teach the unjust Thy ways; and the wicked shall be converted to Thee.”³ Therefore, my dear brethren, the law of charity binds us all to deter our neighbor from evil and to encourage him to do good, by instructing him if we can, and by exhorting and correcting him, if we have good reason for hoping that he will benefit thereby. I shall take another opportunity of speaking of this subject more at length.

More especially are we bound by our good conduct and edifying lives to give a holy example, so that the wicked with whom we have to associate may find therein a cause of salutary confusion, which may impel them to speedy repentance. That is what the Apostle so earnestly demands of the faithful. For instance, he writes to his disciple Titus: “But speak thou the things that become sound doctrine: that the aged men be sober; . . . the aged women in like manner, in holy attire; . . . young men in like manner exhort that they be sober . . . These things speak, and exhort and reprove with all authority.”⁴ But above all, “in all things show thyself an example of good works, in doctrine, in integrity, in gravity, . . . that he who is on the contrary part may be afraid, having no evil to say of us.”⁵ Such, too, is the advice given by St. Peter to the pious: “Having your conversation good among the gentiles, that, whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by the good works which they shall behold in you glorify God in the day of visitation.”⁶ This doctrine they learned from the lips of their Master Jesus Christ,

But especially by good example.

¹ Et continuo in synagogis prædicabat Jesum, quoniam hic est Filius Dei. — Acts ix. 20.

² Et tu aliquando conversus, confirma fratres tuos. — Luke xxii. 32.

³ Dico iniquas vias tuas, et impii ad te convertentur. — Ps. i. 15.

⁴ Tu autem loquere quæ decent sanam doctrinam; senes ut sobrii sint; anus similiter in habitu sancto; juvenes similiter hortare ut sobrii sint. hæc loquere, et exhortare, et argue cum omni imperio. — Tit. ii. 1, 2, 3, 6, 15.

⁵ Tu omnibus teipsum præbe exemplum bonorum operum, in doctrina, in integritate, in gravitate; ut is qui ex adverso est, vereatur, nihil habens malum dicere de nobis. — Ibid. 7, 8.

⁶ Conversationem vestram inter gentes habentes bonam, ut in eo quod detrectant de vobis, tamquam de malefactoribus, ex bonis operibus vos considerantes, glorificent Deum in die visitationis. — I. Pet. ii. 12.

who had said to them, "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."¹

Therefore one is often bound to make known his good works.

But, asks St. Augustine, how, O dearest Lord, am I to understand that? In many other parts of Thy Gospel Thou commandest me to do quite the contrary, and to conceal my good works from the eyes of men, that they may not be seen. "Therefore, when thou dost an alms-deed," Thou sayest, "sound not a trumpet before thee," to let people know of it; but, "let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth,"² when it gives alms. Wilt thou pray? "Enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret," that no man may see thee; "and thy Father, who seeth in secret, will repay thee."³ Wilt thou fast? Then let no outward sign of it appear in thy face: "Thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head, and wash thy face, that thou appear not to men to fast, but to thy Father, who is in secret."⁴ In a word, Thou sayest the same of all our good works: "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."⁵ Is there not an evident contradiction here? On the one side Thou commandest us to conceal our good works from the eyes of men; and on the other, to do them so that men may see them. How, then, can we fulfil this twofold precept according to Thy will? St. Augustine answers this question. To do good solely for the purpose of being seen by others and praised by them as pious is the vainglory that Christ condemns in hypocrites; to do good and lead a pious life, so as to be seen by men, not for the sake of gaining honor and praise, but to further the honor and glory of God; to do good, even in public, for the advantage of our neighbor, that he may be edified and encouraged to do good also, that is not only lawful, but praiseworthy and meritorious, and in many cases a matter of strict duty.

How differ- Thus a father of a family acts very well and according to the

¹ Sic luceat lux vestra coram hominibus, ut videant opera vestra bona, et glorificent Patrem vestrum, qui in caelis est.—Matt. v. 16.

² Cum ergo facis eleemosynam, noli tuba canere ante te. Nesciat sinistra tua, quid faciat dextera tua.—Ibid. vi. 2, 3.

³ Intra in cubiculum tuum, et clauso ostio, ora Patrem tuum in abscondito; et Pater tuus qui videt in abscondito, reddet tibi.—Ibid. 6.

⁴ Tu autem cum jejunas, unge caput tuum, et faciem tuam lava, ne videaris hominibus jejunans, sed Patri tuo, qui est in abscondito.—Ibid. 17, 18.

⁵ Attendite ne justitiam vestram faciatis coram hominibus, ut videamini ab eis; alioquin mercedem non habebitis apud Patrem vestrum, qui in caelis est.—Ibid. 1.

requirements of Christian charity, who says or thinks to himself: ent people can do that.
I will go often and with all possible devotion to confession and holy Communion; I will assist every morning at the early Mass with folded hands and down-cast eyes; I will never neglect to hear a sermon on Sundays and holy-days; and that I will do publicly, so that my children, servants, neighbors, and other people of the same condition as myself may be induced to serve God in the same manner. In the morning I will kneel down and say my morning prayers; in the evening, before retiring to rest, I will assemble the whole household and will make the ex-amen of conscience and say evening prayers. If poor beggars come to the door, I will give them an alms with my own hands, so that all in the house may be edified and encouraged to perform similar acts of devotion and charity. Thus, too, the mistress of a household acts very well and in accordance with the law of the love of God and of our neighbor, when she thinks or says: I will dress modestly and in a Christian manner, and will not hesitate to appear thus dressed in public, although I should be the only one to do so; for my example may be the means of inducing others of my condition to imitate me. I will keep my daughter at home in seclusion, teach her to keep house and to do other work suited to her condition, and not allow her to frequent parties, so that others like me may be encouraged to do as I do, and to unite with me in procuring the honor and glory of our heavenly Father. Oh, what wonderful changes might be brought about in the world by such edifying example! How much good was not done by a St. Clotilde, a St. Elizabeth, a St. Frances of Rome, who by their good example converted not only their own husbands, but whole towns and countries, from a wicked life to a good one, or from a vain life to a better one!

St. Gregory says that in certain circumstances one may praise himself, his good works, his virtues, and his mode of life, if he does it with a proper end in view, that is, for the honor and glory of God and to encourage other men to follow his good example. Many holy servants of God praised themselves in that way. A noble youth, who was brought up most delicately and in all the luxury of the world, moved by a divine inspiration, left everything and went to St. Macarius, to lead a holy life in solitude. During the first few days, while he was still treated as a stranger, things went well enough with him; but when he had to eat and sleep like the community, he found it rather hard.

Nay, sometimes one may praise his own good works, as some saints have done.

A piece of dry bread, a jar of spring water and now and then a few spoonfuls of unsalted vegetables were his only food; besides that, he had to sleep on a hard bed of straw, and to rise in the middle of the night to go to choir. What difficulty he had in persuading his stomach to submit to such treatment! He wandered about, full of sadness, thinking of the life he formerly led. I cannot stand this another month, he said to himself; it will kill me. St. Macarius, seeing the temptation he was in, went to him, and said to him in a most friendly manner: have courage, my son, do not lose heart; you will not die so easily as you think! Look at my gray hairs; I can hardly count the years I have spent in the religious life; and in all these years I have never eaten bread enough to still the pangs of hunger, nor fully quenched my thirst, even with cold water, nor slept long enough to give my body the necessary repose; besides that, I have daily chastised my body with severe penances; and nevertheless, as you see, I am in vigorous health, in spite of my advanced age. But, O holy man, thou art praising thyself! The praise given him by others is torture in the ears of one who is really virtuous, while the praise that one gives himself is a source of scandal to others. No, St. Macarius might have answered; in order to give good example, and to encourage this young man to persevere in his holy undertaking, I do not hesitate for a moment to speak of my good works. Job, otherwise so humble, boasts before the whole world: "I was an eye to the blind, and a foot to the lame. I was the father of the poor;"¹ that is, I helped all, and assisted them in their corporal and spiritual necessities, as well as I could. Does not the great St. Paul relate in detail to the Corinthians the labors he underwent, the good works he performed? "They are the ministers of Christ; I am more; in many more labors, in prisons more frequently, in stripes above measure, in deaths often."² Nay, he proposes himself as an example for their imitation: "Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ."³

How we can and must imitate them in this respect.

Therefore a mother need make no scruple of her seeming self-praise, when she says to her daughters, although they may be already married: when I was your age, I was much more modest than you are; I did not even dream of going out to parties as you do, of dressing in the latest fashion, of spending my time

¹ *Oculus fui cæco, et pes claudo. Pater eram pauperum.*—Job. xxix. 18, 16.

² *Ministri Christi sunt; plus ego; in laboribus plurimis, in carceribus abundantius, in plagis supra modum, in mortibus frequenter.*—II. Cor. xi. 23.

³ *Imitatores mei estote, sicut et ego Christi.*—I. Cor. xi. 1.

idly at the window, or in unnecessary visits, etc. My parents (may God and they be thanked for it!) brought me up much better; why do you not imitate me? Why do you not bring up your children in the same manner? etc. Nor need the master or mistress make any scruple of saying to the servants: see, I, your master or mistress, am so quiet, so modest, so meek, so charitable; why do not you, who are but a servant, be the same towards your fellows? Nor need any one make a scruple of saying in company: God be praised, I am not aware that a farthing of unjust gain ever came into my hands; or that, through human respect, I ever said a word more or less than what my duty required; or that I ever encouraged any one to drink more than was good for him. I do not allow card-parties to meet at my house, nor permit my wife or daughters to dress too extravagantly; no one in my house would dare to appear at nightly gatherings, etc. In a word, when one has a good object in view, it is not only praiseworthy and meritorious to show that one practises good works, especially when they are commanded by the law of God, but it is even necessary and a matter of duty to do so. For, if it is our bounden duty, according to the law of Christian charity and mercy, to give good advice, what better advice can there be than good example, given for the praiseworthy motives I have mentioned? "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works." Mark, my dear brethren, how Christ compares good example to a light. And why? A lighted candle sheds its rays on all sides of it, but see where the flame points to; it always points to heaven. Such, too, should be the nature of the good example we give; it must shine on all sides and be seen by all men; but our intention must be directed to heaven, to God, in order to seek His honor alone and the spiritual good of others.

Now, if the law of charity towards all men obliges us to give good example to those with whom we have to do, in order to induce the wicked to amend their lives, how much more are we not bound to avoid doing anything, even if we imagine it to be lawful, which could encourage the wicked in their vicious practices, or be an occasion of sin to the innocent? Read the history of the Machabees, and you will find an Eleazer, an old man of ninety, who was threatened by the tyrant with a most cruel death, if he did not eat of certain meats that were forbidden by the Jewish law. "But he," says the Scripture, "choosing rather a most glorious death than a hateful life,

Hence we must refrain from giving bad example.

went forward of his own accord to the torment.”¹ His friends took pity on him and brought him secretly other meats, that it was lawful to eat, and begged of him to eat them, so as to satisfy the tyrant and save his own life. What? was the hero’s answer; must I begin to have recourse to deceit in my old age? The meat you bring me may be lawful to eat, but not under the present circumstances; for what would the young men of our nation think? They would imagine that Eleazer had eaten forbidden meats, and thus would be scandalized in me, who should on account of my age give them good example. No, I would rather die! “Wherefore, by departing manfully out of this life, I shall show myself worthy of my old age: and I shall leave an example of fortitude to young men, if with a ready mind and constancy I suffer an honorable death for the most venerable and most holy laws. And having spoken thus, he was forthwith carried to execution.”² “Thus,” concludes the history, “did this man die, leaving not only to young men, but also to the whole nation, the memory of his death for an example of virtue and fortitude.”³

And often abstain from what is otherwise lawful.

Hear what St. Paul says: “If meat scandalize my brother, I will never eat flesh, lest I should scandalize my brother.”⁴ Speaking of these words, St. Ambrose says: “So much regard should we have for the law of charity, that we should consider lawful things as unlawful, lest they might be a source of sin to others.”⁵ There are, namely, many things lawful and decent in themselves; but! but! What is the meaning of that but? For instance, conversation or intimacy with this or that person may be lawful in itself, so that not the least evil is done, even in thought; but if it occurs too often, it furnishes the neighbors or servants with matter for a reasonable suspicion of evil. A young girl dresses above her means; she has to work hard during the week in order to be able to appear in the newest fashions on Sundays and holy-days; of course, there is nothing wrong in

¹ At ille gloriosissimam mortem magis quam odibilem vitam complectens, voluntarie præbat ad supplicium.—II. Mach. vi. 19.

² Quamobrem fortiter vita excedendo, senectute quidem dignus apparebo; adolescentibus autem exemplum forte relinquam, si prompto ammo ac fortiter pro gravissimis ac sanctissimis legibus honesta morte perfungar. His dictis, confestim ad supplicium trahebatur.—Ibid. 27, 28.

³ Et iste quidem hoc modo vita decessit, non solum juvenibus, sed et universæ genti memoriam mortis suæ ad exemplum virtutis et fortitudinis derelinquens.—Ibid. 31.

⁴ Si esca scandalizat fratrem meum, non manducabo carnem in æternum, ne fratrem meum scandalizem.—I. Cor. viii. 13.

⁵ Tantopere charitati studendum est, ut licita pro illicitis habeantur, ne obstet fratri nostro.—St. Ambr. in hunc locum.

all this; but what ideas does it put into people's heads about her! Nor have they unreasonable grounds for their suspicions. A woman dresses like others of her standing, according to the vain fashions of the world, but, as she imagines, she does not transgress the bounds of decorum; she takes part in Shrove-tide amusements and is fond of going to parties; all that is lawful enough, according to her ideas; but by the apparently lawful customs she follows, she helps to keep up abuses that are not lawful. In these and similar circumstances Christian charity obliges us, when we can do so without suffering any great loss, to give up that conversation, that intimacy, that extravagance in dress, that worldly custom, in order not to scandalize others. This applies specially to persons whose condition is one which gives them the reputation of holiness, such as persons consecrated to God, the members of the clergy, whether regular or secular, as also those gentlemen and ladies who are looked on as holy; one individual of that kind can do more harm by giving scandal in the way I have mentioned, than twenty others. And why? Because the others appeal to their example in support of the abuses in which they indulge; see, they exclaim, So-and-so does it; he certainly wishes to go to heaven, and yet he makes no scruple of acting in that way. See how those children behave, and yet it is a well-known fact that their parents are very pious people.

And what conclusion am I to draw from all this, my dear brethren? If Christian charity requires us to avoid what is lawful in itself, lest we should give occasion of sin to others, what a terrible sin, crying to heaven for vengeance, they are guilty of, who try to propagate wickedness by word and example, by advice and instruction, by approval and instigation, and to lead others into sin! St. John Chrysostom calls such people "agents and representatives of the devil, murderers of souls, betrayers of the Blood of Jesus Christ."¹ In former times the Venetians and the French besieged the town of Ptolemais, and surrounded it so effectually that no citizen or soldier of the town could give the least information concerning himself to his friends living outside. Not far off the Sultan was encamped, so that his colors could be seen from a high tower; but all means of access to the town were cut off. Nevertheless, a way was at last found of interchanging letters between the Sultan and the commandant of the town. The latter had a

How wicked, then, it must be to give scandal.

¹ Supplementum dtaboli.

pigeon, which was accustomed to fly into the neighboring forest, in which the Sultan was encamped, and then to return to the town. Whenever he wished to send a letter, he tied it under the wing of the pigeon, which flew off with it in the desired direction, and brought back an answer. This interchange of letters went on for a long time, until at last the innocent messenger flew into the enemies' camp, and it was at once seized. The letters it carried were directed to the commandant, and were to the effect that the Sultan would attack the enemy in a few days, and then come to the assistance of the beleaguered town. Instead of this letter, another was written, in a handwriting resembling that of the former, telling the commandant that no help was to be expected, and ordering him, in the name of the Sultan, to capitulate at once, in order to save the lives of his soldiers. The pigeon was again made the letter-carrier, and it flew back without delay to the town, bearing its treacherous message. The commandant, not suspecting anything, and certain that he was obeying his sovereign's orders, hoisted the white flag on the walls, and surrendered the fortress. The bird, my dear brethren, was quite innocent, for it knew nothing of what it was carrying under its wing; yet by its help the treachery was accomplished and the fortress seized. But what name should we give to those who in any way are the occasion of scandal to their neighbor? They are owls and ravens and unclean birds of prey, that deliberately fly about to seize for the devil souls that the crafty tempter has been besieging for years without being able to induce them to surrender to him. Oh, woe to them! "Woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh." They who know themselves to be guilty in this respect, are, above all other men, under a special obligation of doing all they can for the future in word and deed to help to convert the wicked, so as to gain for God either the souls they have perverted, or, if that is impossible, the souls of others, in order to make good the loss they have occasioned the almighty God. When Octavius Augustus heard of the slaughter of his three best legions, which was caused by the negligence of Quintilius Varus, he cried out, full of indignation, "Quintilius Varus, give me back my legions!"² Such is the reproof those people will have to expect from God, who will cry out to them in a terrible voice from His judgment-seat: give Me back the souls you took

¹ Væ homini illi per quem scandalum venit.—Matt. xviii. 7.

² Quintilli Vare ! redde legiones.—Sueton., Oct. Aug., c. xxiii.

from Me! Restore to Me the souls that you have stolen from Me by giving them scandal!

My dear brethren, I trust that none of us is guilty in that way. If we are obliged to go into the company of the wicked, let us make use of our intercourse with them according to the law of Christian charity, and in the manner in which God makes use of His patience in bearing with sinners; that is, not only for the good of our own souls, but also for the good of the souls of others. Most of that good will be the work of our edifying example; and none of us, no matter what is his state or condition, can reasonably excuse himself from the performance of this duty. And if we have no other means at hand to help in the conversion of the wicked during this specially dangerous season of Shrove-tide, let us, at all events, recommend them to the mercy of God by fervent prayer, so that they and we may be kept from grievous sin, or, if they have already fallen, that they may do penance at once, and that we may help each other to persevere in good to the end of our lives, until we shall meet in the society of the elect in the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

Conclusion
and resolution
to work
for the sal-
vation of
souls
when in the
company of
the wicked.

On Fraternal Correction, see several Sermons in the following Fourth Part. On the Daily Examen of Conscience, as a Means of Persevering in Good, see the preceding First Part. On Diligence in Hearing the Word of God in Sermons, for the same end, see the Fourth Part. On the Frequent Meditation on Death and Eternity, see the Fifth Part.

ON DOING PENANCE DURING THE TIME OF A JUBILEE.

SIXTY-FOURTH SERMON.

ON THE YEAR OF A JUBILEE, AS A TIME OF SPECIAL GRACES.

Subject.

During this time, 1. prisoners are released; 2. sold or forfeited goods are restored; 3. debts that have been incurred are remitted, together with all the punishment that may be due on account of them. Therefore no one should fail to profit by such a favorable opportunity.—*Preached in the year 1730, on the first Sunday when the Jubilee proclaimed by the recently elected Pontiff, Clement XII., was published.*

Text.

Vocabis remissionem cunctis habitatoribus terræ tuæ; ipse est enim Jubilæus.—Levit. xxv. 10.

“Thou shalt proclaim remission to all the inhabitants of the land; for it is the year of jubilee.”

Introduction.

Amongst other laws which the Lord God commanded His servant Moses to announce to His chosen people was this: Every week I reserve a day to Myself, which shall be sanctified in My honor, and that is the Sabbath; every fiftieth year I reserve to Myself, and that shall be called the holy year, or the jubilee. Five months beforehand that year shall be announced in all the towns by the joyful sound of the trumpet, and all the people shall with unusual signs of joy and festivity meet in the temple of Jerusalem, in order to hold a feast in honor of their God.” And what, O Jews! was the occasion of this extraordinary exulta-

tion on your part? The special favors that God bestowed in the jubilee year. What favors were they? All debts were remitted to those who had contracted any that they were not able to pay: "Thou shalt proclaim remission." They who had sold their houses or lands could regain possession of them, so that all immovable property returned to its former owner: "Every man shall return to his possession."¹ The prisons were opened, and those detained therein were set at liberty, and slaves were made free: "And every one shall go back to his former family."² And was that all? Yes, that was all. O shadows! figures! symbols! your time has passed, says St. Paul: "Now all these things happened to them in figure."³ What joyful times we Christians live in, who possess in reality that which the Hebrews had only in figure! "Thou shalt proclaim remission to all the inhabitants of the land; for it is the year of jubilee," such is the message sent us from Rome to-day by the voice of the Vicar of Jesus Christ. Rejoice, then, and exult far more than the Jews did of old; for the favors conceded to them affected only their bodies and their temporal welfare; while those conferred on us by God in this jubilee are for the good of our souls and for our eternal happiness, as I shall now explain.

Plan of Discourse.

The jubilee year is a time of special graces for us Christians. Why? Because prisoners are released from slavery. The first grace. Because sold or forfeited goods are restored. The second grace. Because debts that have been incurred are remitted, together with all the punishment that may be due on account of them. The third grace which is offered during this season of graces. Therefore no one should fail to profit by such a favorable opportunity. Such is the subject of this sermon.

Father of mercy, who now openest the inexhaustible treasures of the merits gained for us by Thy Son Jesus Christ, and scatterest Thy graces with the utmost liberality, prepare our hearts and increase our desires, so that we may receive them in full measure! This we beg of Thee through the Mother of Thy Son; Mary full of grace, and the intercession of our holy guardian angels.

¹ Revertetur homo ad possessionem suam.—Levit. xxv. 10.

² Et unusquisque rediet ad familiam pristinam.—Ibid.

³ Hac autem omnia in figura contingebant illis.—I. Cor. x. 11.

First Point.

Miserable condition of Christians enslaved by the Turks.

A pitiful spectacle it was, as we read in old histories and hear from those in our own days who were eye-witnesses of it, to see how the Christians who were taken prisoners by the Turks, Algerians, and Saracens, were treated; how in the morning they were driven out of their dungeons to work, their hands and feet laden with chains, while their flagging strength was urged on to incessant toil by frequent blows of the whip, as if they were horses or oxen. Pitiful it was to hear them moan and sigh, in the midst of their torments and miseries, with their bodies so emaciated that they resembled corpses more than living beings. Pitiful to hear them cry for mercy, and to see how they had to fight among themselves for the wretched bit of coarse bread that was thrown to them, as if they were greyhounds training for a hunt just let out of the kennel to be fed. And amongst these wretched mortals there were sometimes men who were formerly in a high position, and delicate children, who, as they had not the means of paying their ransom, were reduced to such miserable straits. Truly a pitiful spectacle!

What difficult conditions would they not joyfully fulfil to be restored to liberty.

What do I mean by telling you this, my dear brethren? Do I mean, perhaps, to console you by telling you that in this jubilee year all those prisoners are to be released from slavery, and to be restored to freedom? Ah, would that I could bring them such a joyful message! If one were to appear to-day before their dungeons, and to cry out in a loud voice, to the sound of the trumpet: "Every one shall go back to his former family. Hear, ye suffering people! All the prisoners of this land are set at liberty! come out at once! lay aside your chains! You are free, on the sole condition of doing homage to the Sultan, or of humbly petitioning his ambassador, who is a mute and cannot say a word to you, to be set at liberty, with the promise that you will never again set foot in this country. Fulfil that condition, and you are free." What do you think, my dear brethren? Would there not be unspeakable joy and exultation amongst the unhappy slaves? Would they not, rising, as it were, from the dead, willingly perform whatever act of homage might be required from them? Would they not solemnly promise, by all that is dear to them, never again to set foot in a land in which they have suffered so much? Would there be even one of them who would hesitate as to fulfilling the condition imposed on him in order to regain his freedom? Ah! if he had, in addition to that, to sacrifice all his possessions, he would cheerfully consent

to do so. But I cannot bring such a welcome message to the unhappy slaves.

Christians, are there not prisoners of the kind amongst ourselves nowadays? Nor do I allude now to those malefactors who are kept in prison here and there throughout the country; even they would rejoice if they were told that in this year of jubilee they were to be set at liberty and freed from the punishment of death. I am speaking of ourselves, who are now assembled here; and I ask, are there no slaves amongst us? Would to God that we could all boast with truth of enjoying that freedom of which St. Paul writes to the Romans: "The creature also itself shall be delivered from the servitude of corruption, into the liberty of the glory of the children of God."¹ But, alas! sinners who are still in the state of sin, what are you? You are poor prisoners and bond-slaves. Such is the name given you by Our Lord in the Gospel of St. John: "Amen, amen, I say unto you, that whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin."² And who is it that keeps you in slavery? Are you groaning under the heavy yoke of the Algerians? or of the Saracens? or of the Turks? If that were the case, you would be wretched indeed, and you would deserve my most heartfelt commiseration; but even then you would not be so much to be pitied as you are now. Hear how St. Paul describes your slavery: "And they may recover themselves from the snares of the devil, by whom they are held captive at his will."³ So that you are slaves of the devil, with whom no tyrant can vie in cruelty; you are bound with as many chains as you are subject to vices; you are given over to as many tortures, as you have evil inclinations that you do not resist; you suffer all the more from hunger and thirst, as your conscience enjoys less of heavenly consolation; and if you remain longer in that slavery, the eternal dungeons of hell are prepared for you. Unhappy wretches that you are! and all the more unhappy, because you do not know your misery!

Sinners are enslaved by the devil.

It is a joyful message, O sinners, that I have to deliver to you to-day. The trumpet is sounded, and everywhere remission is proclaimed to all the inhabitants of the land; for it is the year of jubilee. Come forth, then, at once from the prison in

To-day ransom is offered to them under easy conditions.

¹ Ipsa creatura liberabitur a servitute corruptionis in libertatem gloriæ filiorum Dei.—Rom. viii. 21.

² Amen, amen, dico vobis, quia omnis qui facit peccatum, servus est peccati.—John viii. 34.

³ Et respiciant a diaboli laqueis, a quo captivi tenentur ad ipsius voluntatem.—II. Tim. ii. 26.

which you have been groaning under the yoke of the devil. Jesus Christ offers to pay your ransom and to give you freely His own most sacred flesh and blood and all His merits; you need not pay a penny to obtain your liberty; all you have to do is to make an act of homage to your offended God, to visit once the three churches appointed for the purpose, to fast for three days according to the usual custom of the Church, to give a small alms to the poor, according to your means, to say devoutly a few "Our Fathers" for the intention of the Church, to repent of your sins and confess them to a priest, who is the ambassador of God, and is, so to speak, dumb and speechless, and to promise sincerely that you will not return again to that land of your captivity. That is all you have to do, in order to be set at liberty, to enjoy peace of conscience, and to possess the glorious freedom of the children of God.

Which they
should joy-
fully fulfil.

Do you think it too much? Are the conditions too difficult to gain such a great favor? Are they too much for a sinner who has often merited hell-fire, and who should consider it a great favor indeed if by suffering all the torments in the world he could do penance for his sins and escape eternal death? Ah, fathers, mothers, if your children were lying on their death-beds, what sums of money would you not be willing to give, if you could thereby have them restored to health! Dutiful children, if your father or mother were in danger of death, would you spare any trouble to avert that danger? And now your own, only, immortal soul is groaning in the slavery of the devil, in imminent danger of everlasting death; the grace of redemption is offered you, and yet you hesitate about fulfilling the conditions, easy as they are, that will enable you to profit by that grace! Lose no time, then; break at once the chains of your vices, that bind you. "Behold, now is the acceptable time," I say to you, in the words of St. Paul; "behold now is the day of salvation."¹ This is the day of your redemption. But where shall I go? asks the prisoner on the day of his release. I have lost all I possessed in the world; house and home are sold; there is nothing I can call my own; what have I gained by my release, since I must now beg my bread from door to door? Do not trouble yourselves, O sinners, by such thoughts, if you are really desirous of regaining your freedom; for all that you have lost or sold will be restored to you: "Every man shall return to his possession;" such is the command given to the Jews by God during the

¹ Ecce nunc tempus acceptabile, ecce nunc dies salutis.—II. Cor. vi. 2.

jubilee year; and it also expresses the grace offered to all men now in this jubilee that we are celebrating.

Second Point.

Truly, you have reason to shed tears of blood, sinful Christian, when you consider your unhappy state! You lost and forfeited great treasures, when you allowed yourself to be made a slave of the devil by transgressing the divine commands; you have forfeited all the spiritual goods of your soul, all the supernatural graces and virtues which were infused into you in baptism. Not one of them all has remained to you except faith and hope, and not even these, if you have sinned grievously against them. In losing sanctifying grace you have lost the favor and friendship of God, and the merits of all the good works that you had done during your whole former life. See if you can count all the good works you have done from the time when you first came to the use of reason, to the first mortal sin you committed. How often have you been to confession, to holy Communion? How many Masses have you heard, thus offering to God a sacrifice infinitely pleasing in His sight? How many rosaries and other prayers have you sent up to heaven? How often have you directed your daily labor to God by the good intention? How often have you given alms to Jesus Christ in the person of His poor? How often have you fasted and made acts of charity, humility, meekness, patience, resignation to the divine will, mercy, and Christian mortification? Every one of those acts, nay, every thought, every step, every movement of your body, while you were in the state of grace and in the friendship of God, provided you had a good intention, earned for you an increase of sanctifying grace and a new degree of eternal glory in heaven. But the moment you consented to a grievous sin and became a slave of the devil you lost all those treasures of grace and merit forever, and not the least reward was due to you for them. Nay, you lost the coffer as well as the gold; you forfeited the very house in which those treasures were kept, that is, your immortal soul; and what is most deplorable of all, you forfeited heaven with its joys and glories, nay, your very right and claim to heaven and to the possession of God that was formerly yours. In truth, that was a transaction of the greatest importance, in which such valuable treasures were bartered!

The sinner, by falling into slavery, forfeits all the treasures of his soul.

And what price did you get for them? Ah, God help us! As the Prophet David says of you and those like you, "They And for nothing.

set at naught the desirable land;”¹ they have bartered heaven and everything worth having for a mere nothing. How ill those two expressions harmonize, “the desirable land,” and, “set at naught”! Heaven given away for nothing! Yes, for nothing; and it is what sinners do every day. That brutal lust, that vanishes in a second, and that is often admitted only in thoughts voluntarily entertained; that empty honor and praise of men, which disappears like smoke before the wind; that trifling gain made unjustly, which is squandered in a day; that hatred and feeling of revenge against one’s neighbor, which fills the heart with bitterness; those curses and imprecations that escape in a moment of deliberate anger; that childish fear or love of a creature, that so often leads to evil; that impure or uncharitable remark, that so often slips into a conversation; that vain and scandalous style of dress, that only provokes ridicule and laughter; such is the price demanded by those foolish people, and offered and agreed to by the hellish purchaser; and for it heaven and its eternal goods are given away, “set at naught”!

Even the
just give up
heaven for
a time.

Just souls! even the habit of committing venial sins, although it does not cause you to forfeit heaven forever, yet makes you, as it were, place it in pawn for a time. By every jocosely lie, every wilful movement of anger and impatience, every word uttered deliberately through anger or revenge, every wilful distraction in prayer, every little act of irreverence in church, every suspicious thought, every curious glance at a person of the opposite sex, a man says in reality: I am satisfied to be deprived of the possession of heaven, of the enjoyment of the merits I have accumulated, of the glorious vision of God, my sovereign and supreme good, and of the endless joys prepared for me; I am satisfied to be deprived of them for a day, a month, or one, two, ten, or twenty years, according to the gravity of the sin, or the amount of deliberation with which it was committed; and these sins sometimes are so numerous that, if they are not atoned for here on earth, one has to remain in purgatory and to be excluded from heaven till the Day of Judgment. And all that for nothing! Poor mortals! what a terrible loss! Well may you lament and sigh when you think of it! Doubtless you imagine that, when your sins are forgiven and you are released from captivity and again restored to liberty, there will be nothing for you but to go about the world bare and naked as to your soul, like a needy beggar, seeking for nourishment that is,

¹ Pro nihilo habuerunt terram desiderabilem.—Ps. cv. 24.

trying to get back some more merits by additional good works.

Poor mortal, be comforted! I have a cheering message for you! "Behold, now is the acceptable time," in which all those spiritual goods that you have forfeited, lost, squandered, or given away, will be restored to you, if you only fulfil a few conditions. O sacred jubilee! thou art that desirable time, in which every contract made with the devil can be nullified and rendered void forever; in which all former gifts, graces, merits, virtues, and ornaments of the soul, as well as God Himself and the kingdom of heaven, can be restored to the penitent, and that, too, with considerable additions. "Every man shall return to his possession;" all who wish it can regain possession of their former inheritance. And what price have we to pay? A short prayer after having repented of and confessed our sins, a trifling alms, and a little fasting. O holy Prophet! thou complainest of the folly and madness of sinners in setting at naught the desirable land; to-day I must invert the sense of thy words, and say that they can have the desirable land for nothing; so great is our good fortune, that we can purchase the land of the living for a mere nothing; for the God of goodness announces to us that, although we have bartered for nothing His heaven and the treasures He had bestowed on us, yet He now offers them back to us for the same price, for nothing.

Now they can redeem everything for a mere nothing almost.

Christians, where is now our avarice and greed of gain? Shall we allow this golden opportunity to go by unprofited of? Should we not rather set aside all other affairs, and with all diligence labor to gain such a great advantage, since we can do it in a short time, by cleansing our conscience from the filth of sin, and fulfilling the few prescribed conditions as well as we can? Oh! if Esau, after having sold his birth-right for a mess of pottage, could have bought it back again at the same price; if the foolish king Lysimachus, who sold his kingdom for a drink of water when he was thirsty, could have regained it by giving another drink of water for it, how happy would they not both have been, and how ready to pay even a far greater price! Ah! if I said to one of you: see that fine house, that beautiful garden, that fruitful land, that noble property, which you were forced to sell or mortgage; now is your time to redeem or re-purchase it; what! he would at once reply, what price will I have to pay for it? I have no money now, nor do I expect to have enough to redeem it. No matter, I would say; a few pence will be sufficient; when you have paid them, the title-

Therefore no one should neglect doing so.

deeds of your property will be handed to you. Oh, with what joy he would at once run out of the church and get the sum required! Christians, I ask you again, where is our avarice and greed of gain? It is not a handful of earth, or a perishable house, or a garden, or a piece of ground, or an earthly kingdom that is offered to us, but the eternal goods, the beautiful heaven that we have so wantonly given away; these we can now regain possession of during this time, by performing a few works of devotion; and yet we hesitate; we do not yet see the great fortune that is within our grasp, if we only wish to stretch out our hands for it!

Difference between the jubilee and an ordinary confession.

Yes, you exclaim, that is all very well; but why do you exaggerate so much your praises of the jubilee year? All that you have said is indeed very true, and is very desirable, too; but we need not have recourse to the jubilee in order to gain those advantages; we have another means at hand, if we wish to avail ourselves of it, namely, the sacrament of penance; a good confession will free the sinner from the yoke of the devil, restore him to the freedom of the children of God, and give back to him all his lost merits, supernatural virtues, and other ornaments of the soul, as well as God and heaven, so that there is nothing very extraordinary in the jubilee year, after all. The first statement is true, my dear brethren, but not the second. For there is a great difference between an ordinary confession, and the penance one does during the jubilee. "Thou shalt proclaim remission to all the inhabitants of the land." Not only are all debts remitted, but also all punishment. And this is the third grace which the jubilee offers us, and which we do not always gain by our ordinary confessions.

Third Point.

In confession the guilt, but not all the punishment due to sin, is remitted.

Sometimes those who are taken prisoners by the Turks and Saracens, and those, too, among Christians who are imprisoned on account of debt, are allowed to leave their prison, but they must still wear their chains or be attended by a guard; and in this guise they wander about the country, begging, until they have collected enough to ransom themselves or to pay their debts. Occasionally, too, a forfeited property is given back to its former owner, on the condition that he pays a certain sum every year, until the whole mortgage is paid off. That is, indeed, a favor for those people, but it is not a complete favor; it is a remission, but imposes the burden of a yearly payment. So it is, my dear

brethren, with the sacrament of penance ordinarily speaking. It frees the sinner from the dungeons of hell, and sets him at liberty; but it still leaves him in debt, and he has to work until he has the amount required to settle his account fully. His lost spiritual goods are restored to him, but he has still to pay a heavy interest, until the whole capital is repaid; that is, the guilt of sin is forgiven, so that he is again a friend of God, but not the punishment which he still owes the strict justice of God; and that punishment must bear some proportion to the eternal pains he has merited, nor can any one hope that the just God will remit or forgive any part of it. Even the smallest sin must be punished, and if the sinner does not atone for it in this life, either by bearing patiently the trials sent him by God, or by voluntary works of penance, or by other works of devotion which have the power of satisfying for sin, he must suffer severely for it in the next life, in that place of torments of which the divine Judge says, "Amen, I say to thee, thou shalt not go from thence till thou repay the last farthing."¹

O man, look back on your life, and bring to mind, if you can, all your sins. See how many you have committed from your seventh year, when you first came to the use of reason, to the present moment, with eyes, ears, tongue, hands, body, and in the thoughts and desires of your heart; how many you have committed through deliberate malice, how many through weakness and frailty, how many through negligence and sloth, how many in act, how many in omission, how many knowingly, how many through culpable ignorance, how many alone by yourself, how many in company with others; how many you have caused others to commit by giving scandal, or by negligence in performing the duties of your state; how many grievous, how many venial sins you have been guilty of. Ah, what a fearful number of sins you will thus bring to mind! And how long will you have to suffer in the next life on account of them? Perhaps a hundred, perhaps a thousand years, or even till the Day of Judgment? I cannot tell you how long; but this much I know for certain, that, if the good God does not show mercy to you now, and remit all the debts you have contracted by sin, you will have to suffer in the next life until you shall have paid the last farthing, unless you atone fully in this life. Now count your good and satisfactory works, and see how much of the debt you have paid off. See what penance you have done; count up your fastings,

The sinner has incurred a heavy debt of punishment, and wiped out very little of it.

¹ Amen dico tibi, non exies inde, donec reddas novissimum quadrantem.—Matt. v. 26.

prayers, almsdeeds, and other works of satisfaction; perhaps their number will be very small. And it may be, too, that they were performed so tepidly, so distractedly, so faultily, and without a pure intention, that, instead of lessening, you have rather increased your debt of punishment. O my God, what will Thy justice demand of me! Thus the immense debt you have incurred in the sight of God still remains to be paid almost in its entirety.

All punishment can be wiped out during this time.

Now you can understand the greatness of the grace that is offered you to-day; all this punishment will be remitted completely during this jubilee, provided you perform the works prescribed properly and with due dispositions. If you had deserved hell a hundred thousand million times, nay, if you had committed all the sins of the world, and had still to suffer for them all, you can now get rid of the whole debt, so that you will owe nothing more to God's justice. That which cost so many holy confessors and penitents bitter tears, and fasting, and prayer for many years; that which the martyrs of Christ had to purchase by shedding their blood, by sacrificing all their worldly possessions and giving up their very lives, that is now offered you for a mere nothing. The emperor Tiberius caused Agrippa, one of the most illustrious of the Roman nobles, to be cast into prison; and to add to his punishment, he ordered him to be bound by a heavy iron chain, as a slave. In this lamentable plight Agrippa languished for a time, in hourly expectation of death. Some months afterwards Tiberius died and was succeeded by Caligula. The latter at once caused Agrippa to be set at liberty; but not content with that, he also had a large chain made of pure gold, as heavy as the iron chain that Agrippa wore in prison, and sent it to him as a present. This, said he, will serve to show you that I wish to bind you to me as closely as you were formerly bound by the iron chain, so that you may know to what degree you enjoy my favor. What a happy exchange that was! To be freed from prison and from the danger of death, to become a favorite of the emperor! O sinner, much greater is the favor that the great Monarch of heaven now offers you, if you will be only truly converted to Him. Not only will He free you from the prison in which you have been lying, bound as a slave of the devil, but after having remitted the whole debt of punishment you owed Him, He will bestow on you a golden chain, that is, the precious treasure of sanctifying grace, as a sign of your having become a child and friend of God, and a lawful

heir to the kingdom of heaven, so that, if you were to die suddenly after having gained this indulgence, you would, like a newly-baptized infant, go at once into heaven. Let no one imagine, my dear brethren, that the few conditions prescribed, namely, the fasting, prayer, visiting the church, and almsgiving, are able of themselves to effect that. No, for they cannot satisfy the strict justice of God; and yet that justice is fully satisfied, for it is Jesus Christ Himself, the Son of God, who offers to His heavenly Father full satisfaction for our sins, out of the endless treasures of His merits, which He now opens to His Vicar on earth, that they may be distributed to the faithful.

Finally, you can receive that complete remission from any approved priest, no matter who he is, and no matter how grievous your sins are, even if the Pope alone could absolve from them under ordinary circumstances; and, moreover, any vow that you may have made (save and except only the vow of perpetual chastity and the vow of entering religion) you can have changed into any other pious work. O my God! how generous and even prodigal Thou art in bestowing Thy gifts and graces on us poor mortals, who are so little deserving of them. Ah, let the joyful news of this jubilee be announced also to the poor souls in purgatory, who long so eagerly to be released from their torments! (I dare not ask any favor for the damned, because there is no redemption for them.) Oh, what would not those poor souls do to gain the jubilee? Would they fast for three days? or confess to a priest the sins they committed during their lives? or visit the churches? or say seven "Our Fathers"? Ah, put before them all the torments Thy holy martyrs have undergone; tell them they must suffer them all in order to obtain remission of the punishment still due to them, and they would accept the condition with joy. And yet, what Thou refuseth to do for those dear friends of Thine, even under such difficult conditions, Thou now offerest to us poor sinners for a mere nothing.

What a
great grace!

What, then, remains for us, O God of goodness, but to thank Thee with all our hearts for such a great and unmerited favor, to make a firm resolution to fulfil the prescribed works with the utmost diligence, and, above all, to be converted to Thee by true penance, for that is the chief end of the jubilee. Yes, O Lord, such is my firm resolve! Impure intimacy, proximate occasion of sin, away with you! I have done with you! Out of my house at once; for, as long as you are there, I cannot be converted to God. Hatred and anger against my neighbor, away

Conclusion
and resolution
to fulfil perfectly
the pre-
scribed con-
ditions.

with you out of my heart! I forgive all who have ever offended me! I offer my friendship to all, for otherwise I cannot be converted to God! Ill-gotten gains, away with you; I do not want you any more; for without restitution I cannot be converted to God. I must not allow this precious opportunity, which will perhaps never occur again during my life-time, to go by unprofited of, so that, being all fully reconciled to Thee, our God, we may help to avert the dangers and calamities that threaten the Catholic Church and all Christendom, and after having renewed and amended our lives, may serve Thee for the future with greater zeal and constancy to the end. Amen.

Another Introduction for the same Sermon, for any feast on which a Plenary Indulgence is accorded.

Text.

Ecce nunc tempus acceptabile; ecce nunc dies salutis.—II. Cor. vi. 2.

“Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

Introduction.

In the Old Law there was no more desirable time for the Jews than the advent of the fiftieth year, of which a detailed description is given in the Book of Leviticus, in the twenty-fifth chapter. Five months beforehand it was announced in all the towns, etc. *Continues as above, with the few changes which are necessary to make the sermon applicable to the feast.*

SIXTY-FIFTH SERMON.

ON THE WICKEDNESS OF THOSE WHO REFUSE TO BE CONVERTED DURING THE JUBILEE.

Subject.

The Christian who now refuses to be fully reconciled to God acts most wickedly towards all Christendom.—*Preached on the second Sunday of the Jubilee.*

Text.

Obsecramus pro Christo, reconciliamini Deo.—II. Cor. v. 20.
“For Christ, we beseech you, be reconciled to God.”

Introduction.

Great lords do not, as a general rule, without some extraordinary reason, ask suppliantly for a favor, especially from those whom they surpass in dignity; for usually, when they require anything, they are accustomed to command rather than to beg. If the Roman emperor were to send a supplication to some of his subordinate princes, the subject of it must be some matter of the greatest importance, as is the case when he implores the assistance of the princes of the empire in great danger of war. The trumpets are sounded, my dear brethren, as I said in my last sermon, the jubilee year is announced, the vast treasury of the Church is opened, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, the visible head of the Church, the Pope, has commissioned his nuncios and the bishops, priests, and preachers of the Church, and, as we shall see in the course of the sermon, has sent them to beg suppliantly of the people subject to his authority, in the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians: "For Christ we beseech you, be reconciled to God." Truly, there must be something of the greatest importance, for which our repentance is necessary. And so there is, my dear brethren; a great deal depends on it; so that we should make it our business to be now reconciled to God, and that, too, unanimously, without a single exception, as I shall now prove; for it is evident from what we have seen last Sunday that we do not act honestly towards our souls, if we refuse to take advantage of the golden opportunity now offered us. But that is not the most important point; for—

Plan of Discourse.

He who now refuses to be reconciled to God acts most wickedly towards all Christendom. Such is the whole subject of to-day's exhortation. Therefore, if we have true Christian blood in our veins, let us now unanimously renounce sin, and be converted to God with our whole hearts. Such shall be the conclusion.

Obtain for us grace to this end, O Mary, help of Christians! And you holy angels, protectors of the Christian Church, impel thereto those entrusted to your charge, and do not allow one of them to rest until he has obeyed your inspiration.

When all the members of a community are unanimous in working for a certain end that concerns the general welfare, and is of the utmost importance, it would be a most unbecoming and wicked thing for a citizen to refuse to assist them when he can; and he who actually refuses his help under such circumstances,

He is a
worthless
citizen who
does not
join in the
general

effort for
the com-
mon weal.

ought to be driven out of the community as an unworthy member, who takes such little interest in the general welfare that, as far as he is concerned, he would let it go to ruin through sheer laziness. For a community constitutes a moral body, of which each inhabitant is a member. Now St. Paul warns us "that there might be no schism in the body, but the members might be mutually careful one for another. And if one member suffer anything, all the members suffer with it; or if one member glory, all the members rejoice with it."¹ Experience teaches the truth of this; if we knock our foot against a stone, all the members of the body which can help it are at once uneasy and restless, and anxious to render assistance; the hands are stretched out to protect the wounded member; the eyes look to see where it is hurt; the mouth contracts with pain, and commences to lament and sigh; the whole body quivers with sympathy. And yet, it is only the foot, the lowest member of the body, that is hurt; what would it then be, if a nobler part were injured? Oh! in order to preserve that, every other member must be ready at once to sacrifice itself. How readily does not a man stretch forth his hand to be cut off, if amputation is necessary to preserve the life of the body! And how much more eagerly still do not all the members assist each other mutually, when there is no other means of warding off death!

Reconcili-
ation with
God is now
offered to
all Chris-
tian sto-
gether.

My dear brethren, to whom is the jubilee proclaimed this year? Who are recommended by the Vicar of Jesus Christ to use the treasures of grace now opened to them, and to be reconciled to God? Is it, perhaps, only a few members of that mystic body, the Catholic Church? Or perhaps only the inhabitants of a certain town, or country? If the jubilee were proclaimed only for the people of this archdiocese of Treves, certainly there should not be one in the whole land who would not join with the others in profiting of it. But as a matter of fact, the jubilee is proclaimed for the whole Christian world, and every Catholic on earth is invited to take advantage of it. "To each and every one of the faithful of both sexes, wherever they may be," such are the words of the Papal Bull.² All the patriarchs, archbishops, bishops, prelates, and all ecclesiastical superiors, wherever they may be, are solemnly commanded, in virtue of the obedience they owe the Church, to announce this jubilee without delay to their

¹ Ut non sit schisma in corpore, sed id ipsum pro invicem sollicita sint membra; si quid patitur unum membrum, compatiuntur omnia membra: sive gloriatur unum membrum, congaudent omnia membra.—1. Cor. xii. 25, 26.

² Universis et singulis Christianidelibus ubique degentibus.

subjects. In all lands and parts of the world where the true Catholic faith flourishes, in due obedience to the see of Rome, this jubilee is either already announced, or will be announced in a short time; all without exception are invited to be reconciled to God.

Therefore no one who wishes to be esteemed a sincere member of the Christian fold and community will refuse to take part in this holy undertaking; and he who does not now endeavor to be truly reconciled to God acts most unbecomingly. The blind man, as St. Luke tells us, was sitting by the wayside, begging; "when he heard the multitude passing by, he asked what this meant. And they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. And he cried out, saying: Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."¹ Christians, who have perhaps hitherto lived in the state of sin, without purposing repentance or amendment, or who have through love of your blindness not made any effort to repent, hear what is now going on in the whole Christian world; how the people assemble everywhere to hold processions in the public streets; how they visit the churches and besiege the confessionals in order to disclose their sins. If you ask what is the meaning of that, you will be told that Jesus of Nazareth is passing by, that He has offered full pardon of their sins to all men, and that the Vicar of Jesus Christ has gathered together his whole flock, that they may all be reconciled to God. To work, then, at once; this concerns you! You, too, are members of the flock; cry and call out with penitent hearts, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."

So that he who refuses it acts wickedly.

That blind man would have had some excuse if he had not cried out for mercy; for those who were then following Christ, and amongst them even the Apostles and disciples, were displeased with him, and told him to hold his peace: "And they that went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace."² Nevertheless, he cried out more eagerly, that he might be cured of his blindness: "But he cried out much more: Son of David, have mercy on me."³ Sinner, you should long ago have called out to God for mercy, and have endeavored to regain His friendship; but perhaps other men stood in your way; the people with whom you associated, by their bad example or advice, may

Although he is encouraged by the example of all to accept the offer.

¹ Cum audiret tuam prætereuntem, interrogabat quid hoc esset. Dixerunt autem ei, quod Jesus Nazarenus transiret. Et clamavit dicens: Jesu, fili David, miserere mei.—Luce xviii. 36-38.

² Et qui præibant, increpabant eum ut taceret.—Ibid. 39.

³ Ipse vero multo magis clamabat: Fili David, miserere mei.—Ibid.

have prevented you from asking for mercy, because they were addicted to the same vices as you. But now there is no one to prevent you from being converted; the priests await you in the confessional to absolve you from your sins; all true Catholics throughout the world are now following Jesus Christ, and by their example are encouraging you to cry out for mercy, to confess your sins, and to be reconciled to God. Will you, then, be the only one amongst so many to refuse to take part in such a holy work? Will you be the only rotten member in the mystic body of the Church of God? If so, then I say again that you act most unbecomingly and wickedly.

It is important for the Church at large that all should now be reconciled to God.

And in order to make this clear to you, what is the end for which this jubilee is proclaimed? Why are all Catholics invited to be reconciled to God? For the general good and advantage of all Christendom in the four quarters of the globe, to which Christendom you, too, belong. It is true that every plenary indulgence is an exceeding great treasure that takes away at once all the temporal punishment due to him who gains it; and therefore, many might think, and, indeed, we often hear people say, what is the special good of a jubilee? Nearly every Sunday in the year we can gain a plenary indulgence, and that has the same effect as the jubilee. That is quite true, as far as each individual soul is concerned; still, there is a vast difference between the two, when we consider the relative importance of the ends for which they are granted. A plenary indulgence, such as one may gain during the year in the ordinary way, is conceded to a certain church or chapel, in order to encourage a certain devotion or confidence in a certain saint; such is the whole object of it. But the jubilee has a far more extended object in view; it is of the greatest importance to the Church at large that we should all gain this plenary indulgence. There is a storm threatening the bark of Peter, my dear brethren; it will not, indeed, be able to sink it, for the Infallible Truth has assured us that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it;"¹ but it is a storm that will cause the Church much trouble and uneasiness; a conflagration is now menacing Catholic Christendom that can be extinguished only by general penance and reconciliation with God.

On account of the troubles that menace the Church.

Read, if you know Latin enough for the purpose, the text of the Bull announcing this jubilee. Ah, how the newly-elected Pope laments that God has placed such a burden on his shoulders in the present troublous times! And it is to find some support in

¹ Porta: inferi non prevalebunt adversus eam. — Matt. xvi. 18.

bearing that burden that he now begs the penance and prayers of all Christians. I could not restrain my tears when I read the words of the Bull. "Fear and trembling are come upon me," it says, "at hearing Thy voice, O Lord, calling me to this office. O Lord, I have heard Thy hearing and was afraid, when I remembered the troubled and wretched state of the times, and the difficulties, anxieties, wants, and dangers that surround us on all sides; and, what is worst of all, the holy Church of God is torn and dismembered by so many heresies, and dishonored by the vices of her own children, who depart so widely from the example of Jesus Christ, that we have reason to exclaim, with tears in our eyes, in the words of the Prophet, 'How is the gold become dim, the finest color is changed! the stones of the sanctuary are scattered on the top of every street!'"¹

Nor are these mere empty words, my dear brethren. Good reason, indeed, has the Vicar of Christ for his fear, anxiety, and lamentations. Look at the world and see in what a wretched state the Christian community is. Christian princes and potentates, who should assist the Church in maintaining peace and order, are at variance with one another, so that we are, as it were, still between the hammer and the anvil, and know not what will be the end of the present state of things. There is every appearance of a general war throughout Europe; and already swords are whetted that are intended to be steeped in the blood of the children of the Church. Errors and heresies are gaining ground everywhere, so that in many places it is not so easy to say who is a good Catholic, and who is a heretic and malcontent. Whole provinces and districts are infested with this plague; in countries that are otherwise Christian, people have gone so far under the pretext of devotion and piety, that there is hardly any such thing now as frequenting the sacraments; the pastors of the Church, with their flocks, bishops, prelates, priests and religious, do not hesitate to refuse due obedience to the Head of the Church, either openly, or at least in secret and in their hearts. I will say nothing of many other shameful abuses that have crept in, even amongst children of the Church, and that are totally opposed to the holy law of Jesus Christ. All this is proof enough of the anger of God against the world, and therefore it can be taken as a presage of the punishment that He is about to inflict on it.

And the calamities impending over the world.

To avert them, all

This it is that fills the paternal heart of the Pope with fear

¹ Bulla Clement. XII., anno 1720.

388 *Refusing to be Converted during the Jubilee.*

Catholics
are now in-
vited by
the Church
to be recon-
ciled to
God.

and anxiety ; this is the calamity he now wishes to avert by throwing open to Christians the treasures of grace that Christ has left in his charge ; this is the end of the prayers and entreaties he addresses to all ecclesiastical superiors and to those who have the charge of souls: to encourage their flocks by word and example to do true penance for their sins, and to lead real Christian lives ; to all religious of both sexes, not to cease praying night and day for help for the Church in her difficulties, and finally to all the faithful, “ that, having laid down the burden of our sins by repentance, we may with sincere hearts and devout prayers, accompanied by fasting and alms-deeds, implore the divine assistance. Let us, then, unite in praying that the God of peace may reconcile Christian potentates, humble the enemies of the Church, destroy heresies, cause the contumacious and disobedient to turn from the way of error and obstinacy and come back to the fold of the Church, avert the scourge from His people, and, according to His great mercy, free all from punishment and danger.” Such are the words of the papal Bull.

Nor should
any one re-
fuse this
invitation,
because
even one
sinner can
draw down
the wrath of
God on the
people.

From this, my dear brethren, you can see whether we have not cause now, more than ever, to be all without exception fully reconciled to God, and whether he is not truly wicked and impious who now refuses to repent of his sins and to amend his vicious life, although so much depends on his amendment. Ah, are we Christians in reality ? If so, how is it that we have no hearts to feel for the blood of so many fellow-Christians, which is in the greatest danger of being shed in torrents ? no hearts to sorrow for the loss of so many precious souls, ransomed by the blood of Jesus Christ, which are now on the high road to eternal ruin in the darkness of error, schism, and heresy ? no hearts to deplore the great calamities that now threaten to overrun all Christendom ? But it is certain that there is no better means of averting those evils than for us all to unite in being reconciled to God by true penance. In being reconciled to God, I say ; for, according to the general teaching of the holy Fathers, never is a country afflicted with public calamities, unless on account of the vices and sins of its people ; and when the latter amend their lives, God is, as it were, forced, according to His promise, to sheathe the sword that He had drawn to avenge Himself. I say, further, that we must all unite in being reconciled to God by true penance ; for even the vices of one town (I am not saying half enough), even the vices of one sinner are enough to draw down the divine punishments on a whole community.

When I read the Book of Josue, I am surprised to find how all the people of Israel incurred the wrath of God and lost the protection He had hitherto afforded them : “ And the Lord was angry against the children of Israel.” Josue, their leader, had sent three thousand men to take Hai, a small town ; “ There went up, therefore, three thousand fighting men.”¹ But how did they fare? They were attacked by the few inhabitants of the place, shamefully routed, and many of them put to the sword : “ Who immediately turned their backs, and were defeated by the men of the city of Hai ; and the enemies pursued them from the gate as far as Sabarim, and they slew them as they fled by the descent : and the heart of the people was struck with fear and melted like water.”² Josue, dismayed at this calamity, rent his garments, fell prostrate on the ground, and complained bitterly to God of the shameful overthrow of the people : “ Alas, O Lord God, why wouldst Thou bring this people over the river Jordan, to deliver us into the hands of the Amorrites and to destroy us? My Lord God, what shall I say, seeing Israel turning their backs to their enemies? The Chanaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear it, and being gathered together, will surround us, and cut off our name from the earth.”³ “ Israel hath sinned,” answered the Lord ; I will not help you now. “ Neither can Israel stand before his enemies, but he shall flee from them ; because he is defiled with the anathema ; I will be no more with you, till you destroy him that is guilty of this wickedness.”⁴ How, then, had the people sinned? There was but one man amongst them who had provoked the anger of the Lord : “ Achan, the son of Charmi, took something of the anathema,”⁵ and for that the whole nation had to suffer : “ And the Lord was angry against the children of Israel,”⁶ nor was He appeased until the guilty man had been punished as he deserved. “ Where Josue said : Because thou hast troubled us,

Proved from
Scripture.

¹ Ascenderunt ergo tria milia pugnatorum.—Jos. vii. 4.

² Qui statim terga vertentes, percussit sunt a viris urbis Hai ; persecutique sunt eos adversarii de porta usque ad Sabarim, et ceciderunt per prona fugientes, pertinuitque cor populi, et instar aquæ liquefactum est.—Ibid. 4, 5.

³ Heu Domine Deus ! quid voluisti traducere populum istum Jordanem fluvium, ut traderes nos in manus Amorrhæi, et perderes? Mi Domine Deus ! quid dicam, videns Israël em hostibus suis terga vertentem? Audient Chanaanæi et omnes habitatores terræ, et pariter conglorati circumdabunt nos, atque delebunt nomen nostrum de terra.—Ibid. 7, 8, 9.

⁴ Peccavit Israel, et prævaricatus est pactum meum : nec poterit Israel stare ante hostes suos, eosque fugiet, quia pollutus est anathemate. Non ero ultra vobiscum ; donec contratis eum, qui hujus sceleris reus est.—Ibid. 11, 12.

⁵ Achan, filius Charmi, tulit aliquid de anathemate.—Ibid. 1.

⁶ Iratusque est Dominus contra filios Israël.—Ibid.

the Lord trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him ; and all things that were his were consumed with fire. And the wrath of the Lord was turned away from them.”¹

Still more do I wonder at that extraordinary tempest described by St. Matthew. Jesus embarked with His disciples, and hardly had they left the shore, when, as the Evangelist says, “ Behold, a great tempest arose in the sea ; ”² the wind roared and howled, and the rising waves tossed the vessel about like a cork, “ so that the boat was covered with waves,”³ and was almost submerged. Now, I cannot help thinking, should not the heavens have been ashamed to rage so violently against the boat in which was Jesus, the Son of God, along with the apostles, the future pillars of the Church ? How could the waves dare to vent their wrath on Him who had set bounds to their fury ? Could the vessel which bore the almighty and sovereign God be really in danger of sinking ? It does not surprise me that the vessel in which Jonas embarked was near being lost, for in it was a disobedient servant, who refused to do the will of God. But that the ship which carried such a holy company should be in danger appears incomprehensible, and yet the danger was so imminent that the disciples all cried out, almost in despair : “ Lord, save us, we perish.”⁴ What could have been the cause of their peril ? We have reason for fear and trembling, my dear brethren, when we hear St. Ambrose’s explanation of it : “ The cause of the danger,” he says, “ was this : Simon Peter was in the vessel ; but the traitor Judas was with him. When Peter embarks alone, the sea is tranquil ; but when Judas joins him, the storm comes on, although Jesus, the Son of God, is with him.”⁵ Great God ! if Achan alone was able to draw down the wrath of God on the people of Israel, if Judas alone was the cause of the tempest that threatened to submerge the bark of Christ, what mischief may not be done in our own times to the Church of Christ, which is represented by the boat, by so many secret thieves like Achan, by so many traitors like Judas, by so many wicked and vicious Christians ! Therefore, sinners ! “ For Christ we beseech you, be reconciled to God ; ” we beg of you, in

¹ Ubi dixit Josue : quia turbasti nos, exturbet te Dominus in die hac. Lapidavitque eum omnis Israel, et cuncta quæ illius erant, igne consumpta sunt ; et aversus est furor Domini ab eis.—Jos. vii. 25, 26.

² Et ecce motus magnus factus est in mari.—Matt. viii. 24.

³ Ita ut navicula operiretur fluctibus.—Ibid.

⁴ Domine, salva nos, perimus.—Ibid. 25.

⁵ Hæc est causa periculi ; erat in navî Simon Petrus ; sed erat pariter et proditor Judas. Tranquillitas est, ubi solus Petrus navigat ; tempestas est, ubi Judas adjungitur.

the face of the danger that threatens us, to be reconciled to God, all of you, without exception.

But I am afraid that there will be, not one, but many Christians who will take but little interest in the general welfare of Christendom, and will hardly bestow a thought on the necessity of being converted and reconciled to God. I read that in the old heathen times there was a coarse, boorish fellow, named Cyclops, who always refused to take part in the sacrifices that were offered to the gods; when remonstrated with on his conduct, he would answer, "I do not fear the thunder-bolts of Jove, nor do I expect him to send down a shower of gold on me;" let what will happen, I do not intend to take part in the sacrifice. Ah, would to God that there were not many amongst Christians nowadays, who are just as boorish and senseless; who, as they attach little importance to the divine service during the year, and seldom hear sermons or go to the sacraments, so, too, at the present time, are but little interested in the general jubilee! They have not been accustomed to keep their unruly passions in check, as they have been for a long time indulging in a certain vice, or else they cannot make up their minds to restore ill-gotten goods, or to be reconciled to those with whom they have been at enmity, or to avoid the proximate occasion of sin, and the improper intimacy which has become a second nature to them, or to confess a sin that they have been concealing for years through shame, or to prepare themselves properly for confession, that they may not make bad confessions and Communions; and now their consciences have become callous, so that they are determined to continue in their wicked ways, saying or thinking to themselves: let others do as they will, they have no right to dictate to me; I am able to look after myself; I am not afraid of threats, they are only empty talk; the thunder-bolt has not fallen on me yet, and what is it to me whether there is peace or war in the world? I cannot do anything to prevent it. And if the Church suffers from dissensions and heresies, let those look to it who are to blame for it. What have I to do with the souls of others? If they wish to go to hell, it is their own affair. I do not dread God's anger nor His punishments; nor do I want His golden showers, the treasures of His grace. Wicked mouth, that dares to speak in that way! And such is your language, if not in words, at least in action, O sinner! whoever you be, that now refuse to be converted and to

So that he who still refuses under such circumstances is a most intolerable wretch.

share in the general spirit of true repentance. I do not want the jubilee, you say, nor a plenary indulgence, nor to be reconciled to God, nor, as far as it depends on me, to appease the anger of God against the world, or to avert the calamities that now threaten Christendom. I will not do penance, nor amend my life, nor make restitution, nor pardon my enemy, nor renounce my evil habits, nor leave the occasion of sin; I will not give notice to that man in whose service I am, nor turn that person out of my house; I will remain as I am. What a shame for a Christian to talk in that way! Such a man is not worthy of life!

And must expect the divine malediction.

Hear, and tremble when you hear, you who thus think and say, at least with your actions; tremble when you hear what God said in former times to His servant Moses during the Jewish jubilee year. Go, He said, and declare to the children of Israel in My name, that, “the Day of Atonement shall be most solemn, and shall be called holy: and you shall afflict your souls on that day;” that is, you must repent of your sins with sorrow of heart, “and shall offer a holocaust to the Lord. . . because it is a day of propitiation, that the Lord your God may be merciful unto you.”¹ And, moreover, declare woe to him who does not on that day unite with the others in doing penance for his sins: “Every soul that is not afflicted on this day shall perish from among his people.”² Impenitent Christians! the Jewish day of atonement was but a shadow of our jubilee; now, if a Jew was cursed by God for refusing to do penance on that day, what will you have to expect, for now excluding yourself from the number of all good Christians, and rejecting the reconciliation and friendship that God offers you? Your soul will perish and be lost from among your people.

Entreaty and exhortation to all to be reconciled to God.

Ah, my dear brethren, let not that be the case with us! “Having then by true penance,” I conclude in the words of the Vicar of Christ, “laid aside the burden of our sins, let us with heart-felt and unanimous prayer implore the divine help and mercy.”³ Let every member, without exception, labor for the preservation and welfare of the whole body; let there not be one amongst us to whose obstinacy and impenitence the whole of

¹ Dies expiationum erit celeberrimus, et vocabitur sanctus; affligetisque animas vestras in eo, et offeretis holocaustum Domino; quia dies propitiationis est, ut propitiatur vobis Dominus Deus vester.—Levit. xxiii. 27, 28.

² Omnis anima que afflicta non fuerit die hac, peribit de populis suis. — Ibid. 29.

³ Deposito itaque per veram poenitentiam peccatorum pondere, sinceris concordibusque suffragiis imploremus.

Christendom may one day before the judgment-seat attribute the woes and calamities it has had to suffer. "For Christ, we beseech you," O sinner! we beg and implore of you for the sake of the Church at large, "be reconciled to God." Precious souls, beloved souls, give yourselves back to Him who alone has a right to you! Give yourselves back to your Creator, who has made you to His own image! to your Redeemer, who has bought you with His precious Blood! to that God who now calls to you, offers you His grace and favor in abundance, and, as it were, compels you to accept it! God calls you; why do you delay, and put off repentance? He is ready to remit all the debts of punishment you owe Him; why do you not hasten to accept His offer? You are now slaves of the devil, but He is willing to adopt you as His children; will you not profit by His goodness? Our own fatherland, the whole of Europe, and Catholic Christendom throughout the world are now stretching forth their hands to you, earnestly imploring you to help them; will you refuse?

You intend some day or other to give up sin; "why do you not do so now?"¹ I ask you in the words of St. Augustine. Such were the words that St. Augustine addressed to himself when God enlightened him as to the state of his soul, and he was on the point of being kept from doing penance by his evil inclinations. Why do you not repent now that all true Christians are endeavoring to obtain the divine mercy and are waiting most anxiously, so to speak, for your conversion? Is not sin as great and horrible a monster now, as it will be hereafter? You intend freeing yourselves one day from the hateful yoke of the devil; why do you not do it now, when freedom is offered to all prisoners? Or is the fire of hell not yet hot enough for you? You wish, before you die, to enter on the path that leads to heaven; why not now? The gate is always open. Or is heaven not beautiful enough for you yet? You intend sooner or later to love God with your whole heart and to serve Him as you ought; why not now, when everything will help you and impel you to the love and service of God? Or is the supreme Good not yet worthy of all love? And what is it that keeps you from being reconciled to such a good God? Is it a worthless bit of money, that you have acquired unjustly, and have hitherto kept possession of? But you must make restitution some time or other, or else you cannot go to heaven; why not do it at once, then? Is it some

And that.
too, at once.

wretched creature who has entangled your heart in the meshes of impure love? But you must give up that attachment sooner or later, or else you cannot expect to save your soul; why not do so at once? Is it some inveterate bad habit that you have not yet tried to overcome? But you must overcome it, or else there will be no hope of salvation for you; why, then, not at once? It will be much more difficult for you to do so later on, when the habit will have taken deeper root, and have grown stronger by repeated sins. Is it some secret hatred of your neighbor that prevents you from observing the law of charity in his regard? But you must resolve to lay aside that enmity, or you will not go to heaven; why not do it now? Is it some disgraceful abuse that you have not yet been able to make up your mind to renounce? But you must renounce it, or you are lost forever; why not do it at once, then? In a word, you intend some day or other to do penance and to save your soul; why not do it now, when it is required not only by your own welfare, but also by that of all Christendom?

Conclusion
and resolution.

Yes, O God of goodness, I will not delay any longer! I will be reconciled to Thee at this most favorable time with my whole heart; there is still a week left in which Thou wilt offer me the treasures of thy grace, and during that time I am determined to do true penance. I must not, cannot, will not be the only one in the whole Christian world to disturb the joy and exultation of this jubilee, and to oppose the important objects that the Church of God and the Christian community have in view; otherwise I should deserve to have them all rise up against me and expel me from their midst as a monster. No, far be that from me! I will do penance and do it sincerely; I will be sorry for all my sins, and confess them most minutely with the irrevocable resolution never to abandon Thee again, so that I may unite with others in appeasing Thy just anger, and in averting from myself and all Christians the dangers that threaten us. Sinners, if any be present here, let such be your firm resolution. **Amen.**

SIXTY-SIXTH SERMON.

ON THE DEPLORABLE STATE OF THOSE WHO REFUSE TO BE CONVERTED DURING THE TIME OF THE JUBILEE; AND ON THE MOTIVES THAT ALL OTHERS HAVE TO ENCOURAGE THEM TO PERSEVERE IN GOOD.

Subject.

1. Deplorable is the state of those who now refuse to be truly converted. 2. A congratulation addressed to those who have shared in the graces bestowed during this time, and an exhortation to them to persevere.—*Preached on the last Sunday after Pentecost, which was the end of the Jubilee.*

Text.

Qui in agro, non revertatur tollere tunicam suam.—Matt. xxiv. 18.

“He that is in the field, let him not go back to take his coat.”

Introduction.

I find that the spouse of the Canticles follows the exhortation of Our Lord in to-day's gospel to leave certain things: “I have put off my garment, how shall I put it on?”¹ What are we to understand here by the word garment? The old man with his wicked works, says St. Paul: “Stripping yourselves of the old man with his deeds, an putting on the new.”² It is the fleshly garment of cupidity, says St. Jude: “Hating also the spotted garment which is carnal.”³ In a word, the garment that we must not put on again means the sins we have committed, which hang round many a soul like a coat. “He speaks of guilt as a coat,”⁴ says Mendoza. Praise and thanks be to God, my dear brethren, we have laid aside this garment of sin during the jubilee, of which this is the last day; we are now truly reconciled to God; we are saved from the slavery of hell and restored to the glorious freedom of the children of God! We thank Thee, O God, and praise Thee! There is but one thing left for us now to do: “He that is in the field, let him not go back to take his coat;” he who has put off the old man, and has received the

¹ Exspoliavi me tunica mea, quomodo induar illa?—Cant. v. 3.

² Exspoliantes vos veterem hominem cum actibus suis, et induentes novum.—Coloss. iii. 9, 10.

³ Odientes et eam, quæ carnalis est, maculatam tunicam.—Jude 1. 23.

⁴ Culpam vocat tunicam.

beautiful garment of sanctifying grace, must not go back again to his former sins. Yet perhaps I am rejoicing too soon. For I am afraid that, in spite of the golden opportunity offered them, not all have fully laid aside the garment of sin. I have, then, two kinds of people to deal with.

Plan of Discourse.

Therefore I bewail with heartfelt pity the unhappy state of those who have not been converted to God during this time of the jubilee; and that I shall do in the first part of this exhortation. I congratulate with my whole heart those who by true penance have profited by the graces bestowed during this time, and I exhort them earnestly not to return to their former sins; this I shall do in the second part. My object is, to inspire the former with a salutary fear, and to encourage the latter to persevere in the service of God.

Grant this grace to both, O God of goodness and mercy; we beg it of Thee through the powerful intercession of Thy Mother and ours, and also through the merits of our holy guardian angels.

Not every-
one who
has per-
formed the
pious works
prescribed
has gained
the jubilee.
Shown by a
simile.

When we consider what a number of people visited the churches, fasted, prayed, gave alms, and went to confession and Communion during the jubilee, we might imagine that there is no need of the first part of my sermon; for there is hardly a Catholic in this part of the country who has not done his duty in that respect, and fulfilled the necessary conditions, outwardly at least. But, alas, it is not in the outward act that true reconciliation with God consists. Christian works of penance, how manifold you are! Sacred tribunals of penance, how many enter you to confess their sins, and who yet come away more heavily burdened than when they entered! For the penance done by many is only a sham penance, like the sham battles in which soldiers sometimes engage; you may see some thousands of men on foot and on horseback, attacking each other; they rush at each other with drawn swords; you may hear the report of the muskets, the roar of the cannon and field-pieces; the sky is darkened by the smoke, and there is no end of noise and tumult. What is the meaning of it all? one might ask, who happens to come up and to see the affair; is it a real battle? Alas, if so, how many a brave hero will lose his life; how much blood will be shed! But there is no reason for such concern: not a drop of blood will be spilt, nor will a man lose

his life; they are firing only blank cartridges, powder without ball; it is only a sham battle, a review, a sort of military spectacle got up to amuse some great man. For, after the soldiers have fought thus for a time, till one side has apparently fled before the other, they are again good friends as before, and eat and drink with each other; the battle is won on one side and lost on the other, without a drop of blood being spilt on either side.

Such, too, is unfortunately the character of the repentance and conversion of many Christians. A jubilee is proclaimed, or public penance is announced during some calamity; the people flock together; they fill the churches; they fall on their knees, and strike their breasts, and cry out for mercy and pardon; the confessionals are besieged; the table of the Lord is surrounded with communicants; the Blessed Sacrament is carried through the streets in procession, etc. What a beautiful sight! No doubt, an end will be put to all sin and vice! Ah, would to God that it were so! But with many the whole affair is only a sham; their sole object is to do as others do, so as not to get a bad name; they go to confession, but without true contrition and firm purpose of amendment; and where are the signs of true conversion they give? Have they renounced that unlawful intimacy? or abandoned the occasion of sin? or extinguished the flames of impure passion? Is the person with whom sin has so often been committed banished from the house? Are the injuries received pardoned from the heart? Is that long-standing hatred given up? Are neighbors, friends, relatives, or married people, who have been hitherto living in dissension and strife, now reconciled to each other, so that they live in charity and union? Is restitution made of the gain that has been acquired unjustly, of that purchase that has been made unlawfully from a thief, of that unjust advantage, that must be attributed to unlawful bribery, of the money that has been accumulated by usury? Is the stumbling-block removed out of the way? Are those indecent statues and pictures banished from houses and gardens? Are immodest songs and love-tales burnt? Is that indecent style of dress abandoned? Is there an end of the habit of cursing and swearing, of scandal-mongering and detraction? Are other un-Christian abuses abolished? No; I am afraid that in the case of many who do penance all these things remain unchanged. But is that the way to be reconciled to God? Is that a sign of an earnest will and firm purpose to amend one's

The conversion of many was merely a sham.

sinful life? If to gain a jubilee or other plenary indulgence it is necessary to have a firm determination at the present time not to commit in future even a deliberate venial sin, what advantage can they hope for, who are still really resolved to continue in those sinful habits? Oh, no; such people are only sham penitents; they have not derived the least advantage for their souls from all their pious works during this time of grace; they are still in the slavery of the devil, bound with the same chains as before; they are as deeply indebted as ever, and their confessions and Communion have only had the effect of adding to their sins.

Their state is deplorable. Shown from Scripture by similes.

Reason enough, then, have I to deplore their condition. Unhappy people that you are! what have you lost? Woe to you, what is your condition in the sight of God? In the Old Law, according to divine command, the clothes of a leper were to be brought to the priest. "If it be infected with a white or red spot, it shall be accounted the leprosy, and shall be showed to the priest; and he shall look upon it and shall shut it up seven days: and on the seventh day, when he looketh on it again, if he find that it is grown, it is a fixed leprosy: he shall judge the garment unclean, and everything wherein it shall be found, and therefore it shall be burnt with fire."¹ "Son of man," said the Lord to the Prophet Ezechiel, "write thee the name of this day."² Why? O Lord. Behold this pot and see how full of rust it is. "Great pains have been taken, and the great rust thereof is not gone out," in spite of all that has been done to clean it; therefore, "thy uncleanness is execrable; because I desired to cleanse thee; and thou art not cleansed from thy filthiness: neither shalt thou be cleansed, before I cause my indignation to rest in thee: I will not pass by, nor spare, nor be pacified: I will judge thee according to thy ways, and according to thy doings, saith the Lord."³ I hear our meek Saviour Himself crying out with tearful eyes over the ungrateful city of Jerusalem: "If thou also hadst known and that in this thy day, the things that are to

¹ Si alba vel rufa macula fuerit infecta, lepra reputabitur, ostendeturque sacerdoti; qui consideratam recludet septem diebus; et die septimo rursus aspiciens, si deprehenderit crevisse, lepra perseverans est: pollutum iudicabit vestimentum, et omne in quo fuerit inventa, et idcirco comburetur flammis.—Levit. xiii. 49—52.

² Fili hominis; scribe tibi nomen diei hujus.—Ezech. xxiv. 2.

³ Multo labore sudatum est, et non exivit de ea nimia rubigo ejus: immunditia tua execrabilis; quia mundare te volui, et non es mundata a sordibus tuis; sed nec munda-beris prius, donec quiescere faciam indignationem meam in te. Non transam, nec parcam, nec placabor. Juxta vias tuas et juxta adinventiones tuas iudicabo te, dicit Dominus.—Ibid. 12—14.

thy peace;" but since thou hast rejected the light, "the days shall come upon thee, and thy enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round; and straiten thee on every side; because thou hast not known the time of thy visitation."¹ "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings, and thou wouldst not? Behold, your house shall be left to you desolate. For I say to you, you shall not see Me henceforth."²

Sinner, are not all these so many pictures of your obstinate impenitence? You are the leper on whom the waters of grace have been poured in such abundance, to cleanse you from your revolting malady. This is already the fifteenth day on which the source of divine grace has been flowing towards you, so that, if you wished, you might have drawn copiously from it. Many others have used it to purify their souls from the stain of sin; but you, instead of being cleansed, have only become more filthy. Alas, that is a bad sign! Your leprosy is fixed and incurable, and therefore it must be burned with fire; you are in imminent danger of being cast into hell. You are the rusty pot, says St. Augustine; Jesus Christ has given the infinite merits of His sweat and blood to cleanse you, but all to no purpose; "thy uncleanness is execrable; because I desired to cleanse thee, and thou art not cleansed from thy filthiness: I will not pass by, nor spare, nor be pacified: I will judge thee according to thy ways and according to thy doings." Your soul is the ungrateful and hardened city of Jerusalem, which drew tears of pity from the eyes of Our Lord. Ah, if you had only known in this day of grace, which is granted for your salvation as well as for that of others! But you have allowed that day to pass by without profiting by it, and "your house shall be left to you desolate." Reason enough have you to fear that your angry God will withdraw from you altogether the grace of conversion and amendment.

And to take a common sense view of the matter, you see in the street a poor beggar, who is gnawing at a mouldy piece of bread; moved with pity, you say to him: come my good friend, come home with me; I will give you food and clothing for the

And they have reason to fear that God will refuse them His grace in future.

For it makes one inextinguishable to have the benefits he offered re-

¹ Quia si cognovisses et tu, et quidem in hac die tua, quæ ad pacem tibi: venient dies in te, et circumdabunt te inimici tui vallo, et circumdabunt te, et coangustabunt te undique; eo quod non cognoveris tempus visitationis tuæ.—Luke. xix. 42-44.

² Jerusalem, Jerusalem, quoties volui congregare filios tuos, quemadmodum gallina congregat pullos suos sub alas; et nolisti? Ecce relinquetur vobis domus vestra deserta: dico enim vobis, non me videbitis amodo.—Matt. xxiii. 37-39.

jected and despised.

remainder of your days, so that you will not be any longer obliged to beg your bread. But he shakes his head and says to you in a sulky tone: go your way; I do not want your food and clothing; I would prefer to beg my bread; if I knock at your door, you can give me something. Oh, you would exclaim, is that the way with you? If so, then you may knock a long time at my door before I will give you anything, since you have refused the favor I now offer you. You have a debtor who owes you a few hundred dollars; after dunning him for a long time, you see that he has nothing to give you, and moved by Christian charity, you remit the debt; here, my good friend, you say to him, here is your acknowledgment; you can tear it up if you wish; I will not ask for payment. But he, not to be under a compliment to you, refuses to have the debt remitted, and maintains that he is determined to pay it. Very well, then, you say to him; if you are so independent about it, you can and must pay me to the last farthing, and at the proper time; nor need you expect the least mercy from me; for if you do not pay the full amount of your debt when it falls due, I will have you imprisoned without delay. And you would be right in both cases; for when he who wishes to do a kindness to another sees that his offer is rejected and treated with contempt, he has good cause for anger and resentment against the person who acts so unworthily towards him.

The sinner has already often despised the graces offered him by God.

See now, O Christian, whether you do not act in the same way towards your God. What great and generous alms He has offered us poor mortals during the time of the jubilee! What vast debts He has been willing to remit completely and gratuitously! I have explained all this sufficiently already. Truly, that grace and goodness is so great that, if I could announce to the damned souls in hell that it would be offered to them after as many years as it would take a sparrow to drink the ocean dry, they would at once change their curses and blasphemies into singing the praises of God, and would be filled with joy in the midst of their torments. Such was the grace that you, who refused to be converted, rejected; and by your conduct you said to the almighty God: I do not want the generous alms you offer me; I do not wish to have my debts forgiven; keep your graces and favors until I ask for them. Do you look on that as a good way to induce Him to bestow His grace on you in the future? Are you not among the number of those of whom the Lord complains by the 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,"¹ they have rejected and disregarded the benefits I offered them.

But, you maintain, if it was a grace that was offered me during the jubilee, I was not bound to accept it. I can repent of and confess my sins another time and be truly reconciled to God. Can you, indeed? Do you really believe that the God you have so often despised and treated with such contempt will be ready at your beck and call whenever you wish? "I called, and you refused," He will say;² I frequently offered to be your friend, but you would not accept My offer; now it is My turn to refuse. You were not obliged to profit by the grace and favor I was ready to bestow on you, nor am I now obliged to offer you any further graces; "I, also, will laugh in your destruction."³ At some future time I will do penance and be really reconciled to God. Eh? You speak as if you had the future locked up in a box, so that you could take it out and use it as you please! How do you know how many years, months, days, or hours you have yet to live? Oh, how many hundreds and thousands of souls there are for whom this jubilee year will be the last of their lives! Perhaps this is the last call you will get, the last opportunity of doing penance, the last grace of conversion that will be offered you, so that you will in vain expect any more favors of the kind from God.

So that in all probability he cannot expect any more.

Father Christopher Vega, of our Society, relates that on one occasion, when some missionary priests had announced a jubilee, a wicked young man made fun of them and cried out: what jubilee and plenary indulgence are you talking of? There is no danger of my troubling you, even if you brought a hundred jubilees; I do not intend to be converted yet, as I mean to live a good while longer. Such was the presumption of that wicked young man. But, O God of goodness, how great are the wonders of Thy infinite mercy! At the very moment when that wretch was thus insulting God and making a mockery of the reconciliation offered him, the Lord touched his heart during a sermon, and although he was not yet resolved on doing penance, he went away disturbed in mind. Hardly had he lain down to sleep that night, when he awoke again in a state of alarm. Do you hear nothing? said he to his wife. What is the matter? she asked;

Shown by an example

¹ Audite cœli, et auribus percipite terra, quoniam Dominus locutus est. Filios enutrivit et exaltavit, ipsi autem spreverunt me.—Isa. i. 2.

² Vocavi, et renulistis.—Prov. i. 24.

³ Ego quoque in interitu vestro ridebo.—Ibid. 26.

everything seems to be quiet. Go to sleep and be not frightened. How can I sleep? was his answer; do you not hear the missionaries crying out to me: be converted to God! confess the sin you have concealed so long, or else to-morrow you will be in hell! In reality it was midnight, there was no one stirring in the streets, and the good Fathers were long since in bed; but as the man constantly heard the voice calling out to him, he could stand it no longer, and leaping out of bed, he ran to the house in which the missionaries were, knocked at the door and asked to see one of them. The owner of the house was vexed at being disturbed at such an hour, and told him that the Fathers were now in bed, and that, if he wished to see one of them, he should come back the next day. But the missionaries, hearing the noise at the door, were awakened, doubtless by a direct interposition of Providence in order to help a poor soul, and rising at once, they received the man with the greatest kindness. He then and there made a good confession of all his sins, including one that he had concealed for eleven years, and on the following morning, full of consolation at having got rid of the burden of his sins, he received holy Communion. And what do you think happened to him afterwards, my dear brethren? Hardly ten hours had elapsed, when he was stricken with apoplexy, and died on the spot. O soul! what a happiness for thee that thou didst hear the voice of God calling to thee! Poor soul, what would have been thy fate, hadst thou neglected the opportunity then offered thee, and deferred thy conversion even for one day!

**Exhortation
to such people
to do
true pen-
ance.**

Therefore St. Paul warns and exhorts us all: "And we, helping, do exhort you, that you receive not the grace of God in vain. For he saith: In an accepted time have I heard thee, and in the day of salvation have I helped thee. Behold, now is the acceptable time, behold, now is the day of salvation."¹ Wretched sinner, do you not see the danger you run by not profiting by this day of salvation, on which the good God is ready to draw you out of the miserable state in which you are? How do you know but that this is the last time that God will wait for you to forgive your sins, and that such a time will never again be offered you? If that is the case, what will become of you? How do you know but that you will die suddenly to-day or to-morrow in

¹ *Adjuvantes autem exhortamur ne in vacuum gratiam Dei accipiatis; ait enim: tempore accepto exaudivi te, et in die salutis adjuvi te. Ecce nunc tempus acceptabile, ecce nunc dies salutis.—II. Cor. vi. 1, 2.*

a fit of apoplexy, or that you will be killed by a stone falling from a roof, or that some other accident will deprive you of life? Such things have often been witnessed before now in the world. What hope is there for you then? Is it my object to drive you to despair? No, not by any means; for you have still time if you wish; to-day, this very morning, this very moment, you can be reconciled to God; and although you have no longer time to perform the works that are required to gain the indulgence of the jubilee, yet you can confess your sins with true sorrow, so as to regain the friendship of God, and you can make a more firm purpose of amendment than you have hitherto made; such, too, is the object of my exhortation and complaint. But if you refuse to do that I cannot help you, and I turn from you to those now just souls, who have taken advantage of this time of grace, and by true repentance have been reconciled to God, as we shall see in the

Second Part.

I congratulate you, then, with all my heart, on being freed by the mercy of God from the state of sin and the slavery of the devil, and being restored to the glorious liberty of the children of God, amongst whom you can now live in the enjoyment of the sweetest repose of conscience, which surpasses all the delights that the world can offer; and while you can now learn from your own experience the great difference there is between a true servant and friend of God under the sweet yoke of Jesus Christ, and the imaginary pleasure that gnaws at the conscience and fills with bitterness the heart of him who is held captive under the tyrannical yoke of the devil. "Giving thanks to God the Father," I say with St. Paul in the epistle of to-day, "who hath made us worthy to be partakers of the lot of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, and the remission of sins."¹ And what have you still to do, beloved souls? Ah, keep fast to your purpose! You are now in a most desirable state; do not again put on the garment of sin you have cast off. I beg of you, in the words of the same Apostle, "that you may walk worthy of God in all things pleasing; being fruitful in

Congratulation addressed to those who have been reconciled to God during this time of grace.

¹ Gratias agentes Deo Patri, qui dignos nos fecit in partem sortis sanctorum in lumine; qui eripuit nos de potestate tenebrarum, et transtulit in regnum Filii dilectionis suæ. In quo habemus redemptionem per sanguinem ejus, remissionem peccatorum.—Coloss. i. 12, 13, 14.

every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.”¹

They must overcome all temptations and remain faithful to God.

Ah! this is the only thing that can cause me any trouble to-day, namely, the fear that the peace now made with God will not be of long duration with some, but that they will after a time return to their old sins and vices. I know well that the devil will not rest, but will make greater efforts and use more craft than ever to regain his power over the soul that has escaped from his clutches. Never was Laban in a greater rage, than when he found that Jacob had secretly run away from his house; never was king Pharaoh more wrathful against the Israelites, than when he discovered that they had escaped from him by flight. And so, too, never is the hellish foe more cruel and crafty, than when he is forced to submit to the loss of the authority he had over a soul. Therefore the Holy Ghost warns penitent souls 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. Wait on God with patience; join thyself to God, and endure, that thy life may be increased in the latter end. Keep His fear and grow old therein.”² And what causes me still more fear is our own inborn inconstancy, which makes it easy for us to forget our firm resolutions. The recurrence of some former occasion of sin, a pleasing object presented to our senses, some trouble or difficulty in the divine service, or even mere forgetfulness of the motives which have induced us to repent, would be quite enough to make us wallow again in the mire, and to cause all our good resolutions to vanish into thin air.

And not be like those who soon relapse into sin.

The Prophet David likens such inconstant penitents to water, when he says: “They shall come to nothing, like water running down.”³ Mark the words, “water running down.” For there is a great difference between a river and a torrent. The river flows onward, but its course is constant, because it takes its rise in some perennial spring; but it is not so with the torrent. You may remark during the winter, and sometimes also in the summer, after a heavy rain, the water flows everywhere from hills and houses into the lower ground, and the sewers of the town are as full as if there was danger of an inundation. But when

¹ Ut ambuletis digne Deo per omnia placentes; in omni opere bono fructificantes, et crescentes in scientia Dei.—Coloss. 1. 10.

² Fill, accedens ad servitutum Dei, sta in iustitia et timore, et prepara animam tuam ad tentationem. Sustine sustentationes Dei; conjungere Deo et sustine, ut crescat in novissimo vita tua. Serva timorem illius, et in illo veterasce.—Eclus. 11. 1, 3, 6.

³ Ad nihilum devenient, tanquam aqua decurrens.—Ps. lvi. 8.

the rain has ceased for a few hours, what has become of that water? It has completely disappeared. So it is with many penitents, says St. Augustine; "the water rushes along for a while, but it soon ceases."¹ After a moving sermon, during a time of public calamity, or when public penance has been proclaimed, or during a jubilee, when graces come down from above like rain, oh, then you may hear the water rushing along! 'Tears of repentance fill the eyes; hearts are flooded with sorrow; but if you were to look for those torrents in a month's or a week's, nay, even in a few days' time, where would they be? "They shall come to nothing, like water running down;" there is no more trace of them; the old habits of drunkenness and sloth in the service of God, the old sins and vices have regained the upper hand. That it is, I repeat, which causes me fear and trouble, for my sake and yours, my dear brethren, for, in a short time we may act like that.

But shall we do so? Shall we break our word, and violate the fidelity that we have so solemnly sworn to observe towards God? When we undertook to do true penance for our sins, we protested before heaven that we would in future love God above all things and constantly, that we would keep all His commandments without exception most faithfully, and that we would never during our whole lives offend Him by mortal sin; and shall we now prove false to Him so soon, and say by our actions: I retract my promise; I am sorry for having made it; I wish to go back to the devil, from whom I was freed? What a shameful and disgraceful apostasy that would be! What greater disgrace can there be before the world than to have the name of a deserter, a runaway, a perjurer? An honest man, as the saying is, keeps his word. Shall we, then, begin again to persecute and trouble the good God, who has now bestowed extraordinary graces on us, and has forgiven us many grievous sins, with the punishment due to them? If we did that, would we not really say to God: Thou hast shown me great mercy a few days ago, O Lord! Thou hast poured out over me the fulness of Thy graces, but now I do not want them any more; Thou canst take them back! Thou hast admitted me into the number of Thy friends and dear children, when Thou couldst have condemned me to hell on account of my sins; but now I renounce Thy friendship and return to the slavery of the devil! Thou hast gratuitously remitted many debts I owed Thee; now I wish to begin to contract new

For that would be an act of the blackest ingratitude towards God.

¹ Ad tempus perstrepat, mox cessabit.

ones! I have hitherto often provoked Thy anger by thought, word, and deed; I have told my sins in confession, and have been absolved from them; they are all forgiven; and now I will begin again to offend Thee! Thou hast hitherto been wonderfully patient with me, and hast borne with me, although I was Thy enemy; I thank Thee for that; but now Thou canst have patience with me again; I am about to sin again! Men of honor, what do you think of that? Is it not a most hideous ingratitude, Christians?

And would
make them
worse off
than they
were before
conversion.

And what good will the treasures of grace we have received be to us, if we squander them away in that manner? "What is the use," asks St. Cyril, "of washing your garments, if you soil them again at once?"¹ Have we washed our souls with tears of penance, only to sully them again? Are we freed from slavery, only that we may have the opportunity of again delivering ourselves up to the tyrant? Have we redeemed the precious spiritual goods that we had forfeited, only to give them up again to the devil? Suppose (and may God avert it!) that one of us were to commit a deliberate mortal sin, with what confidence could he again appeal to the mercy of God, or expect forgiveness, since he so often perjured himself after repeated promises of amendment? The servant of whom St. Matthew speaks in the Gospel, and who was on the point of being imprisoned by his angry master on account of the money he owed him, fell down on his knees and begged for a respite: "That servant falling down, besought him, saying: Have patience with me and I will pay thee all."² Whereupon the master not only granted him the respite he prayed for, but also remitted the whole of the debt gratuitously: "And the lord of that servant, being moved with pity, let him go and forgave him the debt."³ But what happened to the servant, when he acted unmercifully to his fellow-servant? "And his lord being angry, delivered him to the torturers,"⁴ says the parable. Now I ask, why did not the servant beg for mercy a second time? Was it because he saw that his master was angry with him? But he was angry the first time as well, and yet the servant appeased him. Why could he not do so a second time? The ungrateful man saw with what mercy and meekness his master had first remitted his debt; but now, that

¹ Quid prodest studiose vestes abluere, et lotas rursum luto inquinare?

² Procidens autem servus ille, orabat eum, dicens: patientiam habeam in me, et omnia reddam tibi.—Matt. xviii. 26.

³ Misertus autem dominus servi illius, dimisit eum, et debitum dimisit ei.—Ibid. 27.

⁴ Et iratus dominus ejus tradidit eum tortoribus.—Ibid. 34.

he had despised that mercy by contracting a new debt of guilt, he did not dare to ask for forgiveness, and so he allowed himself to be given over to the torturers without saying a word. This servant is a picture of those sinners who, after having obtained from God the forgiveness of their sins, are daring enough to offend Him again. Finally, what would our repentance profit the whole Christian world, if by falling again into sin we cause to be again drawn from the scabbard the sword of vengeance that was sheathed on account of our repentance? Would not matters be even worse than before? For Our Lord says, speaking of one in whom the unclean spirit enters for the second time, after having been driven out: "And the last state of that man is made worse than the first."¹

Far be that from us, dear Christians! "He that is in the field, let him not go back to take his coat." We are free now, let none of us again put on the garment of sin that we have cast off. We will faithfully observe the fidelity we have sworn to our God, and we will say with the Spouse in the Canticles: "I have put off my garment, how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?"² She does not say, as Mendoza remarks, "I have laid down my garment," but "I have put it off." What is the difference? He who goes to bed at night lays aside his clothes with the intention of putting them on again in the morning; and therefore he puts them near his bed, that he may find them at once when he gets up. But he who puts off his clothes in the sense of the text has no intention of ever putting them on again. In the same way, then, should we put off the garment of sin, so that we may never return to it again. If temptations and dangerous occasions assail us, we will answer them as the peasant would who brings with him into town a sheep that he has already sold to one of the citizens; he is stopped by some one and asked, what does the sheep cost? It is already sold, is his answer. Another asks him, what do you ask for the sheep? It is not for sale, is again his answer. And so he goes on quietly to the house of the person who has bought the sheep. Just souls! You do not belong to yourselves: "For you are bought with a great price,"³ as St. Paul tells you. Jesus Christ has bought you with His precious Blood, of which He has now made you partakers. The enemy of your

Conclusion
and resolu-
tion to keep
always in
the friend-
ship of God.

¹ Et sunt novissima hominis illius pejora prioribus.—Matt. xli. 45.

² Lavi pedes meos, quomodo inquinabo illos.—Cant. v. 3.

³ Empti enim estis pretio magno.—1. Cor. vi. 20.

souls will tempt you with his suggestions and ask you: what shall I give you for the sheep? for your soul? ask what you will, money and wealth, honor and a high position amongst men, carnal pleasures and the delights of impure love, etc. But you must answer him with a firm determination: away with you! my soul is not for sale; it is bought already, and at a higher price than you could give me for it! Men, too, will come with their flatteries and caresses; the person with whom you were formerly in the habit of sin will try again to lead you away from God; but you must have the same answer ready; away with you! my soul is not for sale; I have sold it to another; it now belongs to my God, and He will keep possession of it forever.

And to use
the proper
means to
that end.

And to be all the more certain of fulfilling our resolution, we must at once deprive ourselves of the power of sinning, like the Venerable Metronius, who, having firmly resolved to lead a penitent life, placed a large chain around his body, locked it, and threw the key into a river, so that, even if he wished, he could not free himself from the chain. In the same way we must get rid of all that has led us into sin in the past; we must close our eyes to all dangerous objects, our ears to all sinful discourse, our hearts to bad thoughts, and then throw away the key; that is, we must avoid with the utmost care all occasions and company that were formerly the cause of sin to us. And if we wish to find a great help to holy perseverance, let us keep always in the presence of God, have a great confidence in and devotion to the Blessed Virgin and to our holy guardian angels, go to confession and Communion at least once a month, be diligent in hearing the word of God in sermons,—for, as all acknowledge who have experience of it, that will encourage and strengthen us in good—examine our consciences every evening, say our morning prayers devoutly, and renew our good intention of not offending God for the sake of any man, or pleasure, or gain whatever. Such is my firm resolution, O God! I will keep my word and never abandon Thee as long as I live! Often enough have I angered Thee, although Thou hast never given me the least cause to do so! Often enough have I been faithless to Thee! Ah, too often! But now I am ready to suffer any evil rather than offend Thee! Death itself would I now prefer to sin! Nay, hell itself, rather than again provoke Thy anger! Trusting in Thy grace, O heavenly Father, I make this resolution as a conclusion of the jubilee, for which I now thank Thee with my whole heart. Amen.

SIXTY-SEVENTH SERMON.

ON PEACE BETWEEN GOD AND MEN.

Subject.

Everything now helps to move and compel us to make peace with the Lord God.—*Preached in the year 1735, on the occasion of the jubilee which was proclaimed for the purpose of obtaining peace among Christian princes.*

Text.

Pro Christo ergo legatione fungimur, tanquam Deo exhortante per nos. Obsecramus pro Christo, reconciliamini Deo.—II. Cor. v. 20.

“For Christ therefore we are ambassadors, God, as it were, exhorting by us. For Christ, we beseech you, be reconciled to God.”

Introduction.

A general peace-congress, or meeting, is to be held to-day, my dear brethren. The two contending parties between whom peace is to be made are, on the one side, God, who has been offended, and on the other, wicked men, who have to be reconciled to God. The object and fruit of this peace is to preserve and restore tranquillity to Europe. The means of securing the first peace with God, and thus rendering it easy to obtain the second from heaven, are offered us in this jubilee by our Mother, the holy Catholic Church, in her capacity as mediatrix of peace between the two parties. There is no doubt that the first peace is of the utmost importance to all men, while most of the nations of Europe are earnestly longing for the second. The means offered us by the Church are most favorable and easy; and we, as ambassadors of that Church, cry out in her name, and beg and implore of you all, in the name of Jesus Christ, to be reconciled to God and make peace with Him. But if there be any one who in such circumstances should refuse to agree to this peace, then we must look on him as one who is lost to all sense of decency. There you have without further preamble the subject of this instruction and exhortation on the present jubilee. Trusting, then, in the divine assistance, which I hope to secure by the intercession of Mary and of the angels of peace, I again beseech you for Christ, be reconciled to God.

To be at war with God is the greatest misery.

So that peace is now to be made between God and sinful man? And is much argument necessary to persuade man of the advantage of such a peace? To be in the state of sin, to wage war on the almighty and all-seeing God, to be a rebel to and a sworn enemy of the greatest Monarch, to bear about the torment of a bad conscience, which cries out unceasingly, in tones of the bitterest reproof: you have sinned grievously against God; you have made God your enemy, who, being present everywhere, can destroy you at any moment He pleases; you have lost your soul, heaven and all; you are a wretched slave of the devil, who awaits only the permission of his Creator to drag you down, body and soul, into the abyss of hell; you are a child of wrath and malediction; if you die now, and death can come to you at any moment, you are lost forever; alas! what a miserable state! Is it not surprising that a man can remain even an hour in such a state without trying to free himself from it?

While peace with Him is the greatest happiness.

On the other hand, to be at peace with God; to be in the state of sanctifying grace; to hear the consoling voice of a conscience free from sin saying, according to the testimony of St. Paul: you are a friend and dear child of God, a lawful heir to eternal glory, a co-heir with Jesus Christ your Saviour, a companion of the elect and chosen servants of God; if you were to die now, you would go to heaven; human soul, reflect on this! seek all over the world for everything that can give you pleasure; could you find anything more delightful or agreeable, than to be at peace with your God? For you have nothing to fear in life, nor in death, nor after death; there is nothing that can give you reasonable cause for alarm; but you can rejoice in the Lord your God, as in a perpetual banquet of delights, even in the midst of the greatest trials, troubles, and contradictions.

So that we should make peace with Him at once.

Sinners, we beseech you for Christ—ah, why is it necessary to beg of you to do this?—we implore of you, be reconciled to God! It is for the sake of this desirable peace that the Church has assembled us here to-day. Come, then; do not delay any longer, nor stop to deliberate as to whether you will accept the peace now offered to all. Reject forever and at once everything that has hitherto kept you at enmity with God and burdened your conscience! Away with that sinful habit, that proximate occasion, that impure intimacy, that unjust gain, that scandalous abuse! Confess your sins candidly, and amend your lives once for all! Be reconciled to God! Make peace with Him! If the only advantage to be gained thereby was that desirable

peace and friendship with the Almighty, there should not be one so obdurate and blind as to refuse it.

But what other advantage do we seek by this peace? “That Thou wouldst vouchsafe to grant peace and true concord to Christian kings and princes.”¹ That is what we wish to obtain from Thee, O merciful God! that is the blessing the Church now wishes to secure by proclaiming a jubilee to the whole Christian world, namely, that the God who is so justly enraged with the world on account of our sins and vices may be appeased by our penance, our fervent and united prayers, and our sighs and cries to heaven (as the Papal Bull has it), so that He will sheathe the sword of vengeance, pacify the hearts of Christian kings and princes, whom he can govern and change as He wills, and thus free the world from the dangers of war and the other calamities that threaten it. This, I say, is the object the Church has in view in now wishing to make a general peace with God, who is offended on account of our sins.

Epecially as it is a means of obtaining peace in Europe.

O Christian preachers, let us now hold our tongues, and say no more; for what is the use of our preaching and exhortation to those to whom their own unhappy experience has already preached plainly enough? In former times it was not necessary for the Prophet Isaias to preach in words to the people, to announce the punishment that was impending over them, and to exhort them to penance; for all the inhabitants of the city of Jerusalem saw him going about the streets naked, according to the command of God. Nor was it necessary for the Prophet Jeremias to say a word to the Jews to threaten them with slavery and imprisonment on account of the idolatry into which they had fallen; for they all saw him wandering about laden with heavy chains. Those who witnessed the death of Our Saviour on the cross did not require a preacher in order to be moved to penance; the terror caused by the fearful darkness, the earthquake, and the rending of the rocks, was in itself a most forcible sermon, which had a great effect on many of them, so that, as St. Luke says, the greater number of them struck their breasts with sorrow of heart. “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 According to the opinion of St. Jerome, many thousands of them were converted on

For which every country is longing.

¹ Ut regibus et principibus Christianis pacem et veram concordiam largiri digneris.

² Omnis turba eorum, qui simul aderant ad spectaculum istud, et videbant quæ fiebant, percutientes pectora sua, revertebantur.—Luke xxiii. 48.

the spot.¹ Equally good reason have we for believing that in our present circumstances we have no need of preachers to urge us to do penance; for necessity itself preaches to us, and compels us, as it were, to have recourse to the only means that can help us. Eloquent enough are the cries and shouts of the soldiery, that are to be heard everywhere, so that the words of the Prophet Isaias with regard to the Chaldeans besieged in Babylon are now verified. “The noise of a multitude in the mountains, as it were of many people, the noise of the sound of kings, of nations gathered together; the Lord of hosts hath given charge to the troops of war; the Lord and the instruments of His wrath, to destroy the whole land.”² Eloquent enough is the Christian blood that has been shed in torrents here and there throughout the world; eloquent enough are the well filled cemeteries, the sighs and tears of oppressed citizens and peasants, who have the greatest difficulty in providing themselves with the bare necessaries of life, and many of whom have lost all their worldly possessions and are reduced to extreme poverty; eloquent enough, as His Holiness the Pope complains in his Bull, is the miserable condition of so many provinces and kingdoms in the Christian world, whose resources are quite exhausted, so that they can hardly recover themselves again; in a word, the very name of war is in itself a most forcible sermon, for it is the most severe temporal punishment that an angry God can inflict on a sinful world.

For war is
the worst of
temporal
punish-
ments.

And so it is, my dear brethren; the most terrible of all public calamities is war. Pestilence and contagious diseases are a severe punishment, and so is famine and hunger; but if war once breaks out in a country, you have all those other plagues with it; for, as experience teaches, they follow in its train, as matters of necessity. All trials and contradictions, no matter what their name may be, are, indeed, punishments, but they are salutary punishments, which serve to bring men to a sense of the wickedness of their ways, and to lead them to God; but, as the old song has it, “there is no good in war;”³ instead of amending abuses, it only increases them; instead of hindering, it only encourages injustice, theft, rapine, adultery and all kinds of impurity, murder, despair, and other vices. Alas, that we should have

¹ *Multaque statim de Judæis millia crediderunt.*

² *Vox multitudinis in montibus, quasi populorum frequentium; vox sonitus regum gentium congregatarum: Dominus exercituum præcepit militiæ belli; Dominus et vasa furoris ejus, ut disperdat omnem terram.—Isa. xiii. 4, 5.*

³ *Nulla salus bello.*

such bitter experience of the truth of this! And consequently war is not merely a temporal punishment, as far as our mortal bodies are concerned, but it also brings with it, as a general rule, the perversion and damnation of our immortal souls. Well didst thou choose, O holy David, when God left it free to thee to select war, famine, or pestilence as a punishment! That wise king did not take long to consider, my dear brethren. If I and my people have to be chastised, he said, it is better for me to fall into the hands of God, and to choose pestilence, than to fall into the hands of men by bringing the evils of war on the land. And therefore, when the Catholic Church prays in the Litanies to be delivered from temporal evils, she mentions war last of all, as the summary of every calamity; "from pestilence, famine, and war, deliver us O Lord."¹

In order, then, to be freed from such a grievous punishment, under which almost the whole of Christendom is now groaning, is it not right, I ask again, that we should all help as well as we can, and accept the proffered peace with God? I certainly would not wish to be in the place of that wicked citizen who in general conflagration, for instance, when every one lends a helping hand to carry water to quench the fire, stands idly looking on and laughing, while the flames spread from one house to the other, although, if he cared to help, he might save a house from destruction; for I should fear lest the people vent their just anger on me by throwing me into the flames. Such, too, is my opinion of the Christian who refuses now to help his brethren, who are crying out from all quarters to be delivered from the scourge of war. Dictys, an old historian, who was at the siege of Troy, relates that king Agamemnon loved a Trojan slave to such an extent that neither the entreaties of her father, nor the representations of the other kings, his allies, nor gold, nor threats, were capable of inducing him to give her up. The father made strenuous efforts to free his daughter, and caused great havoc among the Greeks. Then the hero Achilles brought the dead bodies of the slain Greeks to the tent of Agamemnon, and placed them there in the sight of the whole army,² saying: behold those dead bodies, and judge whether so dear a price should be paid for a woman. What do you think of it? he then asked the soldiers. Away with her, they all cried.

Therefore all should help unan-
imously to
avert such a
calamity.

¹ A peste, fame, et bello libera nos, Domine.

² Defunctorum corpora miserandum in modum confecta, undique in conventu ante ora omnium projecit fecit.

And even Agamemnon himself, seeing the slaughter he had caused, overcame his passion and gave up the slave, for he could no longer love one who had caused the lives of so many brave men. Sinners, "for Christ we beseech you, be reconciled to God!" Renounce what is displeasing to Him! And if your hearts are captivated by the attachment to some sin, which has hitherto kept you from doing penance, ah! then, let the lamentable destruction of so many, who have lost either their lives or their property in this war, influence you to give up for God's sake what has been the obstacle to your making peace with Him. We beseech you for the sake of the whole Christian world, "be reconciled to God!" Make peace with Him!

That is to be done by being truly reconciled to God, who afflicts us with war on account of our sins.

Without this peace, that other, for which we long and sigh, cannot be obtained; for who is it that sends us the scourge of war? Is it not the all-ruling God, without whose decree nothing can happen in the world? And why does He afflict us in that way? Is it not on account of the sins and vices of the people, which arouse His anger and compel Him to take the sword of vengeance in His hand? Hear the threats He utters by the Prophet Isaias: "If you be willing, and will hearken to Me, you shall eat the good things of the land: but if you will not, and will provoke Me to wrath, the sword shall devour you." ¹ Who was it that caused the city of Babylon to be besieged and laid waste? "I," says the Almighty, "I have commanded My sanctified ones, and have called My strong ones in My wrath. Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them; with their arrows they shall kill the children, and shall have no pity upon the sucklings of the womb, and their eye shall not spare their sons. And that Babylon, glorious among kingdoms, the famous pride of the Chaldeans, shall be even as the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrhæ."² Phacee, king of Israel, had, without reason or justice on his side, begun a war against Achaz, the king of Juda, and was so successful that in one battle he slew a hundred and twenty thousand of the bravest of the Jewish soldiers: "Phacee, the son of Romelia, slew of Juda a hundred and twenty thousand in one day, all valiant men: and the children of Israel carried away of their brethren two hundred thousand women, boys, and girls,

¹ Si volueritis et audieritis me, bona terræ comedetis; quodsi nolueritis, et me ad iracundiam provocaveritis, gladius devorabit vos.—Isa. i. 19, 20.

² Ego mandavi sanctificatis meis, et vocavi fortes meos in ira mea; ecce ego suscitabo super eos Medos; sagittis parvulos interficient, et lactantibus uteris non miserebuntur, et super filios non parcat oculus eorum: et erit Babylon illa gloriosa in regnis, incluta superbia Chaldeorum, sicut subvertit Dominus Sodomam et Gomorrhæam.—Ibid. xiii. 3, 17, 18, 19.

and an immense booty; and they brought it to Samaria.”¹ What had the poor Jews done to the king of Israel that he should treat them so cruelly? They had done nothing to offend him, but they had sinned against God, who made use of the king of Israel to punish them; for, as the Scripture says: “They had forsaken the Lord, the God of their fathers.”² “O thou sword of the Lord,” cried out the Prophet Jeremias in similar circumstances, “how long will it be ere thou be quiet? Go into thy scabbard, rest and be still.”³ But the answer he got was that it would not rest, because it had been commanded to wreak its fury on the Ascalonites, on account of the sins of the people. “How shall it be quiet, when the Lord hath given it a charge against Ascalon, and against the countries thereof by the seaside, and there hath made an appointment for it?”⁴ My dear brethren, we sometimes complain of having too much to suffer; we desire and long for rest, and we cry out, “O thou sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere thou be quiet?” When shall we be delivered from this heavy burden? But if we were to consider the sins we have committed, they would answer us: “How shall it be quiet when the Lord hath given it a charge,” to wreak its fury on us? They would answer us as God did the complaints of His people by the Prophet Jeremias: “Why criest thou for thy affliction? thy sorrow is incurable; for the multitude of thy iniquity, and for thy hardened sins I have done these things to thee; for I have wounded thee with the wound of an enemy, with a cruel chastisement, by reason of the multitude of thy iniquities.”⁵ There, Christians, is the only reason why we are now scourged by war; and as long as we are at enmity with God there is no hope of peace, or of being relieved from the burden that oppresses us. Therefore, if you wish to be at peace with men, first be reconciled to God by true penance.

And that especially since such favorable conditions are now offered to us, and since such exceptional advantages are to be gained by making peace with God; and this is the final reason which

The favorable terms on which peace is

¹ Occiditque Phacee, filius Romeliae, de Juda centum viginti millia in die uno, omnes viros bellatores; ceperuntque filii Israel de fratribus suis ducenta millia mulierum, puerorum, et puellarum, et infinitam prædam, pertuleruntque eam in Samariam.—II. Paralip. xxviii. 6, 8.

² Eo quod reliquissent Dominum Deum patrum suorum.—Ibid. 6.

³ O mucro Domini, usquequo non quiesces? Ingredere in vaginam tuam; refrigerare et sile.—Jerem. xvii. 6.

⁴ Quomodo quiescet, cum Dominus præcepit ei adversus Ascalonem, et adversus maritimas ejus regiones, ibique condixerit illi?—Ibid. 7.

⁵ Quid clamas super contritione tua? Insanabilis est dolor tuus; propter multitudinem iniquitatis tuæ et propter dura peccata tua feci hæc tibi, plaga enim inimici percussi te castigatione crudeli, propter multitudinem iniquitatis tuæ.—Ibid. xxx. 15, 14.

offered us
should im-
pel us to do
this.

should move us to make it. When two potentates, who have been at war, begin to treat about making peace, their ambassadors hardly ever bring the matter to a conclusion without stipulating on both sides some conditions difficult of fulfilment; for both parties have to make concessions and to cede rights, before the treaty is finally arranged. Sinners, what difficult condition is imposed on us in the treaty we are now about to make with God for the peace of the world? (Pay attention, my dear brethren, for I am about to mention the works we must perform in order to gain the plenary indulgence of the jubilee.) We have to give up nothing except the sins which we have committed, and which still burden our consciences; and that we do by candidly and humbly confessing them, with the firm purpose of never committing them again; and after confession we receive holy Communion. Is that a difficult condition which consists in freeing one's self from the yoke of the devil, and in approaching the Table of the Lord to be fed with the Flesh and Blood of Jesus Christ? Have we not rather just reason to beg of God humbly and perseveringly to bestow that great favor on us? And what more have we to do? Nothing except to fast for three days, namely, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, according to the usual custom of the Church. Is that a very heavy burden? But every Christian who is bound by the law of fasting must do that during Lent and on the appointed fast-days, or else he will commit a mortal sin, so that there is absolutely nothing required of us but what we are already bound to fulfil. We must, moreover, give alms to the poor according to our means. Perhaps that is the difficulty? But again, all Christians who have superfluous wealth are bound by the law of charity, under pain of sin, to give alms. Finally, we must visit three churches appointed for the purpose, or at least we must visit one of them once, and pray devoutly at our own pleasure that God may avert the scourge of war and other calamities from suffering Christendom. Is that a heavy burden, to pray that one may be freed from grievous suffering? But that, too, we must do in any case; our own wants compel us to have recourse to prayer (mark, my dear brethren, that those works must be performed during one of the two following weeks, except the visitation of the churches, for one of the visits can be made according to each one's convenience during the fortnight of the jubilee). Those are all the conditions that we are required to fulfil.

And the
great graces

But, on the other hand, we have great graces and advantages

to expect. If we observe the conditions, that God whom we have so grossly offended will, so to speak, renounce all His rights, and give them up for our sake; for He has an undoubted right to condemn to hell forever the sinner who is His sworn enemy and who has rebelled against His authority; but that right He is willing to give up once for all, and after having forgiven the guilt of sin, to remit all eternal punishment. The sinner has forfeited forever his right to a heavenly inheritance; this right God is ready to restore to him and, forgetting all his offences, to look on him as His beloved child. The sinner, after having repented of and confessed his sins, and received absolution from the priest, still owes a debt of full atonement and satisfaction to the divine justice; that is, he must suffer some temporal punishment, either in this life or in purgatory, until he has paid back the last farthing. This debt is completely remitted; the Catholic Church opens the treasury of the infinite merits and satisfaction of Jesus Christ, and grants him full remission of all the temporal punishment he has incurred for sin during his whole life, even if his sins surpassed in number the sands on the seashore. Sinner, what more do you want? Are you, perhaps, afraid to confess your sins to your ordinary confessor, or to a priest to whom you otherwise owe obedience as your superior? Do you wish to choose another confessor? Do so then, if you wish; whether you are a layman or a religious, according to the terms of the Bull you are free to choose any confessor you please; for every approved priest has now full power to give you absolution. Are you suspended or excommunicated on account of certain sins? Every approved priest can now, as far as your conscience is concerned, absolve you. Have you committed the most grievous sins that can be committed; even those of which the Holy Father has reserved the absolution to himself? Every approved priest has now full power to absolve you from them. Have you bound yourself by vow to do something for God which you now would wish to have changed into some other work, on account of the difficulty of doing it? If so, now is your time; for every approved priest has now the faculty of commuting vows (except the vows of perpetual chastity and of entering religion). O God of goodness! what great advantages those are, and how they should move us poor sinful mortals to make peace with Thee, that we may escape hell, and at the same time be freed from the grievous temporal punishments that now inflict Christendom!

Which will
be granted
at once.

And when wilt Thou bestow all those favors on us? When will that desirable peace be ratified and produce its full effect? Not without reason do I ask this question, my dear brethren. For, when earthly potentates, after having warred against each other for a long time, at last make overtures of peace, and endeavor to bring back tranquillity to the countries subject to their sway, oh, what a long time it takes before everything is definitely arranged! At first couriers are sent with letters from one court to another, and all sorts of proposals are made to see whether the wish for peace is mutual, while a third power must step in to appease the minds of the contending parties. If this much has been effected, the so-called preliminaries of the peace have to be arranged, and accepted by both sides. The next step is to send the couriers back to and fro again, to settle in what town or country the peace-congress is to be held, and where the ambassadors from both sides are to meet. This, of course, requires time, and when it is done, what follows? Is the peace concluded at last? Not by any means! Whole years may elapse before the ambassadors agree; and very often it happens that, while the treaty of peace is actually being considered, war breaks out anew more violently than ever. But when they do come to an agreement, is the matter settled? No, not yet; everything that has been arranged at the congress must first be examined at both courts, and be ratified, approved of, and signed, or else the whole affair will come to nothing. At last, when after a considerable time the conditions are fulfilled, peace is definitely proclaimed. So much trouble is required to reconcile two parties of men who have been fighting with each other. Great God, mighty Monarch of heaven and earth! we poor weak worms of the earth have hitherto waged war on Thee! Now arises the question of making peace with Thee, and Thou, although Thou art the aggrieved One, art the first to offer us such advantageous terms, that, if we have a spark of reason left, we cannot refuse to accept them. And when, I ask again, is this peace to be fully ratified? In a year? or six months? or in forty, thirty, or twenty days? No, Christians, it does not take so long. This very day, the moment we make up our minds to fulfil the conditions, and present ourselves with contrite hearts before the God whom we have offended, the whole matter is concluded; peace is confirmed, and we have sure possession of all the graces offered us, nor is there the least danger that God will ever declare war on us again, unless we are the first to

commence hostilities. O my God! how great is Thy goodness and mercy to us unworthy mortals!

Now I say again, if, in the face of all this, there should be one Christian in the world so selfish, so boorish, and so hardened in wickedness, as to refuse to make that advantageous and, under the present circumstances, necessary peace, and to neglect to reconcile himself to God, thinking, as all impenitent sinners do, and saying, if not in word, at least in act, I will do as I like; what is it to me whether there is war or peace in the world? What do I care whether men laugh or cry? Let them look to it who feel the pinch of want; for my part, let things go as they will in the world; I did not ask the Pope for his jubilee, nor do I wish to make peace with God, nor, as far as I am concerned, to try to appease His anger against the world, or to avert the calamities that oppress it; I can easily say a few prayers, visit the churches, fast, and give a few pence to the poor, nor is there any difficulty in telling my sins to some simple-minded priest in confession; it is now Easter time; I must do these things in any case to avoid getting a bad name among the people, but I have no intention of really amending my life or repenting of my sins from my heart; I will remain as I am. For shame! I say; such a Christian would be a monster! and if, as I do not believe, any such a one were here present, I would say to him: beware of what you do and say! I do not wish you any evil, but rather desire from my heart that you would really repent of your sins, so that things might go well with you here, as well as hereafter; but I cannot help thinking that, if many suffering mortals in the world knew who you are, they would treat you as the inhabitants of a town would treat the worthless citizen who, instead of helping to extinguish a conflagration, stands idly by, laughing at the damage done his neighbor's property. I am afraid that, at all events, they would heap imprecations on your head, and say, in the words of Sophar, a friend of Job: "May his belly be filled, that God may send forth the wrath of His indignation upon him, and rain down His war upon him: his bread in his belly shall be turned into the gall of asps within him." They would call down upon you all those curses which the Prophet David, according to the commentators, uttered against the traitor Judas in the one hundred and eighth psalm: "May his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow: let his children be carried

How unworthy for one to refuse to make peace under such circumstances!

¹ Utinam impleatur venter ejus, ut emittat in eum iram furoris sui, et pluat super illum bellum suum: panis ejus in utero illius vertetur in fel aspidum intrinsecus.—Job xx. 23, 14.

about vagabonds, and beg; let them be cast out of their dwellings. May the usurer search all his substance; and let strangers plunder his labors;"¹ since he refused to help in obtaining for the world the blessings of peace.

Conclusion
and resolution
to
make peace
with God at
once.

Far be it from us, my dear brethren, to give occasion to such a terrible imprecation. Sinners, "for Christ we beseech you, be reconciled to God!" We beg and implore of you again, in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ; we beg and implore of you for the sake of so many countries in Europe, make peace now with God! Let us all, without exception, agree to procure that peace which is so advantageous, so desirable, and so much longed for by nearly the whole world, and let us say: O God of infinite goodness, I will hesitate no longer; I must not and will not be the only one amongst so many to disturb the joy of this festival, and obstinately to oppose that most important object which the whole Christian world is now striving for so earnestly. Joyfully do I sign the contract and accept the conditions that Thou graciously proposest. Readily do I undertake to fulfil them all, to be reconciled to Thee from my whole heart, and from this moment, after having duly repented of and confessed my sins, and thus made peace with Thee, to begin a new life. Thus, O God, we hope that, being appeased by our conversion, Thou wilt show that Thou art still what Thou wert to Judith in the besieged town of Bethulia. "Thou art our God, who destroyest wars from the beginning, and the Lord is Thy name."² Thou art He who canst unite the hearts of potentates, and give to us all that peace which the whole world cannot give, so that we may serve Thee constantly in future with peace and contentment of heart. Amen.

For the Last Day of this Jubilee, see the Forty-ninth Sermon of this Part.

¹ Fiant filii ejus orphani, et uxor ejus vidua: nutantes transferantur filii ejus, et mendicent, et ejciantur de habitationibus suis. Scrutetur fenerator omnem substantiam ejus et diripiant alieni labores ejus.—Ps. cviii. 9-11.

² Tu ipse es Deus noster, qui conteris bella ab initio, et Dominus nomen est tibi.—Judith ix. 10.

ON PRAYER AND PENANCE IN PUBLIC CALAMITIES AND TRIALS.

SIXTY-EIGHTH SERMON.

ON THE EFFICACY OF THE PRAYERS OF THE JUST.

Subject.

The most powerful means of obtaining everything from God is the prayer of the just; therefore we can now be certain that we shall get what we ask for, if we are in the state of grace.—*Preached on the occasion of public prayers for fertility.*

Text.

Si cor nostrum non reprehenderit nos, fiduciam habemus ad Deum, et quidquid petierimus, accipiemus ab eo.—I. John iii. 21, 22.

“If our heart do not reprehend us, we have confidence towards God: and whatsoever we shall ask, we shall receive of Him.”

Introduction.

Is this to be a thanksgiving feast or a day of prayer? According to my idea, my dear brethren, there is ample reason for both; for, in the first place, we must return thanks to God for all the special blessings He has bestowed on our city and country during this year; and in the second place, we must endeavor by fervent and humble prayer to obtain from the same most generous God a continuation of His favors. We have reason enough for gratitude when we consider the times we have just passed through, for, while many of the neighboring as well as the more remote states and kingdoms have felt all the evils of war, and have been plundered, devastated, laid waste, and drained of all their resources, we, who otherwise are generally the first to feel

the pressure of such calamities, have been by some special decree of Providence wonderfully preserved from all disaster. And then, how threatening the weather looked during the whole spring, up to the month of June! It seemed as if there were to be no summer, so that many despaired of getting any crop from their fields or vineyards. And yet in a short time, by the blessing of God, both harvests turned out very well, nay, they were even abundant. In many other countries the farmers were bitterly disappointed, for the young crops were trampled down by marauding soldiers, or were eaten by the field-mice, or destroyed by hailstorms. Our archdiocese of Treves has suffered little or nothing from any of these plagues. O God of goodness, we owe Thee, then, a debt of special gratitude, and we must unceasingly praise and bless Thy holy name for having shown us such great mercy! Most generous God, we have still another favor to implore of Thee, and that is, that Thou wouldst deign with fatherly goodness to bestow Thy blessing and favorable weather on us, that the abundant fruits of the earth, which the heavy rains have hitherto kept on the ground, may be safely gathered into the barns, and that our vines, laden with fruit, may come to maturity. Such is the end of the prayers we have been ordered to say to-day, that our unanimous supplications may obtain these favors from Thee! And it is but right and just that we should humbly acknowledge that Thou alone art the Lord, who, as Thou hast clearly shown us, canst easily either give or withhold those blessings, and art the only One in whom our hopes must rest; and that all the more, because, on the one hand, Thou wilt not give Thy favors to those who do not ask for them; and on the other hand, Thou hast promised to grant everything to the confident prayer of Thy faithful servants, according to the assurance that Thou givest us by Thy beloved disciple: "If our heart do not reprehend us, we have confidence towards God; and whatsoever we shall ask, we shall receive of Him." Let us, then, my dear brethren, pray with confidence, and with assured hopes await abundant blessings from God. The reasons for that hope I shall now proceed to show you.

Plan of Discourse.

The most powerful means of obtaining everything from God is the prayer of the just; therefore we can now be certain that we shall get what we ask for, if we are in the state of grace, and persevere in prayer. Such is the whole subject of this sermon.

Most generous God, grant that efficacy to our prayers; we ask this of Thee through the merits of Mary and of our holy guardian angels, that the words may be verified in us, "If our heart do not reprehend us, etc."

Many creatures in the world have the name of being strong and powerful; thus kings and other potentates are called, "most puissant," "most mighty," because they maintain great armies, by which they can defend themselves against the attacks of their enemies, and overthrow the strongest bulwarks, while all their subjects must obey their least sign and at once do what they command. Amongst unreasoning animals, the lion has the name of being strong and powerful, because his strength surpasses that of all the other animals, and his very roar is sufficient to fill them with terror. Amongst the elements, water, wind, and fire have the name of being strong; the first, because, when it once gains the upper hand, there is no resisting it; the second, because its impetuosity can uproot the strongest trees, and prostrate them on the ground; the third, because it can in a short time lay waste whole cities. Amongst drinks, wine has the name of being strong, because it has the power of intoxicating and depriving of their senses all who take too much of it, whether they be young or old, strong or weak. Physical beauty has the name of being strong, because it wins the hearts of the mightiest kings and most valiant warriors, and, as it were, bewitches them.

Many things on earth have great power and strength.

But the power of these things does not extend beyond creatures that are weaker than themselves. If, on the other hand, I could point to something outside of God, and say, that has as much power as the almighty God Himself, then, indeed, you should acknowledge that such a thing is the most powerful of all creatures. And that is precisely what I now dare to say, without the least hesitation, but with the greatest reverence towards the supreme God; for the prayer of the just man has a virtue that God cannot withstand. Hear the impressive words of Tertullian: when we unite in prayer, we assail heaven as it were with an army, we overcome the Almighty, snatch from His hands the weapons He had taken up against us, restrain and appease His anger, and compel Him by violence to give us what we desire. "But this violence is pleasing to God." ¹ He wishes to be overcome by us in that way; just as a father is pleased if some one takes out of his hand the rod with which he is about to chastise

The prayer of the just man is the most powerful of all, because it overcomes God Himself.

¹ Sed hæc vis Deo grata est.

his beloved son for some fault. Nor are the words of St. Bernard less emphatic; for he does not hesitate to say that the prayers of the just are even more powerful than the invincible God Himself; for they can restrain and overpower Him whose might nothing else can withstand, and they can conquer Him who is invincible.

Proved from
Scripture.

But why should I seek for testimonies from the holy Fathers to prove the truth of my words? Has not God Himself told us plainly enough what violence is offered Him by the prayer of His pious servants? Do you wish for a proof of it? Read the thirty-second chapter of the book of Exodus. In former times God was full of wrath against the Israelites, and He had just cause, too, for His anger; for that ungrateful people, in spite of the extraordinary proofs of the divine favor they had received; in spite of having been freed by the strong arm of God and by the most surprising miracles from the slavery of Egypt; brought through the stormy sea without even wetting their feet, protected by a cloud during the day and a pillar of fire during the night; in spite of the miracle by which water was made to issue from the hard rock to quench their thirst, and of the divine generosity in feeding them so abundantly with heavenly bread in the desert; in spite of all that (who can think of it without indignation?), they go and make a golden calf, and dance and sing around it, adoring it as their god. "And they said: These are thy gods, O Israel, that have brought thee out of the land of Egypt: and rising in the morning they offered holocausts and peace victims, and the people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play."¹ Therefore the Lord was determined to destroy these monsters of ingratitude and to blot them out from the face of the earth; He had already drawn the sword of vengeance, and was about to smite them pitilessly. Strike, O Lord! Why dost Thou wait? Ah, He cannot! And why? Moses is there to prevent Him; he it is who takes the sword and the rod out of His hand. Hear how God has to argue and reason, and, as it were, to contend with Moses in order to get rid of him. "Let Me alone," He says imploringly, "that My wrath may be kindled against them, and that I may destroy them:" do not prevent Me any longer from giving vent to My just anger: I cannot bear any more with their obstinacy and

¹ *Dixeruntque: hi sunt dii tui Israel, qui te eduxerunt de terra Ægypti: surgentesque mane, obtulerunt holocausta et hostias pacificas, et sedit populus manducare et bibere, et surrexerunt ludere.—Exod. xxxii. 4, 6.*

perversity; "let Me alone, and I will make of thee a great nation."¹ Is it not, my dear brethren, as if one were holding back an angry man, who is about to take satisfaction on his enemy, and who, unable to restrain his wrath, cries out to the person holding him: "let me go! I will not be held back"? And what was the end of the contest? Which had to give way? Moses, without doubt? No, quite the contrary: "And the Lord was appeased from doing the evil which He had spoken against His people."² The same kind of contest was carried on between God and the Prophet Jeremias, after the Jews had committed all sorts of crimes, on account of which God was about to reject and cast them off: "I will cast you away from before My face,"³ was the message He sent them. But before inflicting the threatened punishment, He had, so to speak, to get His servant Jeremias on His side, lest he should prevent Him from carrying His threat into execution. "Therefore," said He, as if He were asking a favor, "do not thou pray for this people, nor take to thee praise and supplication for them, and do not withstand Me,"⁴ that I may give vent to My anger, carry out My purpose, and punish that wicked people.

But O Lord, great God! who are Moses and Jeremias, that they dare or can resist Thy almighty will? Can such poor servants venture to contradict the Monarch of heaven and earth? Can such weak mortals restrain Thy all-powerful arm? Can they compel Thee to entreat their permission before Thou art free to do Thy will? What a wonderful and incomprehensible thing! With one word Thou hast created the whole universe, heaven and earth; with a single sign Thou hast called them forth out of nothing; and now Thou art not able to resist one man! No, my dear brethren; He cannot. It was neither Moses nor Jeremias who held Him back and restrained His anger; but their fervent, earnest prayer was the rope with which they tied the hands of the Almighty and snatched the scourge out of them. "But Moses besought the Lord his God, saying: Why, O Lord, is Thy indignation enkindled against Thy people, whom Thou hast brought out of the land of Egypt, with great power, and

This power comes from the divine promise.

¹ *Dimitte me, ut frascatur furor meus contra eos, et deleam eos; faciamque te in gentem magnam.*—Exod. xxxiii. 10.

² *Piacatusque est Dominus ne faceret malum quod locutus fuerat adversus populum suum.*—Ibid. 14.

³ *Profficiam vos a facie mea.*—Jerem. vii. 15.

⁴ *Tu ergo noli orare pro populo hoc, nec assumes pro eis laudem et orationem, et non obstas mihi.*—Ibid. 16.

with a mighty hand?"¹ What would the Egyptians think and say if they heard that? They would say that Thou hast brought out the people to slay them in the mountains and to destroy them off the face of the earth; and what a shame that would be for Thee! Therefore, dear Lord, pardon them this once! "Let Thy anger cease, and be appeased upon the wickedness of Thy people."² This prayer, I say, was what God could not withstand: "And the Lord was appeased from doing the evil." Fearing afterwards a similar opposition on the part of Jeremias, He wished to forestall it, and therefore He implored of the Prophet not to pray for the people, or to withstand Him. O prayer of a pious man! how great is thy power, since thou canst resist the almighty God, even when He is filled with anger, and canst prevent Him from doing what He would willingly do, and compel Him to do what He, as it were, does not wish to do! Whence hast thou that power? From the same God, my dear brethren; for He has pledged Himself, and His own word, solemnly undertaking to grant us all we ask for in a proper manner. Ask, He says to all without exception, ask and you shall receive. If you want anything, all you have to do is to ask for it.

Nearly every wonderful event is an effect of prayer.

Moses and Jeremias are not the only ones who have discovered the power of prayer; for nearly every wonderful thing that has happened in the world is the result of the prayers of the servants of God. If Elias was carried up alive into heaven without tasting death, and if he can there rejoice with God and the angels, he may ascribe that great happiness of his, as St. Peter Chrysologus says, to his fervent and confident prayer: "By prayer Elias escaped death, entered heaven, and now lives with God and the angels."³ If the flames of the Babylonian furnace were changed into a cooling breeze, and the burning coals to blooming roses, so that the only effect of the fire on the three Hebrew youths was to loosen the fetters that bound them, that was due to the fact that their sole occupation while in the furnace was praying and praising God: "Then these three as with one mouth praised, and glorified, and blessed God in the furnace, saying: Blessed art Thou, O Lord, the God of our fathers; and worthy to be

¹ *Moyses autem orabat Dominum Deum suum, dicens: eur, Domine, irascitur furor tuus contra populum tuum, quem eduxisti de terra Aegypti in fortitudine magna, et in manu robusta?—Exod. xxxii. 11.*

² *Quiescat ira tua, et esto placabilis super nequitia populi tui.—Ibid. 12.*

³ *Per orationem Elias nescit mortem, caelos intrat, convlvit Deo et angelis.*

praised, and glorified, and exalted above all forever.”¹ If the fierce and hungry lions respected Daniel when he was thrown to them in the den, left him unharmed, and fawned at his feet like lambs, that happened because Daniel prayed to God while in the den, as if he were in a temple. If Judith, a weak woman, put the whole Assyrian army to flight by cutting off the head of its general Holofernes, it was prayer alone that enabled her to perform such an exploit. “Judith went into her oratory,” says the Scripture of her, before she went out of the city of Bethulia, “and putting on hair-cloth, laid ashes on her head, and falling down prostrate before the Lord, she cried to the Lord.”² And when she was about to cut off the head of the sleeping Holofernes, “Judith stood before the bed, praying with tears, and the motion of her lips in silence, saying: strengthen me, O Lord God of Israel, and in this hour look on the works of my hands, that, as Thou hast promised, Thou mayest raise up Jerusalem, Thy city; and that I may bring to pass that which I have purposed, having a belief that it might be done by Thee.”³ That the same Judith, in spite of her extraordinary beauty, was able to preserve her purity untarnished in the midst of a hostile camp, and especially in the company of the lustful Holofernes, who was quite captivated by her, was also an effect of her humble prayer. “A most wonderful thing,” says St. Augustine; “prayer was able to preserve the chastity of a woman, while the multitude of his soldiers could not save the life of her enemy.”⁴ In a word, the prayers of the just are the cause of all those wonders that astonish the world. If the sky at one time seemed to be made of iron, so that the land was almost burnt up by the drought, the prayers of the just forced the fertilizing rain to fall from it. If the clouds seemed about to empty themselves on the earth, so as to inundate it, the prayers of the just prevented them from letting fall another drop. Prayer protected the people of God when they were besieged, and put their enemies to flight; prayer hardened the waters under the feet of the former, while it caused the earth to open and swallow up the latter. And finally, prayer

Tunc hi tres quasi ex uno ore laudabant, et glorificabant, et benedicebant Deum in fornace, dicentes: benedictus es, Domine, Deus patrum nostrorum, et laudabilis, et gloriosus, et superexaltatus in sæcula.—Dan. iii. 51, 52.

¹ Judith ingressa est oratorium suum, et induens se cilicio, posuit cinerem super caput suum, et prosternens se Domino, clamabat ad Dominum.—Judith ix. 1.

² Stetitque Judith ante lectum, orans cum lacrymis et labiorum motu in silentio, dicens: confirma me Domine Deus Israel, et respice in hac hora ad opera manuum mearum; ut, sicut promisisti, Jerusalem civitatem tuam erigas, et hoc quod credens per te posse fieri cogitavi, perficiam.—Ibid. xiii. 6, 7.

⁴ Fœminæ castitatem servavit oratio, et hostem non potuit servare multitudo.

has proved that the almighty God can resist it as little as a creature can resist His almighty power.

Prayer is still more powerful in the New Law.

Now, if it has had such wonderful efficacy in the Old Law, what can it not do now that Jesus Christ has sanctified it by His example, increased its merit and value by the infinite merits of His own precious Blood, and united His prayer to ours? Now that in and by His name we can call on God as our heavenly Father, whose adopted children we are, and can implore Him by His own Son, who is God, like unto Himself, to grant our petitions? Oh, certainly, now is the desirable time, when, as St. Augustine says, all the gates of heaven are opened to prayer: "The prayer of the just man is the key of heaven; prayer ascends, and the mercy of God comes down upon us."¹ If we could see the hidden decrees of the Almighty, what wonderful effects should we not have to attribute in our own days to the confident prayer of just and pious souls! We should see how the divine anger was appeased, and public calamities averted from a whole city or country; while a whole community enjoys peace and prosperity, owing to the prayers of one or another pious Christian. Sometimes we look on a man as a simple-minded person, because he is not like others in his mode of life, and because he goes often to the sacraments with proper devotion. You look down on that young girl, perhaps, because she is always dressed according to the rules of Christian humility, and keeps modestly at home. That poor servant-maid, who, in spite of the hard work she has every day, kneels down to say her prayers morning and evening so devoutly, and hears Mass daily, is not worth anything, perhaps, in your opinion; but you must know that that simple-minded man, that modest young girl, that poor servant-maid are those who by their prayers avert the punishments that would otherwise fall on a whole city; that it is to their prayers that you owe it that your house is not fallen to ruins, as a just chastisement for your sins; that it is through their prayers that God bestows such copious blessings on your whole family. For, did not God in former times promise to spare Sodom, if even ten just souls could be found in it? O prayer of the just, I must again exclaim, what a wonderful efficacy thou hast!

What a happiness for us, if we are in the friendship of God.

I have to retract, my dear brethren, what I have often said about human weakness and frailty. For we are not in reality so poor and miserable as we seem to be, since we have permission to pray, and have such an inexhaustible treasure at our free dis-

¹ *Oratio just! est clavis cœli; ascendit peccatio, et descendit Dei miseratio.*

posal. Of ourselves we are and can do nothing, that is true; we are all of us, rich and poor, no better than beggars, who have to seek our daily bread at the door of our heavenly Father; that is true also. But can you look on him as really poor and needy who, although he has nothing of his own, yet can procure from another as much as he wants? Can it be said with truth that he is in want who has nothing to do but to ask for all he requires for soul and body, with the assurance that he will get what he asks for? Now, that is the way it is with us; that is the happy position in which God has placed us. We are weak and frail in soul and body; everywhere we are surrounded by a thousand dangers, temptations, and hidden snares, laid for us by our sworn enemies; but let us be comforted and of good heart; we have at hand the surest means of easily obtaining help in all our necessities, if we are only in the grace of God. For all we have to do is to open our mouths, raise our hearts on high, and declare to our heavenly Father what our wants are, and ask from Him all we stand in need of. "We have confidence towards God, and whatsoever we shall ask, we shall receive of Him."

Finally, my dear brethren, if the prayer of one just man has such marvellous power and efficacy, what may we not expect to receive from God, if, while our consciences do not reproach us with any grievous sin, we send up, as we now are doing, our united petitions to His throne? Oh, well may I say with the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas of Aquin: "It is impossible for the united prayers of many to fail in obtaining whatever may be obtained."¹ For clear and truthful is the promise made by Jesus Christ in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "I say to you, that if two of you shall consent upon earth concerning anything whatsoever they shall ask, it shall be done to them by My Father who is in heaven. For where there are two or three gathered in My name, there am I in the midst of them."² Now, if the united prayers of two or three are so agreeable to God that He assures them that he will give them whatever they ask for, what a pleasing sight must it not be before God, and what great results may not be expected, when the majority of the faithful of a whole city go together from one church to the other, and send up their united prayers and hymns to heaven! The prayer of one man is like a cannon-ball directed against the walls of the

The united prayers of many are the most powerful of all.

¹ Multorum preces impossibile est quod non impetrent illud quod est impetrabile.

² Dico vobis, quia si duo ex vobis consenserint super terram, de omni re quamcumque petierint, fiet illis a Patre meo, qui in caelis est. Ubi enim sunt duo vel tres congregati in nomine meo, ibi sum in medio eorum.—Matt. xviii. 19, 20.

town, in order to make a breach in them gradually ; but when many pray together, it is as if they attacked and took heaven by storm. Such is the meaning of the words of Tertullian : “ We assemble together like an army to force our way to God by our prayers and to compel Him to hear our requests.”¹

If offered with a pure heart; otherwise it is of no good.

But mark, my dear brethren, the condition laid down by St. John : “ if our heart do not reprehend us,” that is, if we are not conscious of a mortal sin, then we can obtain anything from God by prayer. To pray to God and at the same time to be at enmity with Him is not the prayer of the just man, which alone is efficacious. To pray to God for fair weather and fertility, and that He may keep off heavy rains and injurious storms, and yet not to amend one’s sinful life, is like emptying the water out of a cellar without stopping the hole through which it leaks down. To pray to God for a fruitful harvest and vineyards, and yet not to amend sinful ways that are hateful to God, is like expecting to reap good corn off a field in which one has sown nothing but thorns and thistles. To pray to God for a healthy atmosphere, and yet not to avoid sin, is like taking medicine and poison together in sickness. To pray to God that He may avert the evils of war, and still to continue offending Him, is like trying to extinguish a fire by pouring oil on it. In a word, there is no use in trying to get rid of an evil unless you eradicate the cause and root of the evil. Well did the blind man who was cured say, as we read in the Gospel of St. John : “ Now we know that God doth not hear sinners ; but if a man be a servant of God, and doth His will, him He heareth.”² It is sin alone that can prevent prayer from being efficacious and powerful.

As the Israelites expiated.

When did the Israelites, the chosen people of God, find in Him a severe Master, who punished them in the most terrible manner ? Was it not always when they sinned against His law, and refused to amend or be converted ? Consider them in the cruel slavery of Egypt, under the tyrant Pharaoh ; they sigh and moan, and cry out to God to help them in their misery : “ The children of Israel, groaning, cried out because of the works ; and their cry went up unto God from the works.”³ Did God then hear them ? Yes, says the Scripture : “ And He heard their

¹ *Coimus in cœtum, ut ad Deum, quasi manu facta precationibus ambiamus.*

² *Scimus autem quia peccatores Deus non audit; sed si quis Dei cultor est, et voluntatem ejus facit, hunc exaudit.—John ix. 31.*

³ *Ingemiscetes filii Israel, propter opera vociferati sunt; ascenditque clamor eorum ad Deum ab operibus.—Exod. ii. 23.*

groaning, and remembered the covenant which He made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And the Lord looked upon the children of Israel, and He knew them.”¹ Soon after He led them out of Egypt by His servant Moses. But I ask, why were the Israelites not heard before? They had been, as Abulensis remarks, already ninety years in bondage, and there is no doubt that they often cried to God for release during that time. True, answers Abulensis; they had been already grievously oppressed, and had cried to heaven for relief; but they were at the time infected with the idolatry and impurity of the Egyptians, as the Prophet Ezechiel writes: “They committed fornication in Egypt, in their youth they committed fornication.”² Therefore, their prayers and cries were ineffectual; God rejected them and their prayers, too. Now, too, they pray and cry in their tribulation, but with sorrow of heart for their sins: “the children of Israel, groaning, cried out,” and therefore God at last took pity on them: “And the Lord looked upon the children of Israel, and He knew them.” O ye prayers of Christians, of what kind are ye? Are ye mere sounds, while the idols are still adored at heart, and creatures are more loved than the Creator? Are ye uttered by those who are still addicted to shameful impurity? or by those who have not yet done true penance, nor amended their sinful lives? If so, then it is no wonder that such prayers remain without fruit, and are not heard by God.

The same people once held a grand procession, and brought the Ark of the Covenant with great solemnity into the camp, in order to make sure of gaining a victory over their enemies. The ark, my dear brethren, was a precious treasure to the Hebrews; it contained three things which represented three divine attributes, for their profit and advantage. It contained the tables of the law, which signified the sovereign dominion of God over all things, that He was pleased to make use of for the protection of His people; the miraculous rod of Aaron, which showed forth the invincible power of God, in which His people would find a sure refuge against their enemies; and, finally, a vessel filled with the manna with which their fathers had been fed in the desert; this manna signified the loving care that divine Providence took of His chosen people, always arranging everything for their greater good. God Himself worked most

When, in spite of their prayers, they were punished still more severely.

¹ Et audivit gemitum eorum, ac recordatus est fœderis quod pepigit cum Abraham, Isaac et Jacob. Et respexit Dominus filios Israel et cognovit eos.—Exod. ii. 24, 25.

² Fornicatæ sunt in Ægypto, in adolescentia sua fornicatæ sunt.—Ezech. xxliii. 3.

surprising miracles in the presence of the ark, and always commanded it to be held in the greatest respect and reverence. When it was carried round the walls of Jericho, the walls fell down at once, without any violence being used; when it was brought to the Jordan, then swollen, the waters divided of their own accord, the upper side part remaining immovable like a wall, while the lower waters flowed off rapidly, thus leaving a dry passage for the ark. It was in this miraculous ark that the Israelites placed their last hopes, after having lost four thousand men in an engagement with the Philistines, and dreading with good reason that they might be equally unfortunate another time: "And the ancients of Israel said: "Why hath the Lord defeated us to-day before the Philistines?" We must prevent a recurrence of that disaster. Quick! "let us fetch unto us the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord from Silo, and let it come into the midst of us, that it may save us from the hand of our enemies. 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." They were fully persuaded that in the presence of the ark they would have nothing to fear from their enemies; and in fact, when the Philistines heard of its arrival, they were greatly disconcerted, and cried out: "God is come into the camp. And sighing they said: Woe to us. Who shall deliver us from the hand of these high gods?" Soon after another battle took place, and which side gained the victory? "Israel was overthrown, and every man fled to his own dwelling; and there was an exceeding great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen; and the ark of God was taken." Such was the result of the battle. But how was that? Did God no longer value the ark He formerly held so sacred? It was just as sacred as ever in His eyes. Perhaps He did not wish so much honor to be shown to the ark any longer? No, He desired it to be held in great esteem, as it formerly was, and proved that desire to the great loss of the Philistines. If so, then what was the cause of such a shameful defeat in the very

¹ *Dixeruntque majores natu de Israel: quare percussit nos Dominus hodie coram Philistinim?—I. Kings iv. 3.*

² *Afferamus ad nos de Silo arcam foederis Domini, et veniat in medium nostri, ut salvet nos de manu inimicorum nostrorum. Cumque venisset arca foederis Domini in castra, vociferatus est omnis Israel clamore grandi, et personuit terra.—Ibid. 3, 5.*

³ *Venit Deus in castra: et ingemuerunt, dicentes: vae nobis! Quis nos salvabit de manu deorum subtilium istorum?—Ibid. 7, 8.*

⁴ *Cæsus est Israel, et fugit unusquisque in tabernaculum suum: et facta est plaga magna nimis: et ceciderunt de Israel triginta millia pedum; et arca Dei capta est.—Ibid. 10, 11.*

presence of the ark, which was given to the Hebrews as a sign of the divine help and protection? It was, as Theodoret says, out of respect for the ark that God refused to protect the people who had grievously offended Him, and would not do penance. They showed outward honor to the ark, but with sin on their souls; they greeted it with loud cries, but without shedding a single tear of penance or heaving one penitent sigh; and therefore it was of no help to them. What wonder is it, asks Denis the Carthusian, that calamities and trials increase instead of diminishing amongst Christians, in spite of public prayers and pilgrimages, when they who take part in them are in the state of mortal sin? The Israelites, he continues, who brought the ark into camp, represent those Christians who in times of calamities carry in procession the Blessed Sacrament, or the statues and relics of the saints, filling the air with their cries to heaven for mercy, while they make not the least effort to amend their sinful lives; along with the picture of Mary, they have in their minds a hideous image of Venus, while they carry the devil about in their hearts with the pictures of the angels and saints; so that all their prayers and processions are of no use to them, and they are often punished even more grievously than before. Such, too, is the opinion of St. Augustine. "The punishment increases daily," he says, "because sins increase."

Do we wish, then, my dear brethren, that God should grant our requests? then let us first do as He wishes. "We must first weep and then pray,"¹ is the warning given us by St. Ambrose. We must have sorrow for our sins, and truly repent and amend our lives, if we wish our prayers and devotions to be pleasing to God, and to have the desired effect. Therefore, sinners, be converted to God, be reconciled to your neighbor, restore those ill-gotten goods, cast away the stone of scandal, leave that improper company and impure intimacy, give up that monstrous habit of cursing and swearing, do penance for your sins, which are the only occasion of the evils that afflict you, and if you are firmly resolved to do that, then come and pray with the just, and say to God, "that Thou wouldst vouchsafe to give and preserve the fruits of the earth, we beseech Thee to hear us."² Grant, O Lord, that our fields and vineyards may bear abundant fruit! Already Thou hast blessed our fields far beyond our

Therefore sinners should do penance and help the just to pray for fine weather.

¹ Crescit quotidie poena, quia quotidie crescit et culpa.
² Ante flendum est, et sic precandum.
³ Ut fructus terræ dare et conservare digneris, te rogamus, audi nos.

expectations, and we thank Thee therefore with all our hearts, while Thou hast given us far better hopes with regard to our vineyards than we dared to entertain, considering the nature of the seasons we have had. Most generous God, complete Thy goodness to us by preserving what Thou hast given, that we may harvest our crops safely.

And yet
leave the
weather to
the disposi-
tion of
Providence.
Shown by a
fable.

With regard to the weather, whether it is to be hot or cold, dry or rainy, we leave that to Thy all-wise Providence: for very often we do not know what we wish or desire, nor what we are complaining about, and Thou mightest with reason address to us the same reproof Thou gavest to the sons of Zebedee: "You know not what you ask."¹ We are like the man in the fable. (Hear this, ye of little faith, who, as soon as the least appearance of what you think unfavorable weather sets in, commence to complain and to despair of your crops, thus very often compelling the good God to withdraw His blessing from us, in punishment of your complaints.) Driven by want, a man was about to sell his property, but could not find a purchaser to give him the price he thought fair; he therefore humbly besought the god Jupiter to change men's minds and make them disposed to agree to his terms. I will do so, answered Jupiter; go and tell every one that whosoever buys your property will have whatever weather he likes, at all times. When this was made known, there was great competition as to who should make the purchase, for every one thought that it would be an excellent thing to have the weather so completely under control. He who offered the highest price and became the fortunate possessor of the land began at once to study as to how he could best use his privilege, so as to be sure of having good crops in every part of his fields; sometimes he wished for rain, sometimes for dry weather, and whatever he wished for in that way he had. But when the time for the harvest arrived, and he thought he was sure of being made rich, he had nothing to bring into his barns, for, all the seeds that had shot up from the earth produced nothing but straw and stalks without any fruit. What is the meaning of this, he said to himself. I must have made a mistake in selecting the weather. Next spring he began to wish again, but he changed the order he had followed the year before; where he wished for rain or cool weather then, he now asked for sunshine and heat. But the poor man was again disappointed; his crops came to nothing, although he thought he had managed matters very well.

¹ *Nescitis quid petatis.*—Matt xx. 22.

At last he lost all confidence in his powers of weather-making, and falling at the feet of Jupiter, he cried out: see, I will wish no more, for it is clear that I do not understand the business; forgive me for having usurped your office; in future I will let the weather be what it will; do you arrange it according to your good pleasure, and not as I might wish, and whatever you do, I will be satisfied. This pleased Jupiter exceedingly; good, said he; now you are acting prudently in allowing me to do as I like; your wishes were not well directed before, but go now, and receive with gratitude what I shall give you. After that, no matter what the weather was, the man always had a good harvest, as a general rule, and he left us all by way of warning the old saying, "let the gods alone." So it is, O only true and living God, and Ruler of all things! Such are our sentiments. We do not desire to have weather to suit our fancies, for we humbly acknowledge that we do not understand the matter. Thou alone knowest what is good for us; do, then, as Thou pleasest; for it is as easy for Thy almighty power to help us in one way as in another, and, if one crop fails, to make more than sufficient compensation for it by the abundance of another, as we have already had proof of. In any case, we will be content with Thy fatherly Providence.

If our sins, perhaps, prevent Thee from hearing our prayers, behold, we now acknowledge with sorrowful hearts our guilt; we condemn and detest everything that has hitherto been displeasing to Thee in our lives and actions, and we make the firm resolution to keep Thy holy laws inviolably for the future, and to serve Thee with the utmost zeal and fidelity. With contrite hearts, then, we continue to address our prayers to Thee, full of confidence in Thy promise to grant us what we ask; and, if it is for the good of our souls, trusting that Thou wilt fulfil in our regard what Thou saidst to the Wise Man: "Fear God and depart from evil; and thy barn shall be filled with abundance, and thy presses shall run over with wine."¹ O Lord, let it be done according to Thy will! Amen.

Then we shall be heard.

¹ Time Deum et recede a malo, et implebuntur horrea tua saturitate, et vino torcularia tua redundabunt.—Prov. iii. 7, 10.

*Another Introduction to the same Sermon for the Feast of St.
James the Apostle.*

Text.

Nescitis quid petatis.—Matt. xx. 22.

“You know not what you ask.”

Introduction.

Truly, that mother was ambitious: “Say that these my two sons may sit, the one on Thy right hand, and the other on Thy left in Thy kingdom.” She asked for a great deal, indeed, yet her request was not a presumptuous one, when we consider the infinite goodness and liberality of God, who can easily grant all that is asked of Him, and has promised to give what they request to those who pray to Him. And that mother would have obtained her request, if she had not asked unwisely; for, she either imagined the kingdom of Christ to be an earthly one, in which she hoped her two sons would have the highest places; or, else, if she understood the kingdom of Our Lord to be heaven, her request was still unreasonable, for the elect are apportioned a higher or lower degree of glory according to the merits of each one. Therefore her request was rejected by Christ, and the only answer she got was, “you know not what you ask.” My dear brethren, we often complain that we pray so much, and yet receive so little from God, although we have His infallible promise, “If you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it you.”¹ How does that happen? Ah, could not the same answer be given to us? “You know not what you ask.” And so it is; either we know not what is good for us, when we ask for some temporal blessing, or we do not wish to obtain what we ask, if we sometimes implore a spiritual grace, or (and it is in this that the prayers of most people are prevented from being efficacious), we do not pray in the right state, since our hearts are not pure. If we were always free from these faults, and especially from the last mentioned, oh, what could we not then obtain from the good God! Hear what St. John says: “If our heart do not reprehend us, we have confidence towards God, and whatsoever we ask, we shall receive of Him.” Yes, my dear brethren, if we pray in that way, we can obtain everything from God, as I shall now show.—*Plan of Discourse as above.*

¹ Si quid petieritis Patrem in nomine meo, dabit vobis.—John xvi. 23.

Another Peroration for the same Feast, to be inserted on page 433, after the Paragraph ending "because sins increase." The remaining Paragraphs of the Sermon to be omitted.

Let us, then, my dear Brethren, above all, keep always in the friendship of God, that in all our necessities we may fly to Him for refuge with child-like confidence, assured that He will protect us. O God of goodness, what great happiness we have in our hands daily, and yet we prize it as little as if we had no help to expect from any one in our necessities. We complain of our miseries, and forget that we can easily free ourselves from them, if we only make up our minds to speak to Thee about them. If a courtier were always sure of being admitted to the presence of his sovereign, and of being allowed to present his petitions, how happy he would be, even if he had not the assurance of always obtaining what he might ask for? But how rare a thing is such confidence amongst the great ones of this world! To seek an audience and obtain it are two different things; much less can one always hope to obtain one's request. Thou, O supreme Monarch, dealest with us mortals in a far different manner! In all places, by day or night, whenever we wish, and as long as we wish, we can have an audience of Thee; and not only dost Thou admit us freely into Thy presence, but Thou desirest, entreatest, commandest us even to appear before Thee and present our petitions, because Thou art always ready to hear us, and because Thou willest that we should compel Thee to give us Thy graces. If Thou sometimes dost not bestow on us at once what we desire, it is that we may persevere in prayer, so as to give Thee an opportunity of being still more liberal to us; and if Thou givest us a little, it is that we may turn to Thee again and continue in prayer, while, if Thou refuseth the temporal things we ask for, Thy only object is to bestow on us a larger share of eternal goods! For the future, then, in all accidents and wants of body and soul, we shall take refuge in prayer with thankful hearts for the many benefits we have received from Thee; and especially as far as our consciences are concerned, we shall keep in Thy friendship, and thus await with confidence further blessings from Thee, assured that whatsoever we shall ask from Thee we shall receive. Amen.

SIXTY-NINTH SERMON.

ON THE REAL CAUSES OF PUBLIC CALAMITIES.

Subject.

The sins and vices of the people compel the Lord God to chastise a whole land with public calamities; therefore we must do penance and amend our lives.—*Preached in the year 1730, during a time of public prayer.*

Text.

Tradite illum solum, et recedemus a civitate.—II. Kings xx. 21.
“Deliver him only, and we will depart from the city.”

Introduction.

When Joab, the general of king David, was besieging the town of Abela, and his soldiers had already made a breach in the walls, with the intention of capturing the rebel Seba, who had taken refuge in that town, a certain woman ascended the wall, and cried out at the top of her voice: Joab, what are you doing? “Thou seekest to destroy the city and to overthrow a mother in Israel? Why wilt thou throw down the inheritance of the Lord?”¹ No, answered Joab, that is not my design; “God forbid that I should: the matter is not so, but a man of Mount Ephraim, Seba, the son of Boehri by name, hath lifted up his hand against king David: deliver him only, and we will depart from the city,”² and will not do you any harm; otherwise you must suffer in the general ruin of the city. The woman went at once to the people and told them the reason of their being besieged, whereupon they cut off the head of the rebel and threw it over the wall at the feet of Joab: “And he sounded the trumpet, and they departed from the city, every one to his home.”³ So far the history. When I consider, my dear brethren, the circumstances in which we are at present, this city and land of ours appears to me to be besieged on all sides by calamities and distress, while we, like that woman, full of fear and

¹ *Queris subvertere civitatem, et evertere matrem in Israel? Quare precipitas hæreditatem Domini?*—II. Kings xx. 19.

² *Absit, absit hoc a me: non sic se habet res; sed homo de monte Ephraim, Seba, filius Boehri cognomine, levavit manum suam contra regem David: tradite illum solum, et recedemus a civitate.*—Ibid. 20, 21.

³ *Et ille cecinit tuba, et recesserunt ab urbe, unusquisque in tabernacula sua.*—Ibid. 22.

anguish, cry out: what? will you destroy us again? O God of goodness, turn away Thy anger from us! We have suffered enough already! But it seems to me, also, that I hear the same answer that Joab gave, no, that is not what we seek; "Seba hath lifted his hand;" there is a rebellious Seba, there are in fact several Sebas in your town, in your country, who have lifted up their hands against the Lord God; deliver them up; let them surrender to their God by true penance and conversion, and "we will depart from the city," from your land. Otherwise we shall be forced to fall upon all of you without distinction, nor will your prayers of supplication be of any avail. So it is, my dear brethren, as I shall now show, and I say:

Plan of Discourse.

The sins and vices of the people compel the Lord God to chastise a whole land with public calamities; therefore, if we wish to be freed from them, we must do penance and amend our lives. Such is the whole subject of this sermon.

Mary, refuge of sinners, and help of Christians! Thou art that woman who canst best obtain grace and mercy from Thy Son; obtain for us, then, a powerful grace to cut off the heads of the rebels, that we may slay and destroy all sin and vice by repentance, so that, free from the dread of impending calamity, we may zealously serve thee and thy Son in peace and quiet! Holy angels and guardians of our dear country, help us by your powerful intercession to avert the evils that threaten us.

The foundation of my sermon is supplied by that celebrated saying of St. Bernardine of Siena, "In three ways God wishes to eradicate sin: first, by preachers; secondly, by princes; thirdly, by war, pestilence, and famine."¹ The Almighty acts in this respect like the famous Tamerlane, who on account of his success in war was called the "Terror of the World." Whenever Tamerlane besieged a town, he caused a white flag to be hung up in sight of it for the first three days, as a sign that, if the inhabitants surrendered to him, he would spare their lives. During the following days, if they refused to surrender, he had a red flag hung up, surrounded by soldiers with drawn swords, to show that, when the town was captured, the soldiers and chief men would be put to death in punishment of their obstinacy. Finally,

In three ways God endeavors to banish sin from a country. Shown by a simile.

¹ Tribus modis Deus vult tollere peccata: primum, per prædicatores; secundum, per principes; tertio per bellum, pestem, et famem.—S. Bernardin. Serm. xlvii., feria v. post Dom. Passion.

if the inhabitants still held out, he hung up a black flag, as a sign that he meant to destroy the town and put every one, innocent as well as guilty, to the sword, not sparing even the infant in the mother's womb; and this threat of his he always carried into execution.

Firstly, by preachers.

In the same way, it seems to me, God acts towards sinners who are His enemies and rebels against His authority. We have in Him a good, patient, and merciful Lord, who bears with our vices for a long time with amazing patience, and does not draw the sword of vengeance to punish us; and woe to us poor mortals if He dealt otherwise with us, for then the world would have been destroyed a hundred thousand times. Yet, since He hates sin in a special manner, and is compelled to punish and eradicate it, He first sets up the white flag, by way of fatherly warning, amid the sound of trumpets; that is, He sends His preachers into the pulpits, as living trumpets, to make known His will, according to His own words to the Prophet Joel: "Blow the trumpet in Sion, call a solemn assembly, gather together the people:"¹ exhort and reprove them on account of their vices, so that they may do penance, and have the treasury of My graces opened to them again. "Now, therefore, saith the Lord, turn to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, patient and rich in mercy, and ready to repent of the evil."²

Secondly, by princes.

But if this first means does not help to convert the sinner, then God has recourse to the second, and hangs up the red flag surrounded by drawn swords; that is, He makes use of princes, potentates, and temporal superiors, and obliges them as His plenipotentiaries to wield the sword of justice against the guilty alone, and by their authority to put a stop to abuses and vices among the people.

Thirdly, by war, pestilence, and famine.

Finally, when that too fails, He is forced to show the black flag, that is, to stretch forth His almighty arm and strike a whole city or country, without making any distinction between good and bad, with war and devastation, famine and unfruitful seasons, pestilence and contagious maladies, letting them feel the full weight of His chastising arm.

The world to-day is full of sin and vice.

Ah, since that is the case, my dear brethren, I do not wonder that the world nowadays is oppressed and tormented by so many trials and calamities. It is even surprising that any country re-

¹ *Cantate tuba in Sion, vocate cœtum, congregate populum.*—Joel ii. 15, 16.

² *Nunc ergo dicit Dominus: convertimini ad Dominum Deum vestrum, quia benignus et misericors est, patiens et multæ misericordiæ, et præstabilis super malitia.*—*Ibid.* 12, 13.

mains free from them. For, if you could accompany me in thought through the world, in order to examine how people act in their different states of life, in their different offices and employments, lay and clerical, what a vast amount of sin and vice we should see and hear of? What an almost endless number of sins we should discover, if we could see into the secrets of conscience? Pride amongst the great; evil training amongst the lowly; avarice and injustice amongst the rich; dissolute lives among the poor; shameful adulteries amongst married people; impurity amongst the unmarried; sacrileges and bad example amongst the clergy; drunkenness amongst men; public scandal amongst women; hatred, envy, and vindictiveness amongst friends and enemies; cursing, swearing, fault-finding, detraction, sloth, and idleness in the divine service amongst the greater number; who could count up all those sins? O God of justice and holiness, is it possible that Thou canst behold so patiently so much perversity, and not at once draw the sword of Thy vengeance to punish it?

No; His mercy first makes use of a milder means; and He endeavors to eradicate all those vices by His preachers; but for how many years do they not sound the trumpet in vain? There is no want of preachers in Catholic towns; on all Sundays and holy-days they cry out at the top of their voices, inviting sinners to repent and the just to be more zealous in the divine service; and what do they effect? Generally speaking, nothing; or else so little, that it is not worth while. Those who are most in want of sermons seldom come to hear them, either through sloth, or because they are afraid of being warned of their duty and awakened out of the sleep of their vicious or slothful lives. Amongst those who hear the word of God, how many are there who really profit by it? They can say that they have heard it, and that is all. Otherwise, where are the signs of amendment of their un-Christian lives, of a change for the better, of their doing what they are exhorted to do? We have to wait a long time for them. Nor is there any necessity of going much through the world to see the truth of that. There is hardly one of the vices I have mentioned that has not been preached against several times; how many have, therefore, given up the shameful habit of cursing and swearing? how many have made restitution for injuries inflicted on their neighbor's property or character? how many have given up impurity? how many have laid aside their hatred against their neighbor? how many have begun to practise

Against which preachers are, generally speaking, powerless.

sobriety? how many have done away with scandalous abuses? Have we not just reason to complain with our dear Lord, who said, after He had cleansed the ten lepers and but one of them returned to thank Him: "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"?' In the same way we might say: are there not several who were guilty of this or that vice, and who have heard sermons against them? Where, then, are those who were converted? There is no one found to give glory to God in that way; perhaps you might find one here and there; certainly not one in ten, hardly one in fifty; the others remain as they were before, and continue in their old ways. If St. Paul boasts of his Thessalonians, "For you are our glory and joy,"¹ since you have heard my teaching and acted according to it, many preachers could now say with sorrow of heart: you are our shame and our sorrow, for you shut your ears to our preaching and derive no spiritual profit from it. Behold, O Lord! Thou dost not gain Thy end by the first means! And yet Thou commandest us to continue preaching and exhorting, partly for the good of a few, who have the mark of predestination, and who are of the number of those sheep that hear Thy voice and follow it; and partly to make more evident the justice of Thy condemnation of the wicked, for on the Last Day Thou wilt remind them that there was no want of interpreters of Thy holy will and law; and what causes me the greatest pain is the fact that we, too, shall have to appear as their accusers, and help in the condemnation of those for whose sake and eternal salvation we cheerfully labor and toil; for we shall have to give testimony that we told them what to do, and they would not do it.

As well as
the author-
ity and just
measures
of princes.

Then God goes on to the second means, those princes and temporal superiors, to whom He has given authority over His people on earth, to keep them in the bounds of His law. There is no doubt that they can do much good, and hinder much evil amongst their subjects, if they are really zealous in furthering the honor and glory of God and the salvation of souls; and their preaching is in one respect, as experience teaches, far more powerful than the words of God itself when delivered from the pulpit, for they have the means of enforcing their commands, which preachers have not. God has at all times aroused a zeal

¹ Nonne decem mundati sunt? et novem ubi sunt? non est inventus qui rediret et daret gloriam Deo, nisi hic alienigena?—Luke xvii. 17, 18.

² Vos enim estis gloria nostra et gaudium.—I. Thess. ii. 20.

of this kind in the heart of Christian princes, amongst whom we must not forget our present, gloriously reigning archbishop and prince. The efforts that he has made to further the honor and glory of God, and to banish vice from amongst his subjects, are evident enough in the severe laws against abuses that were almost publicly known, and in the strict inquiries that he has caused to be made regarding them. Praised be God! much good has already been done thereby, and more will yet be done, as far as public vice is concerned. But the power of princes does not extend beyond this; namely, they can deter their subjects by the fear of punishment or disgrace from outward sins, that readily attract notice; but, since they are not lords of the heart and conscience, all their vigilance, and threats, and laws, and punishments cannot eradicate vice. How many sins are not committed in secret, or at least in desire, that cry to heaven for vengeance? And thus God again fails to attain His end.

Therefore, as a last resource, since He cannot allow sin to remain unpunished, He must set up the black flag, and chastise a whole nation with His powerful arm, by war, famine, and pestilence. War, devastation, plague, contagious maladies, sterility, poverty, hunger, terrible storms, inundations, and other instruments of chastisement, which the Divine Justice has in store, where are ye? But no, I do not wish to invite you! To all appearance, my dear brethren, war is not far from our frontier; and you know better than I can tell you, from past sad experience, what its effects are; for they are not yet wiped out, either, as far as morality or temporal prosperity is concerned. And I leave you to imagine how it will be with us if war breaks out again. The unfruitful season, which is so injurious to the crops and vineyards, seems already to be bringing famine in its train for many poor citizens and peasants; how will it be if next year (and indeed many such years are not required to cause a famine) the season should be equally bad? The plague (the very name of it frightens me!) or some epidemic is generally the companion of war and famine, of an unfruitful season and poverty. What are we to do, Christians? If those punishments are not already at our doors, yet we have good reason to dread them, and if we do not prevent Him, an angry God will soon inflict them on us. "I will call in the sword against him in all My mountains, saith the Lord God;"¹ such is the terrible threat we read in the

Therefore God is forced to punish by war, famine, and pestilence, which we now have to dread.

¹ Convocabo adversus eum in cunctis montibus meis gladium, ait Dominus Deus. —Ezech. xxxviii. 21.

prophecy of Ezechiel; since nothing else is of any avail, I will have recourse to another, more efficacious means; "And I will judge him with pestilence, and with blood, and with violent rain, and vast hail-stones; I will rain fire and brimstone upon him; And I will be magnified, and I will be sanctified, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations; and they shall know that I am the Lord.'

Therefore
we must do
penance for
our sins.

What are we to do? I ask again. Raise up to heaven your hearts, your hands, your humble sighs and tears, and the anger of God must necessarily be appeased, and the impending chastisements averted! Let us cry out with the Catholic Church: "Hear us, O Lord, who cry unto Thee," grant what we most humbly ask for, a fair, healthy, and fruitful season, "so that we, who are justly afflicted for our sins, may by Thy forestalling mercy experience Thy clemency."² Such is the prayer offered up by the priests on the altar; such, too, has been the nature of the petitions we all addressed to God during those days of prayer and penance. Persevere, then, in prayer! But after all, what is the good of it? All our efforts are in vain, unless we try to get rid of our sins by true penance and amendment of life. The rebels against God must be given up. To no purpose do we use medicine, as long as the germs of disease remain in us; to no purpose do we pray to be freed from an evil, as long as the cause of the evil is not destroyed. Christ teaches us this truth in the Gospel of St. Matthew. When the man sick of the palsy was brought to Him, He said: "Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee."³ The forgiveness of sins! What a great grace that is, O dear Saviour! But it is not the grace that was asked of Thee; Thou wert not requested to pardon his sins, but to heal the bodily infirmity from which he was suffering. True; but because Our Lord intended granting the man's petition, He infused into his heart a powerful inspiration of sorrow and contrition for his sins, without which he could not have any hope of being healed of his sickness. But when his sins were forgiven and his soul healed, then did Christ restore his bodily health: "Then said he to the man sick of the palsy: Arise, take up thy bed, and go into thy house. And he arose and went into his

¹ Et iudicabo eum peste, et sanguine, et imbre vehementi, et lapidibus immensis; ignem et sulphur pluam super eum; et magnificabor et sanctificabor. et notus ero in oculis multarum gentium, et scient quia ego Dominus.—Ezech. xxxviii. 22, 23.

² Ad te nos, Domine, clamantes exaudi, ut qui juste pro peccatis nostris affligimur, misericordia tua præveniente clementiam sentiamus.

³ Confide fili, remittantur tibi peccata tua.—Matt. ix. 2.

house.”¹ Cardinal Hugo, commenting on this passage, remarks that Our Lord acted like an experienced physician, who first removes the causes of the illness, and then cures the illness itself.”²

The sins and vices of the people are the only causes of the public chastisements inflicted on them. “Who is the wise man, that may understand this,” asked the Prophet Jeremias, when the city of Jerusalem was about to be destroyed, “and to whom the word of the mouth of the Lord may come, that he may declare this, why the land hath perished, and is burnt up like a wilderness? And the Lord said: Because they have forsaken My law, which I gave them, and have not heard My voice, and have not walked in it: but they have gone after the perverseness of their own heart. Therefore, thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will feed this people with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink: and I will send the sword after them till they be consumed.”³ Sometimes God punishes a certain family, nay, even His holiest servants, such as Job, Tobias, and others, with temporal calamities and trials; nay, according to the testimony of St. Paul, no pious man can long remain without such crosses; for, as he writes to his disciple Timothy, “all that will live godly in Jesus Christ shall suffer persecution.”⁴ And that He does in order to prove their patience and to increase their glory in heaven; but public calamities and punishments, such as pestilence, war, and famine are never inflicted on a city or land unless on account of the sins and vices of the people. Such is the opinion of the holy Doctor St. Ambrose: “A city is never severely punished, unless on account of the crimes of its inhabitants.”⁵ That is, the only cause of the punishment is sin and nothing else. Why, then, are we so frightened and alarmed at the thought of the troubles that threaten us? It is sin alone that we should hate and dread. “We must take the blame to ourselves,” says Salvianus; “for, since we commit those things on account of which we are tormented, we are

For they are the sole cause of our misfortunes.

¹ Tunc ait paralytico: surge, tolle lectum tuum, et vade in domum tuam. Et surrexit, et abiit in domum suam.—Matt. ix. 6, 7.

² More peritl medici morbi causam prius expellit.

³ Quis est vir sapiens, qui intelligat hoc, et ad quem verbum oris Domini fiat, ut annunciet istud, quare perierit terra, et exusta sit quasi desertum? Et dixit Dominus: quia dereliquerunt legem meam, quam dedi eis, et non audierunt vocem meam, et non ambulaverunt in ea, et abierunt post pravitatem cordis sui. Idecirco hæc dixit Dominus exercituum, Deus Israel: ecce ego cibabo populum istum absinthio, et potum dabo eis aquam fellis; et mittam post eos gladium, donec consumantur.—Jerem. ix. 12-16.

⁴ Omnes qui pie volunt vivere in Christo Jesu, persecutionem patientur.—11. Tim. iii. 12.

⁵ Civitati nonnisi propter civium peccata inferitur excidium.—St. Amb. Serm. 85.

the authors of our own misfortunes. Why, then, do we complain of the severity of the punishment we suffer? Each one of us punishes himself."¹ Why do we give way to such care and anxiety as to the best means of averting calamity from our country? Let us only take thought as to how we ought to repent of and avoid sin, for that is the forerunner that opens the door to all kinds of misfortunes.

Which we cannot avoid unless we do penance. Shown by a simile.

“Ye brood of vipers,” said St. John the Baptist to the Pharisees, “who hath showed you to flee from the wrath to come?”² How will you escape the punishment that threatens you? “Bring forth, therefore, fruit worthy of penance. For now the axe is laid to the root of the trees.”³ The axe, says St. John Chrysostom, is the bitter anger of God, which is at hand. But why does he compare the anger of God to an axe? You have, no doubt, heard, my dear brethren, the fable of the trees; they met on one occasion in order to take counsel as to the best means of escaping the injuries that men inflict on them by cutting, sawing, splitting, and burning. One of them recommended that they should all unite their strength and overwhelm their enemy. No, said another, men are much stronger than we, and violence on our part will only make matters worse; in my opinion the best thing to do would be to offer them a yearly tribute and humbly beg of them not to do us any further harm. What? said the cedar. What is the good of such a plan as that? Do you know how it is that men can do us so much harm? It is because they have axes and other instruments to do it with. Now, what are axes made of? Of a piece of iron or steel, which can cut, and of a wooden handle, by which the tool is held. Now, who has given them the wood? How foolish we are! It is we trees who have done it. Let us, then, agree unanimously not to give them any more wood for tools, and the axe will be powerless in their hands. Do you see the application of this fable, my dear brethren? The axe is already raised and laid to the root of the tree; the anger of God is ready to punish us; what can we do? Shall we resist Him? Ah, we poor worms of the earth would have no chance against His almighty arm! We beg and implore the Lord to have mercy on us and spare us. That is very good and right; but it

¹ Nos nobis accensandi sumus, nam cum ea quibus torquemur admittimus, ipsi tormentorum nostrorum auctores sumus. Quid ergo de poenarum acerbitate querimus? Unusquisque nostrum ipse se punit. —Salvian. de Gubern., 1.

² Progenies viperarum, quis demonstravit vobis fugere a ventura ira? —Matt. iii. 7.

³ Facite ergo fructum dignum poenitentiae. Jam enim securis ad radicem arborum posita est. —Ibid. 8, 10.

is not enough; we must remove the handle of the axe that is raised to hew us down. "Who has placed the wooden handle in the hands of the divine anger?"¹ asks Aresius. "Ourselves," he answers, "and no other."² Our sins are the wood out of which the handle is made. Therefore pray, but at the same time, bring forth fruit worthy of penance, and by the amendment of your lives take away that wooden handle that the divine anger uses against us; otherwise your prayers will do no good.

How we are to act under such circumstances, we can learn from the Hebrews in the Old Testament, although they were not expected to be nearly so perfect as we Christians should be. God had often chastised them with war, famine, and pestilence whenever they had been addicted to vice for a certain length of time; and the first thing they always did to appease His anger was to repent of their sins with contrite hearts, to fast for a whole day until the stars began to appear in the heavens in the evening, to cover their heads with ashes, to exchange their costly clothing for rough sack-cloth, and to gird their loins with hair girdles; such were their outward works of penance and humiliation. In this garb of penance they all went, young and old, to the temple in Jerusalem, and there sent forth their sighs and lamentations to heaven: "For many hours with one voice they cried to God, saying: We have sinned with our fathers, we have done unjustly, we have committed iniquity. Have Thou mercy on us because Thou art good."³ Thus the Hebrews prayed when they were besieged in the city of Bethulia, as you may read in the Book of Judith. Similar descriptions are to be found in the Second Book of Paralipomenon, in the fourteenth, twentieth, and thirty-second chapters, and in the First and Second Books of the Machabees.

The Hebrews give us an example of penance.

How do we Christians act in times of public calamity? We pray, and that is all, and God alone knows with what kinds of hearts. Instead of fasting, we spend our lives in every sort of indulgence, perhaps, until necessity compels us to change; instead of shedding tears of repentance, we continue our old mode of life, remain attached to our old bad habits, and continue in the occasion of sin; instead of sack-cloth, or a style of dress suited to the law of Christian humility, we flaunt about in scandalous attire; and in that guise we cry to heaven, "Have

Which few follow now a days.

¹ Manubrium ligneum quis illi tribuit ?

² Non alii quam nos ipsi.

³ Per multas horas una voce clamaverunt ad Deum, dicentes : peccavimus cum patribus nostris, Injuste egimus, Iniquitatem fecimus. Tu, quia pius es, miserere nostri.—Judith vii. 18-20.

Thou mercy on us because Thou art good!" Take pity on us and turn away the plagues with which Thou hast threatened us! Do we think that God will hear our cries? But why should He do so? Is it that we may continue undisturbed in our luxurious, easy, or sinful lives? The times are changed, some will say; we know nothing of the customs of the Jews. But has God changed? Or have we another God since then? Or have we offended God less than the Jews did? Yet in those days the only way in which God wished to be appeased was by general public penance and amendment of life; how, then, can we hope to mitigate His anger without repentance and amendment?

Even if we do penance, the change does not last long.

But you say, we go frequently to confession; and we are ready to do penance, to go to confession to-morrow on the feast of the Blessed Virgin, and to make a firm resolution to amend. Besides, what are you thinking of? Do you imagine that we are all so very wicked? Are there not many pious Christians in this city and country who send up fervent prayers to heaven? Yes, I acknowledge that with joy of heart, and with the greatest respect towards those of whom you speak. You say that you will go to confession to-morrow. God grant that such may be the case, and that all who are in need of the sacrament may make good confessions! But I am afraid that many will act like the Hebrews of old, who humbled themselves before God in the time of affliction, but as soon as prosperity was restored, they generally returned to their former idolatry, as we read in the Holy Scripture, and again compelled God to take the rod in His hand to chastise them. I am afraid that such will be the case with many Christians who now undertake to do penance. While God actually holds the rod in His hand to strike us, oh, what fine promises we can make! How we protest that we are ready to confess our sins, to go to holy Communion, to amend our lives! But if He hears our prayers and averts the evil from us, as He often does, how do we act! Does our love for God and our zeal in His service become greater? Does the promised amendment of life follow, and is it lasting? Ah, far from it! When do we see more signs of pride, luxury, impurity, gluttony, drunkenness, and forgetfulness of God, than when the good God has mercifully averted a public calamity and has poured down temporal blessings on us? For most people act on the principle expressed in the old rhyme—

“When the devil was sick, the devil a monk would be;
When the devil was well, the never a monk was he.”

Pah! away with that sham penance and the prayers that accompany it! They who are in such dispositions may pray and sigh a long time, but all their prayers and sighs will do little for them.

But then there are many pious and zealous Christians who help us to pray. I acknowledge it again; and I am of the comforting opinion that most Christians in this country lead good lives; and I know, moreover, from the Epistle of St. James that the prayer of the just man penetrates the clouds and is often capable of averting a calamity from a whole country, or at least of retarding it. "For the continual prayer of the just man availeth much."¹ And woe to thee, O city of Treves, if thou hadst not had hitherto many holy servants of God within thy walls, and many holy intercessors in heaven! But in case that there are also many wicked persons amongst us, what have we then to expect? "When one buildeth up, and another pulleth down," asks the wise Ecclesiasticus, "what profit have they, but the labor? When one prayeth, and another curseth, whose voice will God hear?"² The pious inhabitants of a town or country build up for the general welfare; the wicked, on the contrary, pull everything down to the general misfortune; and what sort of a building will be the result? One man can pull down in a day more than ten men can build up together. The pious send forth to heaven their prayers, sighs, and hymns; but the vices of the wicked at the same time cry to heaven for vengeance. For, as St. Gregory says, "every sin" that is committed in a community "has a voice, with which it calls forth the inscrutable and just judgments of God; whose voice shall God hear?"³ If you hear ten sweet and musical voices singing with ten or even fewer inharmonious and untrained voices, what a discord is the result! And which of the two do you hear more distinctly? A sensitive ear perceives the least false note at once. Therefore, if in our present straits a pious, just, and humble Christian prays, like the sinner in the Gospel: God, be merciful to us poor mortals; while at the same time a proud, worldly-minded man cries out: I am not as the rest of men; I am better than the common run of people; I must show that I am as good as so and so; whose voice will God hear? The charitable Christian cries out for mercy by his generosity towards the poor; but the

To no purpose do the good pray, unless the wicked are converted.

¹ *Multum enim valet deprecatio justī assidua.*—Jas. v. 16.

² *Unus ædificans, et unus destruens: quid prodest illis nisi labor? Unus orans, et unus maledicens: cujus vocem exaudiet Deus?*—Eccles. xxxiv. 28, 29.

³ *Omnis iniquitas apud secreta Dei judicium habet voces suas; cujus vocem exaudiet Deus?*

avaricious man by his stinginess or injustice cries out for vengeance. Chaste hearts pray with sweet voices for grace and favor; but the impure swine with their hideous gruntings call down the anger of God. The meek and patient ask for blessings; while the vindictive, passionate, envious detractors and foul-mouthed railers bring down curses and imprecations. The modest and edifying implore happiness and prosperity; but the luxurious children of the world, with their vain and scandalous attire, bring down that woe with which Christ has threatened them. "Whose voice will God hear?" Ah, the wicked overpower the good, and the latter with their pious prayers will do little for the common welfare, unless the former are converted to God with their whole hearts.

For one
sinner can
bring down
a general
punish-
ment.

One ill-tuned instrument is enough to ruin a whole orchestra, and one wicked sinner in a town is able to frustrate of their efficacy all the prayers of the just, and to bring down the anger of God on the community. On account of Seba alone the city of Abela was besieged. One disobedient Jonas was the cause of a fearful storm that arose at sea, and endangered the safety of the others who were in the vessel, although they were not partakers in his sin. Nor did the storm cease until Jonas was thrown overboard, as he himself acknowledges: "And he said to them: Take me up and cast me into the sea, and the sea shall be calm to you; for I know that for my sake this great tempest is come upon you."¹ David alone had sinned against God, and yet thousands of his subjects were smitten with the pestilence, as we read in the Second Book of Kings, twenty-fourth chapter. Cæsarius, in his Third Book of Miracles, describes a terrible storm that overtook certain pilgrims who were on their way by sea to the Holy Land. The helmsman and the rowers strained every nerve, but to no purpose, they saw that the ship was on the point of being overwhelmed by the waves; they cried to all the saints in heaven for help, but in vain. In the ship there was a wicked sinner, who, frightened by the obstinate rage of the wind and the sea, entered into himself, and knowing that he was the sole cause of the general peril, repented of and detested his sins with his whole heart; and as there was no priest at hand he confessed aloud to his companions, in order to humble himself all the more sincerely before God, all the crimes that were the occasion of the storm that threatened

¹ Et dixit ad eos: tollite me, et mittite in mare, et cessabit mare a vobis; scio enim ego quoniam propter me tempestas hæc grandis venit super vos.—Jon. i. 12.

their lives. This means was so efficacious that, as soon as he had finished his confession, the storm abated, and the sky and sea returned to their former tranquillity.¹ But, good Christians will perhaps say, is it our fault if other people lead wicked lives? Let the angry God punish those who deserve it; why should we who are innocent suffer with them? Just God! I must allow Thy inscrutable decrees, which I do not understand, to answer that question! So it is, my dear brethren; all the inhabitants of a country have to suffer on account of the wicked; God is determined to destroy and banish sin; if He cannot do it by the first or second means already mentioned, if they are unable to bring the sinner to repentance, then He is forced to have recourse to the last and most severe, and to punish the whole community with war, famine, or pestilence.

Nevertheless, pious souls, be comforted; although you have to suffer in spite of your innocence, your merits and rewards will be all the greater in the joyful life that awaits you hereafter; while they whom God uses as a rod of chastisement will be thrown into the fire like a dry stick, after they have inflicted the punishment. But you, O sinners, wherever and whoever you are! see what mischief you can cause in a community. You sin and offend your God, and by your bad example and the scandal you give make other souls the accomplices of your vices; or else, if you confine your sins to yourselves, you bring others besides yourselves into misery, for you are the cause why an angry God inflicts on many who are innocent and just the punishments of war, famine, or pestilence. If one only knew who you are, there is reason enough for all to join in expelling you from the community, just as one pitilessly cuts off a deceased limb, lest it should infect the whole body and place it in danger of death. Oh, what terrible curses will be uttered one day against you (and perhaps they are being uttered even now) by all whose misfortune, poverty, and misery you have increased by your wicked lives! Just Judge, they will cry out with angry voices: See, there are those wicked ones who have grievously offended Thee and incurred Thy just anger, thereby bringing misfortune on our land, so that we, although innocent, have, according to Thy just decrees, had to suffer also. They are to blame for the unfruitful seasons which reduced us to such poverty that we could hardly find bread for ourselves and our

Therefore sinners incur a still more grievous malediction.

¹ *Mox ut messam iniquitatis per confessionem ejecit, mare furens siliuit, et facta est tranquillitas magna.*—Caesar., l. III., mirac. c. 21.

children; for the scarcity which made it difficult for us to clothe ourselves decently; for the hard work that we had to perform in cold and snow, to no purpose, in the fields and vineyards, the only result of our labor being that on account of bad seasons we had to mortgage our property, thus incurring new debts instead of paying the old ones; for the calamitous war that drove us to such straits, and caused us so much misery; for the plague that carried off our children, parents, and dearest friends by a premature death. Their vices are to blame for the despair that seized on some of us, so that we gave ourselves up to the devil, and are lost forever! Just God, where is Thy vengeance?

Conclusion
and resolution
to do
sincere
penance at
once, in
order to
avert im-
pending
calamities.

Ah, sinners, do not wait for those curses to be called down on your heads! Repent! Repent! Surrender to the God whom you have offended, and so avert from this town and country the evils that threaten it. "Deliver him only, and we will depart from the city;" give up the rebels, that is, your sins and vices! Let each one say, with sorrow of heart, what King David said when God punished his vanity in taking the census of his people, by sending a pestilence on his whole kingdom. Seventy thousand of his subjects had already perished, and the angel of death showed no sign of staying his hand, when David, unable to bear the sad spectacle any longer, cried out with sorrow of heart and tearful eyes: "It is I that have sinned; I have done wickedly;"¹ ah, Lord, restrain Thy hand! "These that are the sheep, what have they done?"² How are those innocent sheep to blame for my sin? "Let Thy hand, I beseech Thee, be turned against me, and against my father's house."³ Behold me, O Lord; strike me, but spare my poor people! I am willing to die for them! "The Lord had pity on the affliction, and said to the angel that slew the people: it is enough, now hold thy hand;"⁴ I am satisfied. So should each one of us, O sinners, say with a sorrowful heart: "It is I that have sinned; I have done wickedly;" it is I, O Lord, who have offended Thee so often and so grievously; I am that rebellious Seba who have revolted against my Lord and my God; it is I who have refused to live according to Thy holy law, and have thus brought misfortune on the whole land! I am that disobedient Jonas who have fled from Thy sight, and on whose account this tempest now threatens the people! "These that

¹ *Ego sum qui peccavi; ego inique egi.—II. Kings xxiv. 17.*

² *Isti qui oves sunt, quid fecerunt?—Ibid.*

³ *Vertatur, obsecro, manus tua contra me, et contra domum patris mei.—Ibid.*

⁴ *Misertus est Dominus super afflictione, et ait angelo percipienti populum: sufficit, nunc contine manum tuam.—Ibid. 16.*

are the sheep, what have they done?" Ah, merciful God, what crime have those innocent and just souls committed? What sin are those poor citizens and peasants guilty of, that they should now be punished on my account? "Let Thy hand, I beseech Thee, be turned against me." Wilt Thou avenge Thyself? Thou hast a right to do so, and here am I, the rebel! I offer myself to Thy fatherly chastisement; let me feel Thy rod! I will do penance, O Lord! I will do penance! Throw me like Jonas into the sea; give to my eyes copious tears, that I may drown my sins in the waters of repentance! I will amend my life, and renounce everything that has hitherto displeased Thee and aroused Thy just anger! Let me no longer be the cause of the sufferings of others. And now, O God of endless mercy, do Thou now restrain Thy anger and say to the smiting angel: "It is enough; now hold thy hand;" war, famine, and pestilence, away with you! I have attained the object I had in view with this people; the rebels have surrendered; they are now converted and have given themselves up to Me entirely; I require you no longer! So, my dear brethren, will the good God certainly say and do, if we all make that sincere promise of repentance, and keep it. Amen.

SEVENTIETH SERMON.

**ON THE USELESSNESS OF PRAYER WITHOUT PENANCE
DURING PUBLIC CALAMITIES.**

Subject.

To pray for release from temporal calamity, and not to amend one's sinful ways, is, 1. a prayer which cannot move an angry God to mercy; 2. it is a prayer which renders the divine anger still more bitter.—*Preached in the year 1731, during a time of public prayer.*

Text.

Qui ingredimini per portas has, ut adoretis Dominum, hæc dicit Dominus exercituum Deus Israël: bonas facite vias vestras.

—Jerem. vii. 2, 3.

"Ye that enter in at these gates to adore the Lord, thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: make your ways good."

Introduction.

Pray, Christians! pray! It is high time! Punishment is already at hand; nay, it is at our very doors. The elements seem to wage war on us; fire, water, air, heaven, and earth unite their forces for our destruction. Whole towns and districts have in a short time been destroyed by fire, burnt to ashes, and their inhabitants reduced to extreme poverty. Although we could hardly defend ourselves from inundations during the winter, now the water seems to have left us completely, and to have taken the fertility of the earth with it. The air is filled with unhealthy vapors; fevers and other sicknesses are carrying off men and cattle at no great distance from here, so that some of the towns bordering on the Rhine have, according to report, closed their gates as in the time of pestilence. It seems as if the threat uttered by the Lord, in the Book of Leviticus, against the Hebrews, is now about to be fulfilled in us: "I will make to you the heaven above as iron, and the earth as brass."¹ The heavens, to which we have looked so often before for heat and fine weather, have for a long time now distressed and troubled us by their continual dryness. The dried-up earth cries to heaven, so to speak, open-mouthed, for rain, and leaves us not the least hope of reaping any crops. The clouds, if they happen now and then to let a few drops fall, disappear as quickly as possible again, as if they did not bring anything for us. The only promise from the seed that has been sown is, so far, that the hard work of the husbandman will be fruitless; for what is not destroyed by the frost, or torn up by the violent winds, or dried up by the persistent drought, is eaten here and there, even in the most fertile lands, by the mice and other hurtful vermin. What can be the result of that but a general scarcity, that means for the poor man all the pangs of hunger? A short time ago the winter crops alone failed, and what misery we experienced here! There were some people in this town who did not see a bit of bread for two or three days. Pray, Christians! We are really in need of prayer in order to avert from us such great calamities. But wait a little! Hear first what God said to the Israelites by His Prophet Jeremias, when they all flocked to the temple to pray during a time of public calamity: "Stand in the gate of the house of the Lord and proclaim there this word, and say: Hear ye the word of the Lord, all ye men of Juda, that enter in at these gates, to adore the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of

¹ *Daboque vobis cœlum desuper sicut ferrum, et terram œneam.—Levit. xxvi. 19.*

hosts: make your ways good,"¹ if you wish Me to help you. "Trust not in lying words, saying: the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord. For if you will order well your ways and your doings . . . I will dwell with you in this place."² I say the same to-day in the name of God: "Ye," Christians, "that enter in at these gates to adore the Lord, make your ways good;" amend your lives; do penance for your sins. Public misfortunes and calamities are never inflicted on a country unless on account of the sins and vices of the people. The will of God is that they should repent of those sins, and when they can be induced to do that by no other means, He is compelled to chastise the innocent as well as the guilty, as I showed last year, when similar calamities were impending over us. Therefore we have now evident proof that we have not yet done true penance for our sins; to this penance it is now my duty to exhort you. Without it all our fasting, prayers, and visiting the churches are of no avail. Why? for the following reason:—

Plan of Discourse.

To pray for relief from temporal calamity, and not to amend one's sinful ways, is not a prayer that can move an angry God to mercy. This I shall briefly show in the first part. It is a prayer that renders the divine anger still more bitter, as I shall show in the second part. Let us, then, all pray together, but at the same time do penance and amend our lives. Such shall be the conclusion.

O God of goodness, who even when Thou art angry dost not forget Thy mercy, before we dare to deprecate Thy anger, we sigh forth to Thee humbly with the Catholic Church: "that Thou wouldst vouchsafe to bring us to true penance, we beseech Thee to hear us," through the Mother of mercy and the intercession of our holy guardian angels.

The qualities that are required to make prayer efficacious, so that it can appease the anger of God and avert the punishments with which He threatens us, are humility, fervor, and confidence. God wishes that we should pray to Him, humbly acknowledging

God wishes us to pray to him with humility, fervor, and child-like confidence.

¹ Sta in porta domus Domini, et prædica tibi verbum istud, et dic: audite verbum Domini omnis Juda, qui ingressimini per portas has, ut adoretis Dominum; hæc dicit Dominus exercituum Deus Israel: bonas facite vias vestras.—Jerem. vii. 2, 3.

² Nolite confidere in verbis mendacii, dicentes: templum Domini, templum Domini, templum Domini est; quoniam si bene direxeritis vias vestras et studia vestra . . . habitabo vobiscum in loco isto.—Ibid. 4, 5, 7.

that He alone is the Lord of all, in whose hands are our sickness or health, our prosperity or adversity, our life and death; that it is He alone whom we have to thank for graces and blessings; He alone whom we have to fear and to adore as the Author of the temporal crosses and trials we have to bear. The brazen sky, which appears so merciless, says St. John Chrysostom, the dried-up earth, which has become hard as iron, cry out to us now: see, ye poor mortals! it is not due to your diligence nor to us that we are able to support you; but to the all-ruling God, on whose fatherly Providence and all-wise decrees your lives depend, and without whom neither our influence nor your industry can profit anything. Him you should speak fair; Him alone you should try to keep as your friend. God wishes that we should pray to Him, but with a fervent and constant prayer, by which we show that we appreciate highly His gifts and benefits. There is no Catholic who does not acknowledge that it is God who rules the wind and weather, the rain and sunshine, and commands them according to His good will and pleasure, and that it is God alone who can cause the fruits of the earth to spring up; but, as St. Augustine remarks, since we are accustomed to receive those benefits every year, we do not appreciate those wonderful works of the almighty power as we should, and we take them as matters of course, so that we do not give ourselves much trouble to beg of Him to bestow them on us. And finally, God wishes that we should pray to Him, but with a firm faith and a child-like confidence in His faithfulness and mercy that He will assuredly give us what is necessary for the welfare of both soul and body. Ask, He says, but at the same time He adds almost always, believe that you will receive.

Prayer
without
repentance
and amend-
ment is not
humble.

Now, my dear brethren, we pray, and visit the churches, and sigh, and cry out to God to avert the evils that menace us. But how do we pray? If we continue to wander on the broad road that leads away from heaven, if our evil ways are not amended, if we remain in the same occasions, bad habits, sins and vices, in a word, if we do not do true penance, oh, then away with our prayers! they have neither humility, nor fervor, nor faith and confidence; not a single quality have they which could appease the anger of God. For, in the first place, where is there any sign of humility in prayer when he who prays is in the state of sin, and will not even subject himself to his sovereign God, nor beg pardon for his grievous offences with sorrow of heart, but obstinately persists in his rebellion? Where is his humble ac-

knowledge that he is in sore need of the help of God alone, when he makes no effort to gain God's favor, but presumptuously continues to act as His sworn enemy? If a man offends seriously one like himself, from whom he is afterwards compelled to ask a favor, his first step must be to make a humble apology for the offence offered, for otherwise he knows well that his application for aid will be fruitless. Is it not, then, a shameless thing for a wretched mortal, who knows that he has grievously offended the great God, to dare to ask Him for help in pressing necessities, without humbling himself and imploring pardon and remission of his sins, or to present to Him a petition for relief, having at the same time the intention of continuing to offend Him?

Besides, he who prays and does not intend to do penance or to amend his life cannot be in earnest, much less fervent in his prayer. "How can you expect God to hear you?"¹ is the question that St. Cyprian asks such a man, when you refuse to hear Him calling on you to return to Him? How can your prayer come from the heart, when you merely move your lips and keep your heart obstinately closed? when your lips cry to heaven, but your heart remains hardened in wickedness? No, all your prostrations and genuflections, all your fasting and church-going, all your praying and singing, even supposing that you abstain for a while from your usual sins during the present calamitous time, are only a sham. You are like the wolf, as St. Augustine says: "the wolf may roar, the wolf may tremble, but he still remains a wolf."² The wolf sees a flock of sheep; aha, he thinks, that is a fine opportunity for me! He makes a spring at them, with his mouth watering; but when he comes near he sees the shepherd, who shakes his cudgel and sets his dog at him. He runs back in a fright, trembling in every limb, so that one might think he had turned into a gentle lamb and had lost his ferocity. But wait; the wolf trembles, it is true; but he is still the same wolf; his hasty flight was not intended to show respect for the shepherd; if it was not for him, he thinks, I should have made those sheep feel my teeth. Sinner, when danger threatens you, you begin to tremble and for a short time to keep a restraint on yourself; you go to church with every appearance of humility; you pray and sigh; but why? The shepherd has appeared and threatened you; an angry God menaces you with sickness or some other evil; but you may tremble and speak Him fair as much as you will;

Nor is it fervent or earnest.

¹ Quomodo te audiri a Deo postulas?

² Lupus fremens, lupus tremens, sed semper lupus

you are the same old wolf; you have no intention of giving up for good your wicked life; you are not in earnest with your sighing and praying; you have no desire to show due honor to God, and therefore you need not think that you will be able to influence Him by your prayers.

Much less is
it confident,
and there-
fore it can-
not influ-
ence God.

But suppose that our prayers are so far in earnest that we really desire to be freed from the necessity in which we are, where is our faith, our child-like confidence that God will hear us? If we do not intend to abandon our wicked ways, we cannot have that confidence without which our prayer is worth nothing. "Dearly beloved," says St. John, "if our heart do not reprehend us, we have confidence towards God: and whatsoever we shall ask, we shall receive of Him; because we keep His commandments, and do those things which are pleasing in His sight." King David, after he had repented of his sins and was assured of pardon by the Prophet Nathan, used to cry out to heaven with the greatest confidence when his enemies were persecuting him: "In Thee, O Lord, have I hoped, let me never be confounded. Bow down Thy ear to me, make haste to deliver me."¹ The Prodigal in the Gospel, when he reflected on his miserable state, and was thereby brought to see his wickedness and bewail it, conceived a firm hope and confidence that he would not be turned away from his father's house, but would again be received into favor. "I will arise and will go to my father," he said to himself, "and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee: I am not now worthy to be called thy son."² I have not acted as becomes thy son; I am now heartily sorry for it; for thou art still my father. And they both had reason to speak like that, for they repented of their sins and detested them. But if I am still in the state of sin, how can I say to God: in Thee, O Lord, have I hoped, let me not be confounded, nor abandon me in my present necessity? On what could I base my confidence? On the divine promises? Ah, my bad conscience at once suggests to me the words of the blind man in the Gospel: "Now we know that God doth not hear sinners."³ On the divine goodness and mercy, because He is still my heavenly

¹ Carissimi, si cor nostrum non reprehenderit nos, fiduciam habemus ad Deum, et quidquid petierimus accipiemus ab eo: quoniam mandata ejus custodimus, et ea quæ sunt placita coram eo facimus.—I. John iii. 21, 22.

² In te, Domine, speravi; non confundar in æternum. Inclina ad me aurem tuam; accelera ut eruas me.—Ps. xxx. 2, 3.

³ Surgam, et ibo ad patrem meum, et dicam ei: pater, peccavi in cœlum et coram te; jam non sum dignus vocari filius tuus.—Luke xv. 18, 19.

⁴ Scimus autem quia peccatores Deus non audit.—John ix. 31.

Father? But how do I dare to call Him by the sweet name of Father? For my bad conscience says to me, you are the sworn enemy of God! you are the object of His hatred and malediction! you do not belong to the number of His children, but to the children of the vain world, to the children of the impure flesh, to the children of the spirit of evil, amongst whom you still dwell! The emperor Caracalla, wishing to have undisputed sway, murdered his own brother Geta in the very lap of his mother. Suppose now, my dear brethren, that the murderer, with his hands reeking with the blood of his victim, were to present himself before his mother, who is still lamenting the loss of her child, and to beg a great favor from her, do you think he would be likely to receive it? No, nor do you even imagine that he would have the audacity to present a request at such a time. And yet, if I am in the state of sin, I should be guilty of still greater presumption, if, with my hands still reeking with the Blood of the Son of God, whom I crucify and murder anew by my sins, I were to present myself before the throne of God to beg relief in my necessities, knowing well as I do what the Lord says to all sinners by the Prophet Isaias: "When you stretch forth your hands, I will turn away My eyes from you; and when you multiply prayer, I will not hear; for your hands are full of blood."¹ Alas, while I am in such a state I dare not even raise my eyes to heaven; how, then, could I pray with confidence to God and ask His help and protection? How could I with confidence beg of God to do what I will, when I am not disposed to do what He wills me to do? No! To pray for release from temporal calamities and not to amend one's life is a prayer that cannot move God to mercy. Nay, more than that, it is a prayer like that word of which Judith spoke to the priests and elders of the people in Bethulia: "This is not a word that may draw down mercy, but rather that may stir up wrath, and enkindle indignation."² And so it is in reality; prayer without the intention of amendment has something in it that renders the divine anger still more bitter; as we shall now see in the

Second Part.

Must he, then, who is in the state of sin give up prayer altogether? For that seems to be the only conclusion we can arrive

The sick man who refuses to

¹ Cum extenderit manus vestras, avertam oculos meos a vobis; et cum multiplicaveritis orationem, non exaudiam; manus enim vestrae sanguine plene sunt.—Isa. i. 15.

² Non est iste sermo qui misericordiam provocet; sed potius qui iram excitet et furorem accendat.—Judith viii. 12.

take medicine provokes the doctor's anger.

at. It is surely better to remain silent than to excite the anger of God and bring down His wrath on us by praying and speaking to Him. No, my dear brethren, such is not my meaning; he who is in sin should pray all the more humbly, frequently, and fervently; but first of all he should implore the grace of repentance and conversion; for, if he does not wish to repent, it would be far better for him humbly to submit to the divine chastisements, acknowledging that he has richly deserved them, than dare to try to avert those chastisements by his prayer. And why so? A sick man, whom an experienced doctor has promised to cure, cries and shrieks out at the top of his voice that he will have none of the medicines prescribed, and actually repels the doctor with hand and foot. Now, do you think that such conduct on the part of the patient is likely to win the doctor's esteem? No, and in place of helping the sick man he will go away in disgust and leave him to perish in his obstinacy. Would not any of us do the same, if we had to deal with such a case?

The child that struggles against the rod, without promising to amend, embitters the father's anger.

A child that has often been guilty of serious offences is about to be punished by its father. Ah, you graceless child, says the father, threatening it with the stick, will you ever do that again? The child says nothing, but its sulky demeanor shows plainly enough that it is determined to repeat the fault it has been guilty of. Oh, thinks the father, is that the way with you? Come here, and I will teach you to amend your ways! The child begins to cry; do not beat me! it says; I do not wish to be beaten! and it struggles with might and main to take the rod out of its father's hand. Will that conduct on the child's part soften the father's heart, so that he will throw away the rod and refrain from punishing? No, certainly not! And if the father had intended at first to let the child off with a threat, he certainly would not do so when he sees it struggling with him, but would rather beat it far more severely than he would have done if amendment had been promised, or the punishment were obediently submitted to; nay, he will not cease to inflict the punishment until the obstinate child promises obedience, begs pardon for its faults, and kisses the father's rod in sign of gratitude for the well-deserved chastisement. No sensible father would act otherwise with his child in such circumstances.

Calamities are fatherly chastisements and

My dear brethren, public calamities, pestilence, unfruitful seasons, scarcity, poverty, hunger, war, etc., which are inflicted on a country by the Almighty God: what are they? They are

rods, scourges, as they are called in the Holy Scripture, with which the just anger of God at first threatens His disobedient and wicked children, and exhorts them to amend; while, if no amendment follows, He strikes hard with those scourges, but with the sole intention of bringing sinners to see the wickedness of their ways and do penance. "He does not strike you," says St. Augustine, "as one enemy would another; but as a father would a son, His object being to correct, not to destroy."¹ His object is to save His children from eternal destruction, and therefore, when He sees signs of amendment, He ceases punishing at once. So much does He Himself give us to understand by the Prophet Jeremias: "I will suddenly speak against a nation and against a kingdom, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy it:"² but My intention towards it is not evil; for "if that nation against which I have spoken shall repent of their evil, I also will repent of the evil that I have thought to do to them."³ What are public calamities? They are medicines, as St. Augustine assures us: "Let man not forget that God is a physician, and that tribulation is the medicine He employs to restore health."⁴

medicines ;
their object
is to make
us better
and to heal
us.

Now, how do we act? God, like a loving and well-meaning father, threatens us with the rod in His hand. Will you amend your lives? He asks. Will you avoid sin in future? And all those who have hitherto refused to do true penance answer sulkily: no, we will not amend; we shall continue our usual mode of life. Then, says the Almighty, you must feel the weight of My hand, which will force you to amend. But still we cry out and struggle against the punishment; we reject the wholesome medicine; we try to snatch the rod out of the hands of our heavenly Father; that is, we fast, and pray, and beg of Him to avert the calamities that threaten us, and to leave us in peace. Now, what is the meaning of a prayer such as that? Is it not as if we said to God: O God, Thou wilt restore us to health by this salutary, though bitter medicine; but away with Thy medicine; we want none of it! Thou hast seized the rod, like a well-meaning father, to warn and exhort us to amend our sinful lives; but we do not wish to amend; take Thy rod away,

When we
pray with-
out pen-
ance, we re-
ject the
medicines
and strug-
gle against
the punish-
ment.

¹ Non admovet vobis manus sicuti hostis hosti, sed ut pater filio, emendaturus, non perditurus.—S. Aug. de temp. c. vi.

² Repente loquar adversum gentem, et adversus regnum, ut eradicem. et destrnam, et disperdam illud.—Jerem. xviii. 7.

³ Si poenitentiam egerit gens illa a malo suo, quod locutus sum adversus eam, agam et ego poenitentiam super malo quod cogitavi ut facerem ei.—Ibid. 8.

⁴ Intelligat homo medicum esse Deum, et tribulationem medicamentum esse ad salutem.

we do not wish to be warned, nor exhorted, nor chastised, nor forced to amend. The famine and scarcity, and the plagues that follow on them, are so many messengers that Thou sendest forth to announce to us in Thy name that it is Thy intention to punish our pride and vanity, our extravagance and immodesty in dress, so that we may learn to live in a manner becoming Christian modesty and humility, and be ashamed to strut and flaunt about so arrogantly, while so many of our poor brethren and sisters, so many poor citizens and peasants, have great difficulty in finding bread enough to allay the pangs of hunger. They announce to us that it is Thy intention, by withdrawing Thy blessing from us, to chastise our avarice, injustice, usury, and hard-heartedness to the poor, and to withdraw our hearts from earthly goods in order to raise them to heavenly things; to put a stop to impurity and public scandal, and to say to us, in the words of Thy Prophet Jeremias: "Thou hast polluted the land with thy fornications, and with thy wickedness. Therefore the showers were withholden, and there was no lateward rain,"¹ as we have already seen with our own eyes. They announce to us that it is Thy wish, by depriving us of the means of livelihood, and by allowing our fields and vineyards to suffer from unfruitful seasons, to compel us to give up excessive drinking, which is the cause of so many sins, idleness and the vices it gives rise to, dangerous company and nightly gatherings, the abominable habit of cursing and swearing, which brings down the malediction of Heaven on us, and the various forms of superstition, by which we seek help in sickness and other necessities from sorcerers and people of evil reputation. They announce to us that it is Thy intention to correct our sloth in Thy service, our irreverence in Thy churches, our neglect of Thy word, our imprudent talkativeness with regard to the faults of others, our want of reticence in matters that our duty obliges us to keep silent about, and the little care that parents take in the training of their children. In a word, we must amend our lives and endeavor to gain heaven by the rough way of penance, for, as Thou hast assured us, Thy kingdom suffers violence. That is the sole reason, O God, why Thou takest the rod of chastisement in Thy hand; and that is the very thing we do not wish to understand or agree to. We do not want to be brought to see our state; we will remain as we are, in our pride and vanity, in our impurity

¹ *Polluisti terram in fornicationibus tuis, et in malitiis tuis. Quamobrem prohibita sunt stillae pluviarum, et serotinus imber non fuit.*—Jerem. iii. 2, 3.

and dissolute mode of life, in our idleness and intemperance, in our sins and vices; for we do not look on those things as such great evils that we should desire to be freed from them. The temporal calamity with which Thou threatenest us is the only thing we dread; release from that is the only favor we beg of Thee, the only object of our cries to heaven; mercy O God! have mercy on Thy people! "That Thou wouldst vouchsafe to give and preserve the fruits of the earth, we beseech Thee to hear us!" such is the nature of our prayers, and so, in fact, do all pray who, being resolved not to amend their vicious lives, are attached to any of the sins I have mentioned. "They sorrow on account of the stripes inflicted on them," says St. Gregory; "but they do not sorrow for that which is the cause of those stripes."¹

Now, can a prayer of that kind move a fatherly heart to pity and mercy? Must it not excite still more the just anger of God, and compel Him to inflict a more grievous chastisement on His obstinate children? This is what He complains of so bitterly by the Prophet Amos: "I also have given you dulness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places; yet you have not returned to Me, saith the Lord. I also have withholden the rain from you; and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city; yet you returned not to Me, saith the Lord. I struck you with a burning wind; the palmer-worm hath eaten up your many gardens and your vineyards, your olive-groves and fig-groves; yet you returned not to Me, saith the Lord. Therefore I will do these things to thee, O Israel."² Are not these, my dear brethren, the very chastisements with which the angry God has hitherto punished us, and with which He still threatens us? And yet, we will not return to Him, saith the Lord. Mark the emphatic words, "I have given you;" I have commanded the impending calamity to visit you. You must not imagine that it is merely a matter of chance. To Me alone you must ascribe the unfavorable seasons and the drought which burnt up all the seeds, and not to any other cause, as you are accustomed to do in similar circum-

Therefore such prayer only embitters the anger of God against us.

¹ Flagella sua dolent; quare flagelluntur, non dolent.

² Ego dedi vobis stuporem dentium in cunctis urbibus vestris, et indigentiam panum in omnibus locis vestris; et non estis reversi ad me, dicit Dominus. Ego quoque prohibui a vobis imbrem; et plui super unam civitatem, et super alteram civitatem non plui; et non redistis ad me, dicit Dominus. Percussi vos in vento urente; multitudinem hortorum vegetorum et vinearum vestrarum, olivea vestra, et ficeta vestra comedit eruca; et non redistis ad me, dicit Dominus. Quapropter hæc faciam tibi, Israel.—Amos iv. 5-9, 19

stances. For there are many who pretend to penetrate the secrets of great potentates, when a war breaks out, and grumble at and find fault with their plans, as if they were to blame for the misfortune; while they ascribe the incessant rain, thunder, and hail storms to vapors ascending from the earth; and if pestilence attacks the people, they soar up to heaven with their thoughts and blame some unfortunate conjunction of the planets for it; but they labor in vain. "I have given you;" I am the supreme Lord, who make use of creatures as instruments with which to chastise the world. I, your well-meaning Father, have sent those punishments on you, not merely because you have aroused My just anger by your sins, but also because I am mercifully inclined to urge you to do true penance, and therefore I complain that, in spite of all I can do, you still persist in your sinful mode of life. But hear how I will deal with you in My just wrath; for I now mean to do something more than threaten: "I also will do these things to you: I will quickly visit you with poverty and burning heat, which shall waste your eyes and consume your lives. You shall sow your seed in vain, which shall be devoured by your enemies."¹ Even if the weather is favorable, the mice and the worms shall eat up your crops. "But if you will not yet, for all this, obey Me, I will chastise you seven times more for your sins. Your labor shall be spent in vain, the ground shall not bring forth her increase, nor the trees yield their fruit. And I will send in upon you the beasts of the field to destroy you and your cattle."²

And we must blame our sins for the just punishment we are suffering.

Let us, then, Christians, cease wondering and complaining if heaven seems to be so hard and merciless to us. God is not wanting either in the power or in the will to help us: "The hand of the Lord is not shortened, that it cannot save, neither is His ear heavy, that it cannot hear,"³ such is the assurance given us by the Prophet Isaias. He is still the same Lord who in the beginning brought forth fruits out of the untilled earth, without seed, by His word alone, and He can now in a moment change the apparently miserable condition in which we are,

¹ Ego quoque hæc faciam vobis; visitabo vos velociter in egestate et ardore, qui conficiat oculos vestros, et consumat animas vestras. Frustra seretis sementum, quæ ab hostibus devorabitur.—Levit. xxvi. 16.

² Sin autem nec sic obedieritis mihi, addam correptiones vestras septuplum propter peccata vestra. Consumetur incassum labor vester, non proferet terra germen, nec arbores poma præbebunt. Immittamque in vos bestias agri, quæ consumant vos et pecora vestra.—Ibid. 18, 20, 22.

³ Non est abbreviata manus Domini, ut salvare nequeat, neque aggravata est auris ejus ut non exaudiat.—Isa. lix. 1.

and replace the want that threatens us by the greatest abundance. He is the same Lord who has often helped us already, after we had done penance publicly, and it is our sins alone that we must blame if we are not heard by Him: "Your iniquities have divided between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He should not hear,"¹ such is the answer your own conscience will give you, if you ask it why God takes the rod in His hand now. And it will tell you, too, not that God closes His ears to your prayers, but that He is a just and at the same time a merciful Father, even when He punishes you because you close your ears to His repeated invitations. It will tell you that it is right and just that, since you have so long abused the blessings of God to offend Him, you should now begin to feel the effects of His anger in the withdrawal of those blessings. It will tell you that it is right and just that, since you did not allow yourselves to be drawn gently to acknowledge and repent of your sins by the benefits He has bestowed on you, you should be at last compelled to repent by the pressure of calamity. Truly, "Thy ways and thy devices have brought these things upon thee: this is thy wickedness, because it is bitter, because it hath touched thy heart."² As St. Jerome interprets this text, the sinful works and thoughts of the inhabitants brought evil upon the city. "The ways and thoughts by which they have sinned in word and work have caused all the evil that has happened to it. Therefore we ourselves are to blame for any misfortune that happens us, because we turn the mildness of Our Lord into bitterness, and compel Him to be severe against His will."³ Thus far St. Jerome.

I conclude with the words of my text: "Ye that enter in at these gates to adore the Lord, thus saith the Lord of hosts: Make your ways good;" do penance for your sins. If you do that, I will fulfil the promise I made long ago to My people: "If I shut up heaven and there fall no rain, or if I give orders and command the locust to devour the land; and My people, upon whom My name is called, being converted, shall make supplication to Me, and seek out My face, and do penance for their most

Conclusion
for sinners
and exhortation to the
good.

¹ Iniquitates vestrae diviserunt inter vos et Deum vestrum, et peccata vestra absconderunt faciem ejus a vobis, ne exaudiret.—Isa. lix. 2.

² Viæ tuæ et cogitationes tuæ fecerunt hæc tibi: ista malitia tua, quia amara, quia tetigit cor tuum.—Jerem. iv. 18.

³ Viæ illius et cogitationes quibus opere et sermone peccavit, fecerunt ei evenire omnia quæ evenerunt. Quidquid ergo nobis accidit, nostro accidit vitio, qui dulcem Dominum in amaritudinem vertimus, et cogimus sævire nolentem.

wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sins, and will heal their land.¹ Otherwise your prayers and supplications are useless, and they will only have the effect of making My anger greater. Pardon me, my dear brethren, if, instead of consoling you, which I would much rather have done, I have been forced to launch out into invective against sinners! I know that the most of you, who listen with a pious eagerness to holy exhortations, are least to blame for the calamities that threaten us; I know that they who are most in need of being urged to repentance seldom or never come to hear a sermon; and therefore I pity you all the more that, in accordance with a hidden decree of Providence, you have to suffer with and on account of the wicked; but that very circumstance will make hell hotter for them, for by their vices they are the cause of your having to suffer innocently. Do you, then, just and pious souls, pray, and pray humbly, fervently, and with child-like confidence in God; but pray especially and above all for those who are still in the state of sin, and are the cause of all our misfortunes, that they may be converted and repent with their whole hearts. In their stead and for them let us now go down on our knees before the throne of God's mercy, and sigh forth to Him, in the words of the Prophet Isaias, when the people were abandoned by God on account of their sins.

A prayer in
the name of
all sinners.

“Look down from heaven and behold from Thy holy habitation and the place of Thy glory; where is Thy zeal and Thy strength, the multitude of Thy bowels, and of Thy tender mercies? Thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer; from everlasting is Thy name.”² O Lord, rebellious and unworthy of Thy grace as we have been hitherto, yet Thou art still our Saviour; Thou hast borne that sweet name from eternity; ah, how, then, couldst Thou allow us to wander so far on the ways of wickedness, and to love Thee and esteem Thee so little? “Why hast Thou made us to err, O Lord, from Thy ways: why hast Thou hardened our heart, that we should not fear Thee? Thou art angry, and we have sinned; in them we have been always. And now, O Lord, Thou art our Father, and we are clay: and Thou art our Maker,

¹ Si clausero cœlum, et pluvia non fluxerit, et mandavero et præcepero locustæ ut devoret terram: conversus autem populus meus, super quos invocatum est nomen meum, deprecatus me fuerit, et exquiserit faciem meam, et egerit poenitentiam a vitiis suis pessimis: et ego exaudiam de cœlo, et propitius ero peccatis eorum, et sanabo terram eorum.—II. Paralip. vii. 13, 14.

² Attende de cœlo, et vide de habitaculo sancto tuo et gloriæ tuæ. Ubi est zelus tuus, et fortitudo tua, multitudo viscerum tuorum et miserationum tuarum? Tu, Domine, Pater noster, Redemptor noster, a sæculo nomen tuum!—Isa. lxiii. 15, 16.

and all we are the work of Thy hands.”¹ Even while Thou art chastising us, Thou art our well-meaning Father; remember, we beseech Thee, our weakness and frailty! “Be not very angry, O Lord, and remember no longer our iniquity: behold, see, we are all Thy people!”² Many of us are sighing and moaning under great afflictions: “Wilt Thou refrain Thyself, O Lord, upon these things? wilt Thou hold Thy peace, and afflict us vehemently?”³ If the sweet name of Father cannot move Thee to mercy, of which I in the name of all sinners must humbly acknowledge myself to be unworthy, then I say with the Prodigal: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee: I am not now worthy to be called Thy son.” It is long since by my wantonness I have excluded myself from the number of Thy children; dost Thou, then, no longer acknowledge me, and hast Thou renounced the name of Father as far as I am concerned? Ah! remember that Thou hast still a Son, in whom Thou art always well pleased, Jesus Christ, my Saviour, by whose precious Blood we are redeemed and consecrated in baptism as Thy children. Wilt Thou not regard that Son of Thine? And therefore, if Thou art still resolved to chastise and to destroy, and to make us feel the weight of Thy hand, behold, here we are! take Thy rod and strike us; we are satisfied! But see at the same time where Thou strikest, lest the innocent Blood of Thy Son should suffer. Thou knowest well, O Lord, that in this archdiocese there are many pious Christians, who mean well with Thee and love Thee with their whole hearts. All these are endowed with sanctifying grace as a pledge of future glory, and a treasure bought by the Blood of Thy Son; see that Thou dost not strike them! Although, if they had to suffer, in spite of their innocence, they would not offer Thee the least opposition, but would kiss Thy rod, and thank Thee with child-like love for Thy chastisements as for favors, because they are always resigned to Thy holy will, and know that Thou dost not mean to harm them, but rather to increase their merit and glory in heaven by the chastisements Thou sendest them. But if, on the other hand, Thou shouldst find some who, as they are in the state of sin, have lost sanctifying grace and no longer bear about them the mark of the Blood of

¹ *Quare errare nos fecisti, Domine, de viis tuis: Indurasti cor nostrum, ne timeremus te? Tu iratus es, et peccavimus; in ipsis fuimus semper. Et nunc, Domine, pater noster es tu, nos vero lutum: et fector noster tu, et opera manuum tuarum omnes nos.—Isa. lxiii. 17; xiv. 5, 8.*

² *Ne irascaris, Domine, satis, et ne ultra memineris iniquitatis nostræ! ecce respice; populus tuus omnes nos.—Ibid. lxiv. 9.*

³ *Numquid super his continebis te, Domine, tacebis, et affliges nos vehementer?—Ibid. 12.*

Thy Son, these, O Lord, are the people on whom Thou canst justly vent Thy anger. Smite them, and spare not, even if I should be of their number! Yet, hold! even for them the Blood of Thy Son cries out for mercy! Therefore, strike them, avenge Thyself on them, not in Thy wrath, but rather with fatherly anger! Touch with Thy rod their hitherto hardened hearts; soften them; pierce them; fill them with sorrow; leave them no peace day or night, until they fully realize the enormity of the sins by which they have provoked Thy just anger, sincerely repent of them, confess them candidly, and amend their lives steadfastly! Then, being fully appeased, Thou wilt cease to be angry with them, and wilt lay down the rod of chastisement, while we, freed from trouble and anxiety, shall be able to serve Thee in peace and quiet and to love Thee, our Supreme Good, with all our hearts. Such is the prayer that we all, sinners as well as just, offer Thee, through Thy own most beloved Son and our elder Brother, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same Sermon for the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost.

Text.

Vade prius reconciliari fratri tuo: et tunc veniens offeres munus tuum.—Matt. v. 24.

“Go first to be reconciled to thy brother, and then coming thou shalt offer thy gift.”

Introduction.

If God rejects the offering made Him unless he who makes it is first reconciled to his neighbor, with whom he has lived perhaps at enmity, as Christ expressly says in to-day's gospel: “If, therefore, thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there thou remember that thy brother hath anything against thee, leave there thy offering before the altar,” for it is not pleasing to Me, “and go first to be reconciled to thy brother, and then coming thou shalt offer thy gift,” and I will accept it from thee; if that is so, I say, how much less will the God of all holiness look with favor on the offering of one who is at enmity with Him? Oh, no, away with such an offering! For you must first go and be reconciled to your God. My dear brethren, we often come to the church to present our gifts to God; we offer Him a gift of infinite value in the holy sacrifice of the Mass; we offer Him the gift of our lips by fervent prayer, when we

lay our wants before Him in order to implore His help; but how are our hearts disposed meanwhile? Are we always at peace with our neighbor? Nay, have we really been reconciled to God by true penance and the amendment of our lives? If we do not fulfil this latter condition, then our prayers and offerings are not acceptable. We must first go and be reconciled to God, and change our wicked ways; otherwise we shall be able to effect nothing.—*Plan of Discourse as above.*

SEVENTY-FIRST SERMON.

ON PRAYER AND PENANCE DURING THE TIME OF SICKNESS.

Subject.

God, when He visits us with sickness, wills that we should acknowledge Him as our Lord and Saviour, and take refuge with Him by prayer and true penance.—*Preached in the year 1733.*

Text.

Ego enim Dominus sanator tuus.—Exod. xv. 26.
“I am the Lord thy healer.”

Introduction.

The ancient Romans, as Giraldus tells us, used to go to the Quirinal Hill every year and there with great solemnity offer sacrifice to their gods to obtain the gift of health; but the remarkable thing about this custom was that they never offered such sacrifices when they were really sick, but either before or after an attack of illness or the appearance of an epidemic. What their idea was in that the historian does not say. In my opinion they had such little confidence in their gods that they did not think them able to heal sickness, or else they imagined that sickness did not come from the gods, or else, and if such was the case they put many Christians to shame, they wished to show that they preferred to be induced to reverence the gods by gentle means, such as prosperity, than to be compelled to do so by the pressure of adversity. However that may be, we Christians have a true God, who is the sole Author of all temporal evils, and at the same time our only Helper in them, and He wishes us to acknowledge Him as such; nay, for that very reason He

sends us trials, that we may without delay fly to Him for refuge. How often has He not shown that to be His will with His chosen people, the Israelites? In the Book of Exodus we read that He had punished them with want of water, so that they could not quench their thirst. "And they marched three days through the wilderness, and found no water. And they came into Mara, and they could not drink the waters of Mara, because they were bitter. And the people murmured against Moses, saying: What shall we drink?"¹ Whereupon he cried to God for help. Listen, Moses, was the answer God gave him; do you know why I have sent this affliction on My people? They do not always acknowledge Me as their Lord; now go and say to them: "If thou wilt hear the voice of the Lord thy God, and do what is right before Him, and obey His commandments, and keep all His precepts, none of the evils that I laid upon Egypt will I bring upon thee; for I am the Lord thy healer."² That you must know, and as such you must acknowledge Me. My dear brethren, what are our circumstances at present? Sad is the news we receive from the neighboring as well as the more remote parts of the Roman empire: the waters of the sea threaten to cause an inundation, nay, seem likely to destroy altogether the maritime cities. Vienna, Wurtzburg, Mayence, Coblantz, Cologne, and other towns are crying for mercy to heaven on account of the different epidemics that afflict them to such a degree that there is hardly a house in one of those places which is free from sickness, while in some of them the number of the infected is so great that the churches and schools are half empty and deserted, and the doctors are altogether too few to attend to all who require their help. But we need not go outside our own city to find out the extent of the evil; the schools, public devotions, sodalities, and the attendance at sermons seem to show that there is only a fourth of the usual number of inhabitants in the city. Many tradesmen and laborers are unable to work, and, of course, cannot find bread for themselves and their families, while the constant coughing and groaning of those who are here present is a sufficient indication of what is the matter with many of them. What are we to do in such circumstances? Are we to wait,

¹ *Ambulaveruntque tribus diebus per solitudinem, et non inveniebant aquam: et venerunt in Mara, nec poterant bibere aquas de Mara, eo quod essent amaræ. Et murmuravit populus contra Moysen, dicens, quid bibemus?—Exod. xv. 22, 23.*

² *Si audieris vocem Domini Dei tui, et quod rectum est coram eo feceris, et obedieris mandatis ejus, custodierisque omnia præcepta illius, cunctum languorem, quem posui in Ægypto, non inducam super te; ego enim Dominus sanator tuus.—Ibid. 26.*

like the ancient Romans, till the evil has passed over? No, O merciful God! with folded hands and suppliant voices we unanimously implore Thy help; we acknowledge that Thou art the only One who can help us; and if Thou refusest Thy help, we must conclude that a still greater evil is in store for us. This, my dear brethren, is what God seeks from us by the calamities with which He afflicts us, as I shall now show.

Plan of Discourse.

God wills now especially that we should humbly acknowledge Him as the Lord who alone can help and heal us, and therefore we must at once fly to Him for refuge, partly by prayer and partly by repentance and the amendment of our lives. Such is the whole subject.

O God of goodness, help us by Thy grace to pray and do penance; this we ask of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

There is many a one who, as long as he is in good health, takes no trouble to find out whether there is a doctor or an apothecary in the place where he is living; for he is not in need of either. But when he feels some change in his blood, as a sign that he is about to be attacked by a fever, he is not long in finding out where the doctor lives. The mere report of the approach of the enemy is sometimes enough to inspire with dread the soldier who, while he was safe within the walls, did not deign even to think of him, and to arouse him to take every measure to resist the attacks of the advancing foe. Even on the high seas, while the wind is fair, one might hear the sailors laugh, joke, and amuse themselves; but when the sky begins to get overcast, and the tempest howls in the rigging, the laughter is soon changed into cries and shouts, while every man runs to his allotted place to take in sail or get the anchor ready, calling out meanwhile to God and all the saints for help. And so it is in all dangers and calamities; they awaken the sluggish memory, so that one quickly recalls to mind what he would otherwise have forgotten, namely, who it is to whom he must apply for help.

Impending calamity teaches us to know Him who can help us.

There, my dear brethren, you have the principal design of the Almighty in afflicting a town or district with calamities. In the time of prosperity, when no one feels the pressure of misfortune, and there is nothing particular to dread, either immediately or in the future, oh, how many there are, even amongst Catholics, of whom one might say with truth, in the words of the

Most people forget God in the time of prosperity.

Psalmist: "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God."¹ That is, as Vatablus remarks on this text, "there is no judge nor ruler to punish the crimes of men, and to look after their affairs."² At all events, they indulge as freely and unrestrainedly in their accustomed vices, in their pride, avarice, and injustice, in their impurity and public scandal-giving, in their hatred and enmity, in their gluttony and drunkenness, in their neglect of their children, idleness, extravagance in dress, in the hateful habit of cursing and swearing, of calumny and detraction, and in the other sins that spring from those vices, as if there was no God in heaven, or as if He were a god of stone or wood, a deaf and dumb god, from whom they have nothing to fear. How many there are amongst Catholics who wish, so to speak, to have nothing to do with God, and who say to Him in their hearts, with the wicked of whom we read in the Book of Job: "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways."³ We do not wish to be instructed in Thy law, nor to find out the right path to heaven. For they come seldom to sermons, or rather, they are as much afraid of them, lest they should be disturbed in their vicious habits, and their consciences be aroused to feel the state in which they are, as if they were above the rank of ordinary people and were not in need of the inspirations and enlightening graces of God. So seldom do they put in an appearance in the church, or receive the sacraments, or raise their minds and hearts to heavenly things, that they seem to imagine that they can do without God, and that the eternity of heaven and hell is a mere fable; for it is only a stern command, under pain of mortal sin and the threat of everlasting damnation, that can induce them to fulfil the more obvious duties of religion. In a word, they act as if they did not acknowledge God for their sovereign Lord. Hence the many complaints that God uttered of His chosen people, of which we read so frequently in the Holy Scripture: "Thou hast forsaken the God that begot thee, and hast forgotten the Lord that created thee,"⁴ brought thee out of the nothingness thou wert, and gave thee all thou hast; so we read in the Book of Deuteronomy. "They kept not the covenant of God," is the complaint of the Lord by the Prophet David, "and in His law they would not walk. And they forgot

¹ Dixit insipiens in corde suo, non est Deus.—Ps. xlii. 1.

² Non est iudex, non est moderator, qui scelera hominum puniat, et res humanas curet.

³ Recede a nobis, et scientiam viarum tuarum nolumus.—Job xxi. 14.

⁴ Deum qui te genuit dereliquisti, et oblitus es Domini, Creatoris tui.—Deut. xxxii. 18.

His benefits.”¹ And again, “They forgot God, who saved them, who had done great things in Egypt.”²

What is to be done, O Lord? How wilt Thou bring to a due knowledge of Thee those men who have so ungratefully forgotten Thee? Such is the question asked by St. Augustine. “Thou wilt bring back the people in Thy anger,”³ is his answer. A wilful boy, whose whole idea is play and amusement, cannot bear to hear anything about school; if his father or mother tells him to go there, he pretends not to hear, or feigns illness; and when the school-bell rings he feels like one who is about to be led out to execution. But, wait! his father cries out; I will show you that you have to go to school! And so he takes the stick, or pulls his ears, or seizes him by the arm and packs him off; for there is no use in threatening one who is sensible to physical force alone. In the same way, according to St. Augustine, God acts towards men; our heavenly Father grows angry with those disobedient children of His, who wish to free themselves from His authority; He chastises them with His rod, and in different ways compels them to fly to Him for refuge.”⁴ Such was the school in which He taught the Israelites whenever they forgot Him and ran after false gods. Such, too, was the lesson He gave the obdurate Pharaoh, the disobedient Jonas, the proud Nabuchodonosor, the unchaste Ninivites. It was by means of scourges, chastisements, calamities, and adversity that He humbled them all, and forced them to acknowledge Him as their true God and Lord, and to beg His pardon. Origen considers the case of Pharaoh alone. Hear how that obstinate king speaks when Moses asks him in the name of God to allow the people of Israel to leave Egypt. “Who is the Lord that I should hear His voice and let Israel go?”⁵ Why should He command me? “I know not the Lord; neither will I let Israel go.”⁶ Was not that great insolence on his part? But let him wait a little, and he will soon change his note, when he feels the plagues. “And Aaron stretched forth his hand upon the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up, and covered the land of Egypt.”⁷ What do

Therefore God visits us with calamities, that we may acknowledge Him.

¹ Non custodierunt testamentum Dei, et in lege ejus noluerunt ambulare; et oblitii sunt benefactorum ejus.—Ps. lxxvii. 10, 11.

² Oblitii sunt Deum, qui salvavit eos, qui fecit magna in Ægypto.—Ibid. ev. 21.

³ In ira populos deduces.

⁴ Iratus pater filio eum colaphizat, cædit, aurem vellicat.

⁵ Quis est Dominus, ut audiam vocem ejus et dimittam Israel?—Exod. v. 2.

⁶ Nescio Dominum, et Israel non dimittam.—Ibid.

⁷ Et extendit Aaron manum super aquas Ægypti, et ascenderunt ranæ, aperueruntque terram Ægypti.—Ibid. viii. 6.

you think now, Pharaoh? Do you still ignore the Lord? How soon he changed his mind! “But Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said to them: Pray ye to the Lord to take away the frogs from me and my people; and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the Lord.”¹ Truly, his language is wonderfully changed! And the change was caused by the rod. The same king became still more humble afterwards, when he had felt the plague of the thunder and hail-storms. “And Pharaoh sent and called Moses and Aaron, saying to them: I have sinned this time also; the Lord is just; I and my people are wicked. Pray ye to the Lord that the thunders of God and the hail may cease; that I may let you go, and that ye may stay here no longer.”² Behold, says Origen, how Pharaoh, although he was hardened in wickedness, yet learned to acknowledge his sin and to confess that the Lord is God, “when he had been chastised.”³ So easy is it for the almighty God to make obstinate sinners learn their duty to Him.

And now
He visits us
with sick-
ness as a
general
punish-
ment.

In the same way the Almighty appears to speak to the sinful world nowadays. You do not wish to know Me, He says, nor to fear or love Me, after all the benefits I have bestowed on you; I must, then, have recourse to another means, in order to show you who I am; I will visit you with the rod, and then “you shall know that I am the Lord,”⁴ and that I hold in My hands your bodies and souls, and all you have; and now I will punish you with My rod, which I will stretch out over all without exception, great and small, rich and poor, that all may know and confess that I am the Lord. I have often chastised you with unfruitful seasons; but I saw that it was a severe punishment only for the lower classes, the poor and needy citizens and peasants; they had to suffer the pangs of hunger, although the other miseries of their lives should have taught them to fly to Me for refuge; but the rich and wealthy, what had they to suffer? They had means enough to procure food during the scarcity. Nay, some of them contrived to grow richer by usury during the pressure of the hard times. That usury is a vice that I hate exceedingly, and I have already complained of it by My Prophet Amos: “Hear this, you that crush the poor, and make the needy

¹ Vocavit autem Pharaoh Moysen et Aaron, et dixit eis: orate Dominum, ut auferat ranas a me et a populo meo, et dimittam populum, ut sacrificet Domino.—Exod. viii. 8.

² Misitque Pharaoh et vocavit Moysen et Aaron, dicens ad eos: peccavi et jam nunc; Dominus justus; ego et populus meus impii. Orate Dominum, ut desinant tonitrua Dei et grandio; ut dimittam vos, et nequaquam hic ultra maneat. —Ibid. ix. 27. 28.

³ Ecce Pharaoh durissimus, tamen profuit verberatus.

⁴ Scietis quia ego Dominus.—Ezech. vi. 13.

of the land to fail, saying: When will the month be over, and we shall sell our wares; and the sabbath, and we shall open the corn; that we may lessen the measure, and increase the sicle, and may convey in deceitful balances, that we may possess the needy for money, and the poor for a pair of shoes, and may sell the refuse of the corn.”¹ But the Lord knows how to punish such avarice. “The Lord hath sworn against the pride of Jacob: Surely I will never forget all their works. Shall not the land tremble for this, and every one mourn that dwelleth therein, and rise up altogether as a river, and be cast out and run down as the river of Egypt?”² I have often punished you with war; but even that afflicted most the common people, who had to work hard to pay the tribute imposed by the enemy. The wealthy were able to contribute their share without trouble, so that they still remained in their forgetfulness of Me. But now I will strike with a rod that all shall feel; I will fill the air with pestilential vapors, which all without exception shall have to breathe; and no matter how carefully they look after themselves at home by their firesides, every breath they draw shall fill them with disease; nor shall even one of them be free from the fear of infection; “and you shall know that I am the Lord,” your Supreme God, who has the right of commanding you, and from whom you must beg the gift of health by humble prayer and penance.

And 'to teach you that I am an almighty Lord, and that it is very easy for Me to compel you to come to My school, I will begin your punishment by things that in your estimation are mean and of no account. When earthly princes wish to subdue a country or to lay it waste, they must have a large army of well-armed soldiers to carry out their wishes, otherwise they will fail in their attempt; and that is a proof of their weakness, since of themselves they can do nothing, and all their strength comes from other sources. It is not so with Me. When I wished to bring king Pharaoh and his people to acknowledge Me, I did not send soldiers to attack him or to lay waste his country; I made use of the meanest animals for that purpose, such as grasshoppers,

He makes use of very mean instruments, that we may confess that He is the Lord.

¹ Audite hoc qui conteritis pauperem, et deficere facitis egenos terra, dicentes: quando transibit mensis, et venundabimus mercem; et sabbatum, et aperiemus frumentum: ut imminuamus mensuram, et augeamus sicutum, et supponamus stateras dolosas; ut possideamus in argento egenos et pauperes pro calceamentis, et quisquillas frumenti vendamus?—Amos viii. 4-6.

² Juravit Dominus in superbiam Jacob: si oblitus fuero usque ad finem omnia opera eorum. Numquid super isto non commovebitur terra, et lugebit omnis habitator ejus? et ascendet quasi fluvius universus, et efficietur et defluet quasi rivus Ægypti?—Ibid. 7, 8.

frogs, flies, and mice, that people trample under foot; and by their means I speedily attained My object. Yes, O God of infinite power! we must confess with Solomon that Thou hast no need of borrowing strength from others if Thou art inclined to destroy the world: "For the almighty hand which made the world of matter without form, was not unable to send upon them a multitude of bears, or fierce lions, or unknown beasts of a new kind, full of rage, either breathing out a fiery vapor, or sending forth a stinking smoke, or shooting horrible sparks out of their eyes: whereof not only the hurt might be able to destroy them, but also the very sight might kill them through fear;"¹ but Thou wert not in need, O Lord, of such mighty instruments to fulfil Thy purpose! "For great power always belonged to Thee alone: and who shall resist the strength of Thy arm? For the whole world before Thee is as the least grain of the balance, and as a drop of the morning dew, that falleth down upon the earth."² The smallest insects that we crush between our fingers are enough for Thy almighty power to plunge us into the greatest misery, nay, to destroy us utterly, if such is Thy will; and therefore Thou callest them Thy host: "And I will restore to you the years which the locust, and the bruchus, and the mildew, and the palmer-worm hath eaten; my great host, which I sent upon you:"³ as Thou sayest by Thy Prophet Joel.

He torments us now with worms and with apparently trifling maladies.

And so it is, my dear brethren. The Lord seems to say to us now: I have in My power other plagues with which to afflict the world; I need only give a sign to the raging sea, and it will outstep its bounds and inundate the countries bordering on it; and that I have often done in order to show the might of My arm. In the year 1400 I commanded the three rivers the Rhine, the Maas, and the Waal to overflow their banks; they obeyed at once and submerged seventy-two villages, and drowned a hundred thousand people. On another occasion I commanded the river Dyle to overflow, and in one inundation it destroyed the walls and many of the towers of the town of Louvain in Brabant, and

¹ Non enim impossibilis erat omnipotens manus tua, quæ creavit orbem terrarum ex materia invisa, immittere illis multitudinem ursorum, aut audaces leones, aut novi generis ira plenas ignotas bestias, aut vaporem igneum spirantes, aut fumi odorem proferentes, aut horrendas ab oculis scintillas emittentes; quarum non solum læsura poterat illos exterminare, sed et aspectus per timorem occidere.—Sap. xi. 18-20.

² Multum enim valere tibi soli supererat semper, et virtuti brachii tui quis resistet? Quoniam tanquam momentum stateræ, sic est ante te orbis terrarum, et tanquam gutta roris antelucani, quæ descendit in terram.—Ibid. 22-23.

³ Reddam vobis annos quos comedit locusta, bruchus, et rubigo, et eruca; fortitudo mea magna, quam misi in vos.—Joel ii. 25.

threw down two hundred houses. Ask what was the origin of Lough Erne in Ireland, which is thirty miles long and fifteen broad; and you will be told that in the place it now occupies there was formerly a citadel and a well-inhabited land; but I allowed the waters to inundate the country, which they destroyed with its inhabitants. Holland, Friesland, and other countries lying on the sea and on large rivers have often experienced to their great misfortune how mighty is My arm, when I make use of water as a means of punishing men. And you, too, O city of Treves, have had the same experience! Read your history, and it will tell you what occurred in the years 1296 and 1333, when the Moselle overflowed its banks, rose even above the bridges, and destroyed the walls and many of the houses of the city. I caused the Red Sea to swallow up Pharaoh and all his host, so that not one of them escaped; and in the general deluge all the inhabitants of the world perished, with the exception of eight souls. I could at any moment inflict similar chastisements on you; but it is not necessary for Me to do so; I will entrust the affair to the worms; they, in spite of their small size and weakness, will be able to keep you in constant alarm, and your anxiety to defend yourselves against them will teach you to recognize Me and to pray to Me humbly for release from the plague. Besides, I have mortal illnesses, fevers and pestilence at My command, which I could easily send amongst you at any time to destroy you utterly. I have done that already in Egypt, when in one night the first-born of every family and even of beasts was slain. I did it, too, in the camp of king Sennacherib, when I sent My angel to carry off by plague a hundred and five thousand soldiers in one night. In the same way, too, I punished the vanity of king David, when I caused seventy thousand of his subjects to die of pestilence in three days. In later times I have often inflicted a similar punishment on different towns in Italy, France, and other countries. O city of Treves! if your old buildings could speak, what a lamentable story could they not tell of the effects of the plagues I sent upon you at different times, especially in the years 1313, 1605, 1636, when your inhabitants were reduced to such extremities that there were mothers who ate their own offspring. I might deal just as severely with you now, if I wished; but it is not necessary. I can send you colds, catarrhs, toothache, ulcers in the ears and neck, coughs, and pains in the side, to vie with each other in tormenting you: "And you shall know that I am the Lord;" those

things shall teach you that I am your God, and you may learn from them how severely I might punish you, if I wished to use the power of My almighty arm.

These
plagues He
intends as a
warning to
us.

Certainly, my dear brethren, it is a remarkable thing that God can teach us by such trivial plagues. "If a slight tribulation can instruct, amend, and correct us," I say with St. Jerome, "how much more will not greater ones have that effect?"¹ That is the reason why the Lord now warns us with fatherly goodness, that we may avoid greater calamities. Wonderful is the manner in which the angry God speaks in the Book of Deuteronomy: "I live forever. If I shall whet my sword as the lightning, and my hand take hold on judgment, I will render vengeance to my enemies, and repay them that hate Me."² Why does He say, "like the lightning," and not like a thunderbolt? This latter is more to be dreaded, and would be better means of showing His anger against the world. True; but He wishes to let us see that He is not always intent on our destruction when He punishes, but rather wishes to warn us in time, lest we should incur more grievous chastisements. There is a great difference between a flash of lightning and a thunderbolt; the former is a threat on the part of the heavens, while the latter is the fulfilment of the threat; the one frightens, while the other destroys what it strikes; and the one gives us warning of the danger that is to be feared from the other.

As He is
used to do
at all times.

Such is the way in which the God of goodness deals with us men. Before placing on our shoulders a heavy cross of tribulation, He threatens us, that we may have time to provide for ourselves, and escape the punishment. He could keep still and strike us without warning; but, as Origen says, "He has not done so yet; when He has already pronounced sentence, He still lets us know what He intends to say, that they who deserve condemnation on account of sin may be freed from it by repentance."³ He had already pronounced sentence on the wicked Ninivites, and condemned their city to destruction; yet He did not wish to keep the sentence secret, but commanded His Prophet Jonas to announce it to them, and to give them forty days' respite, that

¹ Si parva tribulatio docet, emendat, et corrigit, quanto magis et magna?

² Vivo ego in aeternum. Si acuero ut fulgur gladium meum, et arripuerit Judicium manus mea, reddam ultionem hostibus meis, et his qui oderunt me retribuam.—Deut. xxxii. 40, 41.

³ Nunquam hoc fecit: etiamsi condemnaverit, dicit quod sibi semper dicere propositum est, ut liberentur a condemnatione per poenitentiam, qui condemnati fuerant per delictum.—Origen, hom. 1. in Jerem., c. 1.

they might have time enough to escape destruction and to obtain His mercy by timely repentance. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrhah, Adama and Seboim, were doomed to destruction with their inhabitants, on account of the hideous vices to which they were addicted; yet God told Lot to warn them, that they might by repentance avoid the flames that were to consume them. The Jewish people were condemned to the most oppressive slavery, and many years beforehand God commanded the Prophet Jeremias to give notice to them of the calamity impending over them. The Prophet warned them incessantly during the reigns of three successive kings, that they might do penance and escape the threatened evils; and when they were actually carried off prisoners, he still exhorted them to penance, assuring them that there was still time to be rescued from captivity: "Behold you are now in captivity; do penance, late as it is; ask Me, and I will spare you; for I, who allowed you to be led into captivity, can deliver you;"¹ thus far Origen. St. Jerome, considering the same truth, adds other examples to those adduced by Origen. For a hundred and twenty years before the Deluge God warned the world of what was to happen, and by His servant Noe gave notice of the punishment that was to overtake it. Seven years before the famine came on Egypt, Joseph foretold it. Before the kingdom of Israel was subjected to the Assyrians, He gave warning of that calamity by the Prophet Amos. Many similar examples might be adduced from Scripture to show that God always gives warning of the chastisements He intends to inflict. And why? "That," as St. Jerome says, "they who hear of those punishments may do penance and so avoid them."² For the God of goodness and clemency always announces the chastisements He intends to inflict, that He may not be compelled to inflict them, since he who threatens shows that he does not wish to smite the offender."³ And commenting on the text of St. Paul to the Romans, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and injustice of those men that detain the truth of God in injustice,"⁴ the same St. Jerome says: "The anger of God is revealed that it may terrify, and may not

¹ *Eccæ captivi facti estis; agite licet sero poenitentiam; rogate me, et parcam vobis; possum eruere de captivitate qui tradidi.*

² *Ut qui audirent ventura supplicia, agerent poenitentiam et tormenta vitarent.—S. Hieron. l. i. in Amos.*

³ *Clemens et benignus Deus semper futura prænuntiat, ne cogatur inferre supplicia; qui prædicat non vult punire peccantes.*

⁴ *Revelatur enim ira Dei de cælo super omnem impietatem et injustitiam hominum eorum, qui veritatem Dei in injustitia detinent.—Rom. i. 18.*

fall upon those who are terrified.”¹ And elsewhere he quotes the words of the Prophet Sophonias: “Assemble yourselves together, be gathered together, O nation not worthy to be loved: before the decree bring forth the day as dust passing away, before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you.”² With these words the Prophet invites sinners, who are hateful to God, to be converted all together, before the threat of their destruction be executed, a threat that is as easily fulfilled as the dust is carried away by the wind. Oh, what goodness on the part of God! says the holy Doctor. It would have been enough for Him to describe the terrible advent of those calamities; but since He did not wish to take the rod in His hand at once, He Himself invites sinners to repent: “Since He does not wish to punish, but merely to terrify, He invites sinners to repent, that He may not have to carry out His threats.”³

If we do not amend then, He will punish us more severely.

What is it that now excites our fears, my dear brethren? It is the different epidemics that threaten us. And we have cause to fear; but so far we have seen only the threats and warnings that God sends us, as forerunners to exhort us to return to Him by true repentance and amendment of life. Woe to us if we do not profit by those warnings, and if we defer conversion until the thunderbolt smites us! King Saul was for two months despised by his subjects, although they had chosen him king. For a time he kept quiet and bore it patiently; but when people began to speak of this rebellious spirit, he could restrain himself no longer: “And the spirit of the Lord came upon Saul when he had heard these words, and his anger was exceedingly kindled.”⁴ What did he do? “And taking both the oxen he cut them in pieces, and sent them into all the coasts of Israel by messengers, saying: Whosoever shall not come forth, and follow Saul and Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen.”⁵ And that was enough. The people at once followed Saul, as the sheep do their shepherd. “And the fear of the Lord fell upon the people, and they went out as one man.”⁶ Sinners, you who do not

¹ Revelatur ut terreat, et territis non inferatur.—S. Hieron. l. ii. in Habac. iii.

² Convenite, congregamini, gens non amabilis, priusquam partat jussio quasi pulverem transeuntem diem, antequam veniat super vos ira furoris Domini.—Sophon. ii. 1, 2.

³ Quia non vult inferre supplicia, sed tantum terrere passuros, ipse ad poenitentiam provocat, ne faciat quod minatus est.—Hieron. in Sophon. ii.

⁴ Insillivit Spiritus Domini in Saul, cum audisset verba hæc, et iratus est furor ejus nimis.—I. Kings xi. 6.

⁵ Assumens utrumque bovem, concidit in frusta, misitque in omnes terminos Israel per manus nunciorum, dicens: quicumque non exierit, et secutus fuerit Saul et Samuel, sic fiet bobus ejus.—Ibid. 7.

⁶ Invasit ergo timor Domini populum, et egressi sunt quasi vir unus.—Ibid.

acknowledge your Lord and God, and who refuse to be converted to Him, beware lest He should give way to His just anger! If you hear of any calamity befalling any people, even at a distance from you, look upon that news as a messenger sent to say to you: "so shall it be done to you." You may sometimes hear that a plague has broken out in some neighboring or remote place, and that it carries off hundreds daily; that is a warning given you by God, and the meaning of it is, "so shall it be done to you." A long-continued scarcity of food causes many poor people to die of hunger; the Lord wishes thereby to remind you that "so shall it be done to you," unless you do penance. You may hear the complaints of poor citizens of a certain town, who have lost all they had in a conflagration; their complaints cry out to you, "so shall it be done to you." News comes from many provinces that a marauding soldiery has plundered the inhabitants and driven them out of their houses; that reminds you that "so shall it be done to you." You are told that a fearful storm has destroyed the crops in the fields and vineyards; that is to remind you that "so shall it be done to your fields and vineyards, too." In another place, an earthquake has ruined whole towns and villages; that is a voice which calls out to you in the name of God, "so shall it be done to your towns and dwellings." And truly so shall it be, says the Lord, unless you profit by My fatherly warnings, and return to Me by true penance; for I will no longer be satisfied with the small afflictions I sent you hitherto, but will act towards you as I did long ago to Pharaoh, to whom I sent My servant Moses to say: "Thus saith the Lord God of the Hebrews. Let My people go to sacrifice to Me. But if thou refuse, behold, My hand shall be upon thy fields. . . . and upon thy horses, and asses, and camels, and oxen, and sheep."¹ In those and similar ways I will utterly destroy you.

O God of goodness, we do not wish to wait for those severe measures! We have felt Thy chastising hand sorely enough already! Behold, we all kneel before Thy throne of mercy with contrite hearts. We acknowledge with deep humility that Thou art our only God and sovereign Ruler, and that Thou alone canst help us. We kiss reverently Thy fatherly rod, which Thou hast used so mildly and mercifully to persuade us to acknowledge

Humble
confession
and purpose
of amend-
ment.

¹ Hæc dicit Dominus Deus Hebræorum: dimitte populum meum ut sacrificet mihi. Quod si adhuc renuis: ecce manus mea erit super agros tuos, et super equos, et asinos, et camelos, et boves, et oves.—Exod. ix. 1-3.

Thee and to amend our sinful lives. We are resolved to repent sincerely and at once. And if there is any one who is not of that mind, we are quite satisfied that Thou shouldst expel him from our midst as a rebel against Thy authority, lest many innocent souls should have to suffer with and on account of him. As for the rest of us, we are firmly determined to change our lives for the better, to be more zealous in Thy service than we have been hitherto, and not to cease humbly and confidently imploring Thy mercy by public prayer, until Thou art fully appeased and sheathest the sword of vengeance Thou hast drawn to threaten us with; and so we shall show before the whole world that Thou art the Lord our Healer, our true God, who alone canst remedy our evils. Amen.

SEVENTY-SECOND SERMON.

ON PRAYER AND PENANCE IN THE DANGERS OF WAR.

Subject.

How one can prevent and avert a war.—*Preached in the year 1733.*

Text.

Si acuero ut fulgur gladium meum, reddam ultionem hostibus.—Deut. xxxii. 41.

“If I shall whet my sword as the lightning, I will render vengeance to My enemies.”

Introduction.

The angry God whets His sword like the lightning, whereby He gives us to understand that, as the lightning is the forerunner of the thunderbolt, and a warning to take care lest the latter should strike us, so also His sword of vengeance is a threat of future punishment, and at the same time a gracious warning that we must be on our guard. I explained all this last winter, when there was just as gloomy an out-look as at present. The avenging sword of God has flashed very often of late in our horizon, my dear brethren; it has threatened bad seasons, accompanied by scarcity and famine, as a consequence of the constant rains; it has threatened a general war throughout Europe; and

after that, again, another famine, on account of the drought. In the course of this year it threatened us with dangerous epidemics, and partially carried out the threat; not long ago it threatened us by more than one earthquake; what those latter forebode, we know not yet. Yet thanks be to the good God! up to the present He has not gone beyond threats, and we have not suffered so severely as we had reason to fear at first. But, is there not cause to fear that after all this lightning the thunderbolt must fall at last? Shall we not fear lest the almighty God may carry out His threats? Yes, indeed; for if we have ever had cause for apprehension, we have it now. The flames of war are kindled in our very neighborhood; the greatest potentates of Europe are busy making preparations for the impending, and, as many think, unavoidable struggle. Alas, poor city and land of Treves, how will you fare! You are generally the first object of the enemy's attack! Nor need I say much on this topic; for a sad experience has taught you what fearful moral and material ruin war can cause. The poorer classes of citizens and peasants have still to suffer from the effects of it, in their efforts to pay the debts incurred by war. Thanks be to God, we have a short period of rest. But what will become of us now? "O thou sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere Thou be quiet?" we might exclaim with the Prophet Jeremias; how long wilt Thou plague us? Is it Thy intention to destroy us utterly? No, my dear brethren, such is not the design of our good God; He is only brandishing His sword by way of threat. And for what purpose? That He may not have to smite us with His thunderbolt. He threatens that He may not be compelled to punish, says St. John Chrysostom. But what do those fearful threats signify? That it is the will of God that we do our best to avert and escape the thunderbolt, the dangers of war.

Plan of Discourse.

How we are to prevent and avert those dangers will be the whole subject of this exhortation. Meanwhile we cry out with one voice to Thee: "grant, O Lord, peace in our days, for there is none to fight for us or to protect us, but Thou, our God."

Help us by thy intercession, O powerful Queen of the heavenly hosts, that we may be heard by thy Son! and we make the ~~same~~ request of you, holy angels of peace. Amen.

¹ O mucro Domini, usque quo non quiesces?—Jerem. xlvii. 6.

Of ourselves
we cannot
prevent war
or resist
the enemy.

But is it, then, possible for us to drive back the thunderbolt that is ready to fall on us, to extinguish the already kindled flames of war, and to repel the enemy from our city and fatherland? Poor people that we are! how could we do that? For we are in the same condition as the Israelites when they were at war with the Philistines, as we read in the First Book of Kings: "Now there was no smith to be found in all the land of Israel; for the Philistines had taken this precaution, lest the Hebrews should make them swords or spears," to protect and defend themselves. "And when the day of battle was come, there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people."¹ We might say the same of ourselves. We have neither arms nor strength to resist the attacks of our enemies, and to drive them from our country. Ah, we may well talk of averting the evils of war! It is far more likely that we shall have to make a virtue of necessity, and go out humbly to meet the enemy at his approach, offer him the keys of the city gates without waiting to be asked for them, as we have had to do before, and subscribe submissively to any tribute he wishes to impose on our property, no matter how hard it may seem to us, if we wish to escape the horrors of a general sacking and plundering.

But we can
do so if we
conquer
God by fast-
ing and
prayer.

But, my dear brethren, we have other means at our disposal, which we can and should make use of to resist, not the approaching enemy, but Him who has in His hand the hearts of all potentates. "The Lord of hosts is His name,"² as the Prophet Isaias says; He has no difficulty in changing the hearts and dispositions of kings and nations who are contending with each other, and in changing them when and how He pleases, so that the threatened war may be averted; or else it is easy for him to give the war another direction and to turn it away from us. This, I say, is the God whom we must conquer, so as to induce Him to sheathe the sword of vengeance, or to turn it elsewhere. And what weapons must we use? Public prayer and fasting, the weapons we have commenced to use already? Yes, these are arms that are most powerful with the Almighty; for our united prayers, as Tertullian says, offer violence, as it were, to Him, so that He cannot withstand us; yet He wishes that we should gain such a victory over Him. It was in that way that the Ninivites forced Him to recall the sentence He had pronounced against

¹ Porro faber ferrarius non inveniebatur in omni terra Israel; caverant enim Philisthim, ne forte facerent Hebræi gladium aut lanceam. Cumque venisset dies prælii, non est inventus ensis et lancea in manu totius populi.—1. Kings xlii. 19, 22.

² Dominus exercituum nomen illius.—Isa. xlvi. 4.

them, that He would destroy them in forty days. In the same way Moses compelled the Almighty to restrain His anger against the Israelites, and not to inflict punishment on them as He had determined. And in that way, too, the Prophet Jeremias forced the Lord to speak him fair, as it were, that He might be able to carry out His designs: "Do not thou pray for this people, nor take to thee praise and supplication for them, and do not withstand Me."¹

But mark, my dear brethren, that Jeremias was just, Moses holy, and the Nivivites of contrite and humble hearts. Oh, if we too had such dispositions with our fasting and prayer, we could be assured of a victory over the divine anger, and could have a firm confidence that neither war nor any of the evils that spring from it would harm us. But I am afraid it will be with us as with the emperor Phocas in Constantinople. Never, according to Baronius, had greater preparations been made in that city to resist the approaching enemy than in the time of that emperor; and yet a voice was heard crying from heaven, "O emperor! thou art building walls, but if thou wert to raise them up to heaven, the city would still easily be captured, for its greatest enemy is within its walls."² Christians, we are now engaged in building walls even up to heaven, while we cry to the throne of God with prayer and fasting to protect our country from the miseries of war; but how will those walls be able to defend us, if our worst and greatest enemy, whom we have most to fear, is hidden in our very midst, in our city and land?

What enemy is that? The one by which the town of Jericho was destroyed in the time of Josue; the people of Israel, who were besieging that town, did nothing but walk round its walls in silence: "But the seventh day, rising up early, they went about the city, as it was ordered, seven times. Josue said to all Israel: Shout. So all the people making a shout, and the trumpets sounding, when the voice and the sound thundered in the ears of the multitude, the walls forthwith fell down, and every man went up by the place that was over against him, and they took the city."³ But, asks St. Augustine, how did they

But that will not help while we have domestic foes to contend against.

That is, as long as sins and vices are not abolished.

¹ Noli orare pro populo hoc, nec assumes pro eis laudem et orationem, et non obstas mihi.—Jerem. vii. 16.

² O imperator! erigis muros; tametsi vel ad caelos eos deducas, intus cum sit malum, urbs captu facilis est.—Baronius ad an. 964.

³ Die autem septimo, diluculo consurgentes, circumierunt urbem, sicut dispositum erat septies. Dixit Josue ad omnem Israel: vociferamini. Igitur omni populo vociferante, et clangentibus tubis, postquam in aures multitudinis vox sonitusque increpuit, muri illico corruerunt, et ascendit unusquisque per locum qui contra se erat, cecideruntque civitatem.—Jos. vi. 15, 16, 20.

manage that, as they used no violence against the city. Although, he answers, they did not attack it by force, "yet the walls were thrown down from the outside by the voices of the just, and from the inside by the sins of the inhabitants."¹ The same thing could easily happen to us; the sins and vices of the inhabitants of the city and land of Treves are the dangerous domestic foes that render useless the walls of fasting and prayer that have been raised to heaven. But I have often spoken of this already, so that I need say no more about it. We all acknowledge with St. Ambrose that "a general calamity is never inflicted on a whole community unless on account of the sins of the inhabitants."² It is not chance nor the malice of men that is to be blamed, for the evil comes from the just decree of God, "on account of the sins of the inhabitants."

Meanwhile
no one
blames him-
self for the
war.

We all, I say, acknowledge the truth of this; but if one were to examine each of us individually on the subject, he would hardly find one to acknowledge that he is to blame. We resemble in this respect people attacked with vertigo; they think that the house is going round, although it is not the house but their own heads that are disturbed. We are infected with that malady in a high degree. If you ask what is the cause of the evils that menace you, what are the sins on account of which they are inflicted, the common people will say that the pride, injustice, avarice of the rich are to blame; while the rich will throw the whole fault on the vicious lives of the common people. Thus, as one puts the blame on the other, neither makes any effort to amend, and the enemy still remains in our midst. But, my dear brethren, that will not do; the axe must be laid to the root of the tree; we must get rid of that vertigo! Let each one enter into his own conscience, and see what secret sins defile it; then let him acknowledge with a contrite and humble heart that he is to blame for the general misfortune; let him say, it is on my account that God chastises this land, therefore I must do penance, and be reconciled to God, and sincerely amend my life. Then let us see whether we have not, perhaps, a share in those public vices which are the principal cause of the public calamities that God sends down on a community; those vices which have almost become fashionable in the world. They are described by St. John in his First Epistle: "All that is in the

¹ *Expugnabantur tamen forinsecus sono justorum, intrinsecus tabernaculo peccatorum.*—S. Aug. serm. 160. de temp.

² *Civitati non nisi propter civium peccata infertur excidium.*—S. Ambr. serm. 85.

world, is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life.”¹

O holy city of Treves! put that vertigo out of your head for a moment! Are you not infected with those vices like the rest of the world? Pride of life, where art thou? We have not need of a long search to find thee. We cannot judge of the interior pride of the heart, because we cannot see it; but if what the Holy Ghost says by the wise Ecclesiasticus be true (and it would be a sin against faith to doubt it), namely, that the outward man is an index of the inner—“A man is known by his look, and a wise man, when thou meetest him, is known by his countenance. The attire of the body, and the laughter of the teeth, and the gait of the man show what he is;”²—if that is the case, what an alarming share of the pride of life is ours! For when people show such signs of dissoluteness and haughtiness in their dress and outward appearance, what can one think of their hearts? And how do people appear in public nowadays? When the city of Florence was in the greatest danger of an inundation, Simon Cassia cried out: “Wake up, O Florence! Correct the wicked vanity of your women; for unless you do, those present evils will be but the forerunners of more grievous ones.”³ If I might speak my mind, my dear brethren, I would change but one word in that whole sentence, and say, “wake up, Treves,” and apply all the rest of it to ourselves.

Although many share in public vices, such as pride and vanity in dress.

In truth, it is lamentable to see how in a Christian city, that boasts of the name of holy, the frivolous fashions of the rest of the world in the matter of dress are followed, so that many occasions of sin and scandal are offered to chaste eyes and hearts, while the common people find therein an occasion of sinful and contumelious language and of cursing and swearing. And yet they who are tricked out in that shameful fashion come to the tribunal of Jesus Christ to confess their sins, and appear at the table of the Lord to receive holy Communion, where their outward demeanor should evince nothing but modesty and humility; nay, in the very temple of God their dress, by its indecency, is an occasion of sin, as experience shows. And when days of public prayer and penance are appointed, to avert public calamity, they come with the rest of the people to appease the wrath of

Especially they who conform to the modern fashions.

¹ Omne quod est in mundo, concupiscentia carnis est, et concupiscentia oculorum, et superbia vitæ.—I. John ii. 16.

² Ex visu cognoscitur vir, et ab occurso faciei cognoscitur sensatus. Amictus corporis, et risus dentium, et ingressus hominis enuntiant de illo.—Ecclesi. xix. 26, 27.

³ Corrige tuarum foeminarum improbam vanitatem! Quia nisi debite corrigaris, hæc damna quæ pateris tibi dico initia esse pejorum.—Cassia. Ep. I. in Flor.

God, but they do not moderate the extravagance of their dress. How inconsistent such conduct! How can you dare to exhibit yourselves in public dressed up in that way, in such circumstances? Such was the question that St. John Chrysostom asked the women of his time, although the only extravagance they were guilty of consisted in the pearls and gold ornaments they wore, which are not apt to cause unchaste thoughts. "How," he says, "can one who is thus adorned send up her sighs and prayers to God?"¹ If you who are thus dressed out were to shed tears, the people would laugh at you. They would say that such tears are only a sign of hypocrisy. While you weep, and sigh, and pray with the others to appease the wrath of God, your scandalous style of dress brings down the divine anger on you and others as well. So far St. Chrysostom. Is it surprising that such fashions should provoke the Almighty, to whom pride is especially hateful, to inflict a general punishment on the whole community? For He assures us that He resists the proud, but gives His grace to the humble.

Which are
contrary to
the Gospel.

I do not wish to say anything now as to whether a sin is committed by those who follow such fashions, and what sort of a sin it is; nor to allude to the opinions of theologians on the matter. I will grant even that there is no sin in it. But what of that? There is not the least doubt that it would be more in accordance with Christian humility to do away with that fashion altogether, and, as Our Lord Himself says, without humility we cannot enter heaven. And it would be more in accordance with the life and example of Christ, whom we must all try to imitate, and whom our heavenly Father has proposed as a pattern for all, for, as St. Paul says, those whom God has predestined for heaven, He has also foreseen, that they are to be conformable to the image of His Son; more in accordance with the teaching of the Gospel, which inculcates nothing more impressively than true humility and mortification, self-denial, detachment from all pomp and vain shows, contempt of the world and its usages, the rough way of penance, which alone leads to heaven, the violence we must use in order to enter by the narrow gate, etc; more in accordance with the teaching of the apostles, and especially of St. Paul (read, I pray you, the second chapter of his First Epistle to Timothy, and there you will find how he instructs Christian women as to the style of dress that they should

¹ Quo pacto ingemiscere potest, et ut deceat orare, quæ hujusmodi ornatu compta procedis?

adopt ; you will find that he does not even allow them to curl their hair, nor to use ornaments of gold, or precious stones, although such things are not in themselves scandalous, but he forbids them because they are superfluous and vain); more in accordance with the teaching of the holy Fathers, who were specially enlightened by the Holy Ghost, that they might make known to us the will of God (I tremble when I read how Tertullian, St. Cyprian, St. Clement of Alexandria, St. Gregory of Nazianzen, St. Jerome, St. John Chrysostom, and many others speak of extravagance in dress, although it may not be indecent; they seem to look on it as a most astonishing thing for a Christian to be seen tricked out in such a manner. I tremble when I read the commentators of the Holy Scripture, especially Angelo Pacciuchelli on the Prophet Jonas, and Cornelius à Lapide on the Prophet Isaias, and see how they describe extravagance in dress as most hateful in the sight of God, and how they bring forward examples from Scripture to show that God has often punished it with severe public calamities); more in accordance with the life and example of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of all the saints of God, amongst whom were princesses and queens, who were distinguished by their modest and humble clothing of simple woolen stuffs.

Now I leave any sensible person to judge whether preachers do not perform a good work, according to their duty and for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, when they endeavor with Christ their Head, the holy apostles, the holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church, to exhort people to follow the narrow way which alone leads to heaven, and urge them to imitate the example of our most humble Saviour, of the Blessed Virgin, and of all the saints of God? And if the women wish to keep the solemn promise they made in baptism, by which they bound themselves to renounce all the pomps and vanities of the world, I leave them to judge whether they should not obey the well-meant exhortation of preachers, and say to themselves: I will try, then, to follow the example of my Saviour and His teaching in the Gospel, the example of the holy Mother of God and of all the saints, and to enter on the narrow way that leads to heaven, for that becomes me as a penitent in this vale of tears, in this place of penance ; and therefore I will give up this extravagant style of dress, which does not at all harmonize with my profession, whether it is sinful or not; and I will do that in order to please God all the more, and to place my soul in greater security. And much

So that no
one should
follow
them.

greater are the reasons for my carrying out this resolution, when the dress I wear, according to the prevailing fashion, is indecent and an occasion of sin, and as such is in direct opposition to the teaching of the Gospel and of the holy Fathers of the Church.

Neverthe-
less, those
fashions
are still
followed.

But there is not much use in talking of this matter; and if I were not obliged by my duty to reprehend public abuses, I should not waste my time in speaking of it. With reason does St. Bernardine of Siena say: "If an angel, or St. Paul, or even Our Lord Himself were to come down from heaven and to preach against that fashion, I do not think he would effect any improvement."¹ If an angel came down from heaven, if the great Apostle of the gentiles were to ascend the pulpit and instruct Christian women as to how they should dress modestly and in a manner becoming them; nay, perhaps if Christ Himself came and condemned those fashions, saying that whoever wishes to enter heaven must follow the rude path of penance, and learn from Him to be meek and humble of heart, I do not believe that even such eloquent preachers would be able to produce any lasting amendment. For an appeal would be made against their exhortations to the general custom, while no one would pay the least attention to the will of God in such a matter; the law of Jesus Christ must give way before the law of the world, and though people protest that they are ready to do all that God wishes, yet they are not willing to act in opposition to what they see others doing.

Which is
very wrong.

Well, for my part, you can go on with what you are not willing to give up for God's sake, for your own souls, and for the souls of others! For my part, I say; because I have neither profit nor loss for my soul from your abominable fashions, except that, on the one hand, you give me reason for more careful mortification of the eyes, and on the other, I am exceedingly sorry, not because, as I have been told, there are some who, to spite preachers, carry the fashion to the extremity of indecency—for I trouble myself little about their ridicule, and I agree with the beautiful words of St. Ambrose: "You wrong no one by preferring God to all, and by not being afraid to say, with confidence in Him, what you believe to be to His glory"²—but I am heartily sorry and could shed bitter tears when I consider that the

¹ Si angelus, vel Paulus, forte vel Christus de cœlo descenderet, et contra hæc talia vestimenta prædicarent; credo quod victoriam non haberent.

² Nemini facies injuriam, si omnibus Deum præfers, et confidens in ipsum, non vereris dicere ad ejus gloriam quod sentis.

good God, who showers so many benefits daily on His creatures, cannot induce them to give up such a wretched thing for His sake; that Jesus Christ must look on patiently while the souls that He has bought at the cost of so much ignominy and torture are determined to act in public defiance of His humility and His Gospel, and I must sigh with St. Bernard: "Thy swaddling clothes," in which Thou wert wrapped in the manger, "are placed as a sign, O Lord, but as a sign which many contradict even nowadays!"¹ The poor garment that grew up with Thee, and which Thou hast left to our archdiocese of Treves, by Thy servant St. Helena, as a pledge of Thy love, and which is still humbly venerated by all; the ragged purple mantle in which Thou wert ridiculed as a mock king: all this is placed as a sign, which many Christians contradict in our days. I am heartily sorry when I consider that the holy guardian angels have to look on while their charges give occasion to many impure thoughts and desires by their indecent dress; that the great Monarch of heaven cannot obtain from His adopted children, by the promise of heaven or the threat of hell, what any temporal prince could effect at once by a simple expression of His wish. When St. John Capistran was preaching at Ratisbon against gambling and extravagance in dress, although the latter was not near so bad as it now is, the gamblers came after the sermon with their cards and dice, and the women with their superfluous ornaments, to the public square, where they made a large bonfire, and burnt all those vanities to ashes, as we read in the Life of that Saint. And the same God, who still speaks by the mouths of His preachers, cannot with all His inspirations and exhortations induce people to give up scandalous vanities! Ah, the Patriarch Abraham received but a sign from God, and in obedience to it he was ready to sacrifice his only son without the least hesitation, while we cannot make up our minds to renounce a disgusting fashion for His sake and for the furtherance of His honor and glory! And yet we pretend to be pious, and say daily: Lord, Thy will be done! And we profess to be resigned to every decree of divine Providence, and we often say with a sigh that we do very little good! Nonsense! Such devotion as that is only fit to be laughed at. If you wish to do the will of God in reality, you have a splendid opportunity. All this, I say, makes me very sorry. But I cannot help it; go on in your own way, and make the customary excuse, "if others

¹ In signum positi sunt panni tui. Domine Jesu! sed in signum cui a multis usque hodie contradicetur!

give up the fashion, I will do so, too; but not otherwise." But you might add, for it comes to the same thing: if others make up their minds to walk on the narrow way that leads to heaven, I will do so, too; otherwise I will continue on the broad road that leads to hell.

God is thus
forced to
punish the
world.

What means, then, is left to put a stop to this fashion? None, answers St. Bernardine of Siena, as experience in many towns has taught me, "but the chastising rod of the Almighty;"¹ and would to God that that rod did not strike the innocent as well! When the Israelites fell into the horrible crime of idolatry, and adored the golden calf, God determined to destroy them, but He was appeased by Moses. Hear what the Lord said, however: Go, said He, and say to the people: "Now presently lay aside the ornaments, that I may know what to do to thee:" then I will see what course I shall pursue with regard to you. "So the children of Israel laid away their ornaments from Mount Horeb."² Mark, my dear brethren, how the Lord seems unable to pardon them as long as they were extravagantly dressed. Now, if such attire was so hateful to God in the Old Law, what must it be in the New? Such is the argument of Cornelius à Lapide in his commentary on the Prophet Isaias. If excessive luxury in dress on the part of the women was so displeasing to God that He often decreed to destroy the people on account of it, how displeasing must it not be to Him, and how must He not be resolved to punish it severely in Christians?"³ In Christians, who are bound to follow a humble Saviour? In Christians, who have solemnly undertaken in baptism to renounce the devil, the flesh, the world, and its pomps and vanities? Ask the pious John Tauler what was the origin of the calamities and especially of the wars and heresies that, as he foresaw sixty years beforehand, would come upon Germany? Here is his answer: "The signs and omens that announce such fearful calamities are certainly the slashed dresses, the new fashions, and those modes of attire which are provocative of lust." You will find more to the same purpose in the Revelations of St. Bridget. If the scourges with which God has threatened our land are to be averted, a blessing which we daily implore from heaven with united voices, although it is hard to say as yet whether we shall obtain it or not, yet you

¹ Nisi Dei flagellum.

² Jam nunc deponere ornatum tuum, ut sciam quid faciam tibi. Deposuerunt ergo filii Israel ornatum suum a monte Horeb.—Exod. xxxiii. 5, 6.

³ Quomodo jam displicebit et punietur in Christianis?

must know that the Almighty has still other scourges in His hands with which He can chastise you individually, and He has often used them, sending to some ulcerous sores that ate away their mouths and noses in punishment of their vanity in painting their faces, while others were afflicted by hideous cancers, as a chastisement for wearing low-necked dresses. With regard to the hooped costumes now in vogue, I have been lately told by one of our Fathers that in a certain town from which he had just come a person of the upper classes, who used to follow that fashion, was possessed by the devil; and when the evil spirit was adjured to tell how he got that person into his power, he answered that God had delivered her over to him in punishment for wearing such a dress. This fact I recommend to the notice of those who laugh at people for giving up such dresses for conscientious motives, and turn their piety into ridicule. St. Jerome writes of *Prætextata*, a noble lady, that an angel announced to her that she would be damned because she helped to deck out the maiden *Eustochium*. "After five months," said the angel, "you will be carried down to hell, because you adorned that young woman after the fashion of the world." Let parents take notice of this when they compel their daughters to follow the fashions, although the latter would prefer to dress in a manner more suitable to Christian modesty. I certainly do not wish that you should feel the chastising hand of God; but you may be assured that, if you escape all temporal punishments, whether in the shape of general calamities or individual chastisements, the words of Jesus Christ will surely be fulfilled in you, "Woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh." Consider therefore well what you are doing.

But I am afraid that I have spent too long speaking of this matter, so that I have only a short time to devote to the consideration of the other causes of public chastisements. From pride and vanity in dress generally follows that other capital sin, the concupiscence of the eyes, or avarice. For, the pride that drives many to expense in dress that their income hardly allows is the cause of parents leaving their children unprovided for at their death, and bequeathing to them, as their only legacy, expensive habits, which ill suit their means, and which are, nevertheless, difficult to get rid of; from which it follows that money is sought for and made in very doubtful ways. And hence, too,

Other causes of punishment are avarice and injustice.

¹ *Finito mense quinto, ad inferna deduceris, quia mundano more puellam ornasti.*—S. Hieron. ep. iv. ad Lactan.

it happens that many are unable to help the poor, for all they have to spare goes in dress, as St. John Chrysostom observes: "Christ goes about tattered and naked, and deprived of the necessary food."¹ There is a sin that will condemn you.

The desires
of the flesh.

And what am I to say of the third deadly sin, the concupiscence of the flesh? O city of Treves! put the vertigo out of your head! Have you not a share in that, too? Ah, damnable idleness, useless visiting, dangerous gatherings, meetings of young people of both sexes, gluttony and drunkenness, constant disunion between married people! what other fruits can you bear, but the corruption of the young, impurity amongst the unmarried, secret adultery amongst the married, sometimes even incest and sacrilege! I dare not say all that might be said on this subject, lest I should offend chaste ears. Let every one who is guilty in this respect consider the state in which he is, and let him not forget that this is the vice which often called down fire from heaven that burnt whole cities to ashes, that it often caused the earth to open and swallow up cities and their inhabitants, and that it brought the universal deluge on the world.

Un-Christ-
ian training
of children.

If time permitted I might speak of another great vice, namely, the wicked, dissolute, and un-Christian training that many parents give their children. We see proofs of it in the streets, where boys and girls run about the whole day without the least restraint; at the doors and windows of the houses, where they stand gaping and staring for hours at a time; in the vanities in which the children must be trained when their mothers are too old to practise them themselves. Besides that, there is that abominable habit of cursing, in which parents indulge against their children, and even children against their parents; for, where there is no good training and correction, there can be no respect for parental authority. And it is the custom, moreover, for parents to send their daughters into foreign lands, and that, too, into lands where they soon lose all sense of modesty, and from which they bring back a good share of the insolence and vanity of the world. Thus parents force their children, whose immortal souls are entrusted to their care, on to the broad road of eternal damnation. But I have often explained this to you already, for I have spent half a year treating of it. Would to God that there was any chance of amendment in this respect!

If these
vices are not
abolished,

But if these and similar vices are not corrected, it is in vain that we raise high walls to heaven in order to avert the dangers of

¹ Christus nudus obambulat, necessario alimento destitutus.

war; all our fasting and prayers will be useless, and we have just our prayers are useless. reason for fearing that after all this threatening on the part of God the thunderbolt will at last strike us, and we shall learn by sad experience how the Lord can avenge Himself on His enemies. "Except you will be converted," says the Prophet David, "He will brandish His sword," and that not merely to threaten you; "He hath bent His bow and made it ready." And in it He hath prepared the instruments of death; "He hath made ready His arrows for them that burn."¹

Oh, no, dear Lord, let it not be so with us! O sword of the Lord, we say in the words of the Prophet Jeremias, "How long will it be ere thou be quiet?" How long wilt thou fill us with fear and anxiety? "Go into thy scabbard, rest and be still."² If Thou wilt that we should do penance and amend our lives in order to induce Thee to be still, behold us now prostrate at Thy feet, full of contrition for our sins, and ready to submit to Thy will in all things, without further opposition. "Go into Thy scabbard," then, "rest and be still." Grant, O Lord, peace in our days to this city and country, so that we may be able to serve Thee in peace and quiet, and to thank Thee our whole lives long most humbly, openly acknowledging before the world that Thou art the Lord who, being angry with us, didst not, however, forget Thy mercy. Amen.

Conclusion and resolution of amendment.

SEVENTY-THIRD SERMON.

HUMBLE ACKNOWLEDGMENT THAT WE WELL DESERVE THE PUNISHMENT WE NOW SUFFER FROM THE CONSTANT AND INJURIOUS RAINS.

Subject.

Prayer and acknowledgment that God is just in punishing us.
—*Preached in the year 1737, during a time of public prayer.*

Text.

Justus es, Domine, et omnia judicia tua justa sunt.—Tob. iii. 2.

"Thou art just, O Lord, and all Thy judgments are just."

¹ Nisi conversi fueritis gladium suum vibrabit; arcum suum tetendit, et paravit illum; sagittas suas ardentibus effecit.—Ps. vii. 13, 14.

² Usquequo non quiesces? Ingredere in vaginam tuam, refrigerare, et sile.—Jer. xlvii. 6.

Introduction and Plan of Discourse.

Christians who are here present to-day, I do not now look on you as hearers to whom I have to speak; I will not preach a sermon to day; for our preaching seems only to make matters worse and to render sinners more obstinate and perverse. I only ask of you now to act the part of humble suppliants, and to unite with me in sending up to heaven, to the God who is so angry with us, a short prayer, since time does not permit a longer one.

We are now
in troublous
times.

“Thou art just, O Lord, and all Thy judgments are just.”
After the evils of war with which Thou hast afflicted us in past years, evils which the innocent and the poor have, in accordance with Thy just decrees, felt more keenly than those who deserved to feel them, after so many occasions of fearful sins were taken away by the restoration of the longed-for peace, we might have expected from Thy goodness and mercy better and more prosperous times! And, indeed, O Lord, Thou hast meant well towards us, as we must confess. Thou hast shown us in this present year how Thou art able to bless us with abundance in our fields, orchards, and vineyards; but Thou hast only allowed the mere appearance of prosperity to gladden us for a moment, in order to let us see how generous Thou couldst and wouldst be to us even in temporal things; and every one was rejoiced at the fine prospect. But now the almost incessant rains have nearly ruined our hopes; the grapes in our vineyards commence to rot away, or cannot attain to maturity; the crops in our fields, whether they are still standing or have been cut down, are seriously injured; the poor peasants are in a most wretched state, and, as I have seen myself a short time ago, are trying to still their hunger with corn dried on their stoves, since they have no more bread; while the future threatens to be still worse for them.

It is easy for
God to help
us.

But how is that, O Lord? (Forgive me if I, a miserable worm of the earth, presume to question Thy inscrutable decrees!) Art Thou not Lord over all the waters? Art Thou not the “Lord upon many waters,”¹ as Thy servant David says? Art Thou not He, “who made a weight for the winds, and weighed the waters by measure? who gave a law to the rains and fixed the number of every drop, when He gave a law for the rain, and a way for the sounding storm?”² Art Thou not He who has put bounds to the raging sea, the rushing torrents, and the mighty rivers, within

¹ Dominus super aquas multas.—Ps. xxviii. 3.

² Qui fecit ventis pondus, et aquas appendit in mensura; quando ponebat pluvis legem, et viam procellis sonantibus.—Job. xxviii. 25, 26.

which they must contain themselves, unless Thou commandest them to burst their barriers, as Thou Thyself sayest: "I set My bounds around it, and make it a bar and doors; and I said, hitherto thou shalt come, and shalt go no further, and here thou shalt break thy swelling waves" ? ¹ Art Thou not He who, when Thou pleasest, canst bless us with a fertilizing rain, sifting the clouds as it were, and causing them to send their drops down on the earth according to our wants, "Dropping water out of the clouds of the heavens" ? ² But when Thou wishest to punish us, Thou makest the clouds to pour down torrents, as Thou hast threatened to do by Thy Prophet Ezechiel: "There shall be an overflowing shower, and I will cause great hailstones to fall violently from above, and a stormy wind to throw it down." ³ Art Thou not the same Lord still? And canst Thou not, therefore, shut up the waters in the heavens, and place a barrier to them on earth, that they may be restrained within their boundaries?

Thou hast often done that at the prayer of Thy pious servants. When in former times, the river Po overflowed its banks and threatened to sweep all before it, the holy Bishop of Piacenza, Savinus, wrote a letter and sent it by a priest to the proud river, commanding it in the name of Jesus Christ not to leave its bed any more. ⁴ When the priest had read the letter in the presence of a vast concourse of people, he threw it into the swollen waters, and immediately they subsided, and returned to their former channel. ⁵ On the occasion of that terrible inundation of the sea which took place on the death of the apostate emperor Julian, when the waters rose so high that they seemed to threaten the world with a deluge, as St. Jerome writes, Thy servant Hilarion cried out to Thee, made the sign of the cross three times over the waters, and boldly advancing against the swelling waves, commanded them not to come any further; they instantly obeyed, and remained fixed where they were, although the succeeding billows kept pressing on them, until they formed towers and walls on the top of each other. "Incredible to relate," says St. Jerome, "to what an immense height the waves

As we know
from history.

¹ Circumdedit illud terminis meis, et posui vectem et ostia, et dixi: usque huc ventes, et non procedes amplius, et hic confringes tumentes fluctus tuos.—Job xxxviii. 10, 11.

² Cribrans aquas de nubibus cœlorum.—II. Kings xxii. 12.

³ Erit enim imber inundans, et dabo lapides prægrandes desuper irruentes, et ventum procellæ dissipantem.—Ezech. xliii. 11.

⁴ Præcipio tibi in nomine Jesu Christi, ut de alveo tuo in locis istis uterus non exeat.—Bezerlinck, theatr. v., mirac.

⁵ Et mox inundatio cessavit.

rose before him.”¹ For a long time it seemed to rage and foam against the violent restraint placed on it; but at last it subsided, humbled itself before its holy conqueror, and retreated.² Thou art not now in need of working such miracles, O Lord! Give but a sign to the clouds, and they will at once restrain their torrents, while the sky, that to our great detriment has hitherto been so overcast, will become clear again, and the gladsome sun will refresh the earth, which has been almost stifled beneath the weight of waters.

We pray to
Him and
He does not
hear us.

And why dost Thou not do so? Wilt Thou not hear our mournful prayers and cries? Dost Thou not see the many processions, or hear the piteous supplications that are offered to Thee by the poor villagers, who flock to the churches and cry aloud to Thee for mercy and grace? Thou art a just and at the same time an infinitely good God! Why, then, wilt Thou not hear us? Thou art a faithful God, who canst not deceive us; where, then, is the fulfilment of Thy oft-repeated promise, “Ask and you shall receive. Amen, amen, I say to you, if you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it you”?³ These and many similar promises Thou hast made in favor of him who flies to Thee for refuge and pours out his soul in Thy sight. How much more, then, does not that promise avail for a whole community, a whole country, which calls to Thee in its necessities, in public devotions appointed for that express purpose. Thou hast spoken plainly enough of the efficacy of such prayers in the Gospel of St. Matthew: “Again I say to you that if two of you shall consent upon earth concerning whatsoever they shall ask, it shall be done to them by My Father who is in heaven. For where there are two or three gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.”⁴ Behold, nearly all the people of the land are now gathered together in that way and are united in prayer. On a former occasion, after such a prayer, Thou didst command Thy angels: “Go, ye swift angels, to a nation rent and torn in pieces; to a nation expecting and trodden under foot, whose land the rivers have spoiled.”⁵ Give the same

¹ Incredible dictu est, in quantam altitudinem intumescens mare ante eum steterit.—S. Hieron. in Vita S. Hilariſon.

² Diu fremens, et quasi ad obicem indignans, paulatim in semetipsum relapsus subsidit. Amen, amen, dico vobis, si quid petieritis Patrem in nomine meo, dabit vobis.—John xvi. 23.

⁴ Iterum dico vobis, quia si duo ex vobis consenserint super terram, de omni re quæcumque petierint, fiet illis a Patre meo qui in cælis est. Ubi enim sunt duo vel tres congregati in nomine meo, ibi sum in medio eorum.—Matt. xviii. 19-20.

⁵ Ite angeli veloces ad gentem convulsam et dilaceratam . . . ad gentem expectantem et conculcatam, cujus diripuerunt flumina terram ejus.—Isa. xviii. 2.

command now, since we send up our united petitions to Thee, expecting help and consolation from Thee in our extremity! But Thou dost not hear us.

Yet why do I complain? “Thou art just, O Lord!” And of a certainty Thou hearest more than we deserve. Thou gavest proof of that some months ago, when the priests, at the command of their ecclesiastical superior, recited in the Mass the Collect to avert public calamities; at once and for a long time after Thou didst grant us warm and favorable weather. And last week, after we had commenced to pray to Thee, the sky immediately cleared up and gave us hopes of a good harvest. But we were doomed to disappointment. And why, O Lord? for we still pray to Thee publicly in Thy churches, and implore Thy mercy. But I need not ask Thee, O Lord, for I know the reason already. One hand we stretch out asking for an alms, while with the other we reject the gifts of Thy goodness. We sigh, and pray, and sing to Thee, that Thou mayest restrain the heavy down-pour of rain, while we still leave open the spring from which all the misfortune flows. So it is. “Thou art just, O Lord!” The prayer we have commenced is good; but we do not amend our perverse ways, which are the cause of our tribulations; we do not repent of and avoid the sins and vices which have placed the scourge in Thy hands and compelled Thee to strike us still. We let those simple souls who mean well towards Thee pray to Thee in the churches; the poor and needy peasants may sigh and appeal to Thee in their misery, and beg for the necessaries of life from Thee; but we trouble ourselves little about what they do. If we were even like the heathen people in Ninive, when they were merely threatened with destruction, if we were like the Jews in the time of Esther and Judith, when they were only in danger of misfortune, we should cover ourselves with coarse sack-cloth, put ashes on our heads, mortify our bodies with constant fasting, and detest our sins from our hearts, in order to avert the calamity that threatens us, as those people did in former times with success. If we were like the early Christians, we should under our present circumstances give up all pleasure-parties and social gatherings, and spend our time in the churches, imploring Thy mercy, as the Christians did in the reign of the younger Theodosius. When that emperor saw that the scarcity was increasing, owing to the excessive rains, he caused the trumpets to be sounded and proclamation to be made that the best thing to do was to give up going to thea-

And justly,
for we do
not amend
our lives.

tres and public spectacles, and instead of that to visit the churches, in order to beg for mercy.¹ And at his command the theatres were abandoned and the people flocked to the churches from all quarters, Theodosius himself appearing, clad in mean apparel, without any insignia of his rank, humbling himself amongst the citizens, and raising his hands and his voice, asking for help. When Thou sawest the people thus assembled, after having given up the theatre for the church, Thou didst at once hear their prayers; for they who had come to the church in a torrent of rain went home filled with consolation, the sun shining brightly in the heavens, while the fruitfulness that ensued changed the scarcity into the greatest plenty.² But how do we act now? We persist in our evil ways, and let things go on as they may, as if the misery of the poor were a matter of indifference to us!

God sees
secret vices
and open
dissipation.

But, O all-seeing God, I need not remind Thee of this. Everything is open before Thee; Thou knowest how things go in the world; Thou seest how men act before Thee in their hearts and in their outward behavior. Intolerable pride and inordinate vanity, impurity, gluttony, drunkenness, cursing and swearing, detraction and calumny, contempt for Thy word in sermons, un-Christain training of children, abominable idleness and dissipation—Thou knowest where and how all these vices prevail. Thou seest what sort of lives people lead, even now in these days of penance, when we should come together in Thy churches to implore Thy mercy with united prayers. Wert Thou not all-seeing, so that Thou shouldst have to learn by hearing, the very public streets and squares, the very stones of the houses would cry out to Thee and tell Thee what is done in them. Thou wouldst hear the unchaste songs that make night hideous, the wanton laughter, the never-ceasing din of music, the dancing and dissipation which turn night into day and day into night, and of which Thou hast so often complained by Thy prophets. Thou knowest, too, how many sins are committed in such circumstances in thoughts and desires, in talk and conversation, by looks and laughter, by touch and improper liberties, and how many sins will be committed afterwards in consequence of those dissipations. Nay,—and what a terrible thing to say of Thy Christians!—Thou wilt hear the vain boastings of some who live

¹ *Conducibilis esse, spectaculo repudiato, Deum, qui presentī calamitate eos liberaret precibus placare.*—Nicephor. Hist. Eccles., l. xiv. c. 4.

² *Statim cœlum aërem turbidum serenitate commutavit, et frumenti non mediocrem inopiam ingens frugum copia et ubertas est consecuta.*

in this town (they are foreigners; for I could not imagine any one belonging to Treves to be guilty of such wickedness) and who, as I have been told, openly assert that, as long as the public prayers continue, they will dance and amuse themselves.

O my Lord and my God, hast Thou ever experienced such conduct on the part of Turks and Saracens, when they were ordered to observe days of public prayer and penance in honor of their false prophet Mohammed, to avert impending calamities? Thou knowest that they, as a sign of humiliation and penance, tear their hair with shrieks and howls, beat their faces with their fists, and cut themselves with sharp knives. But in a city consecrated to Thee from ancient times, bedewed with the blood of countless martyrs, honored in a special manner with the title of holy, in the midst of troubles and calamities and in a time appointed for public prayer and penance, Thou must hear from Christians the words, "let others pray if they wish; we shall dance and amuse ourselves!" Whether what I have been told is true or not, Thou knowest, O Lord, if I do not! At all events, the conduct of some shows what their intentions are; for hardly a night passes without some party or other which disturbs the whole neighborhood. Christian parents send, or even bring with them to such parties their daughters; and when Thy pious servants are going to church in the early morning, to pray to Thee and to sing Thy praises, they are just returning from a dance and are about to go to bed, or else to appear in the church to spite others and let them see where they have spent the night. Nor is there any prospect of these dissipations soon coming to an end, for, as I have again been told, similar parties have been arranged for the next three or four nights, so as to fill up the number of the days of prayer. Thou, O Lord, knowest whether this is true or not! Perhaps, while we are here assembled in such large numbers to implore Thy mercy, there are others standing before their mirrors, tricking themselves out for a ball this evening.

Many grow worse instead of doing penance.

But what is the meaning, O Lord, of such conduct? Do not those people seem to be triumphing publicly over the misfortunes of poor, oppressed citizens and peasants? Are they not acting in contempt of ecclesiastical superiors, who in Thy name have appointed those days as a time of penance and prayer? Do they not mock at and ridicule the public devotions and prayers of good Christians? Do they not openly defy Thee, O Lord, at the very moment when Thou art threatening to

It is not to be wondered at if God were to punish us still more severely.

chastise us? "Thou art just, O Lord." Nor am I surprised that Thou dost not hear our prayers; for even little children have their answer ready when they are exhorted to pray fervently. "What is the good of praying," they say, "when those people of the town spend their nights in dancing." But I am surprised at the patience and meekness with which Thou, O Lord, lookest on! I am surprised that Thou art content with chastising us so gently, and that Thou hast not commanded the four elements to combine and destroy us!

And He would do so if He were not restrained by the prayers of the pious.

But I know what restrains Thee. Thou art still the same long-suffering and merciful God who promised the Patriarch Abraham that, if even ten just men were to be found in the wicked city of Sodom, Thou wouldst spare it for their sake; and here Thou hast many of both sexes, nay, I venture to say, the greater part of the population as Thy pious and devout servants, who mean well with Thee, who are resigned to Thy holy will, and seek to appease Thy just anger by their united prayers. It is they who move Thee to pity and prevent Thee from visiting us as sharply as we deserve; it is they who, since Thy justice compels Thee to punish public abuses and scandals in some degree by public chastisements, feel perhaps more acutely than those for whose sins they are punished the calamities that are impending over us. "Thou art just, O Lord!" even in this decree of Thine; for Thou visitest Thy pious servants with misfortune, in order to try their patience, to increase their merit in heaven, and to make sinners more inexcusable before Thy judgment-seat, and their torments in hell more severe, because by their un-Christian mode of life they were the cause of suffering to the innocent. "Thou art just, O Lord, and all Thy judgments are just."

Humble adoration of the justice of God.

What else have we then to do but to resign ourselves humbly to Thy fatherly decrees, and acknowledge our guilt in the words of the Prophet Daniel: "We have sinned; we have committed iniquity, O Lord, against all Thy justice. . . . We have done wickedly and have revolted; and we have gone aside from Thy commandments and Thy judgments. We have not hearkened to Thy servants, the prophets, that have spoken in Thy name."¹ We have laughed at Thy word in which Thou hast warned us and exhorted us to amend our lives as at an idle threat; we have

¹ Peccavimus, iniquitatem fecimus, Domine, in omnem justitiam tuam. . . . Imple egimus, et recessimus, et declinavimus a mandatis tuis ac iudiciis. Non obediimus servis tuis, prophetis, qui locuti sunt in nomine tuo.—Dan. ix. 15, 16, 5, 6.

only become more obstinate, and have said, “now we will show the preacher that we do not mind him.” And now Thou art about to afflict us with calamities; and Thou hast good reason for doing that, for Thou art just, O Lord; we have deserved it a thousand times. “To Thee, O Lord, justice, but to us confusion of face.”¹

But after this humble acknowledgment we venture to persevere in our prayers to Thee: “Incline, O my God, Thy ear, and hear; open Thy eyes and see our desolation, and the city upon which Thy name is called; for it is not for our justifications that we present our prayers before Thy face, but for the multitude of Thy tender mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord be appeased; hearken and do; delay not for Thy own sake, O my God; because Thy name is invoked upon Thy city and upon Thy people;”² for Thy holy name is invoked upon this city and upon Thy people by many pious souls who mean well towards Thee! We beg and implore Thy mercy for those who still continue to provoke Thy anger by their sinful lives, that Thou, as the almighty Ruler, mayest bring them to see the error of their ways, to repent and amend their un-Christian mode of life, so that, being fully appeased, Thou mayest send us what Thou knowest to be the best for our souls. To this end we will now begin, if not with united voices, at least with united and contrite hearts, to sing and sigh to Thee: “Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy.” Amen.

Appeal to
His mercy.

SEVENTY-FOURTH SERMON.

**ON TRUSTFUL PRAYER IN APPARENTLY DESPERATE
CIRCUMSTANCES.**

Subject.

When everything seems to be lost beyond hope of redemption, then is the time for us to put our hope and trust in prayer to God more firmly than ever.—*Preached in the year 1740, during a time of public prayers for a good season.*

¹ Tibi, Domine, justitia, nobis autem confusio faciei.—Dan. ix. 7.

² Inclina, Deus meus, aurem tuam et audi; aperi oculos tuos, et vide desolationem nostram et civitatem super quam invocatum est nomen tuum: neque enim in justificationibus nostris prosternimus preces ante faciem tuam, sed in miserationibus tuis multis. Exaudi Domine, placare Domine; attende et fac; nemoreris propter te metipsum, Deus meus; quia nomen tuum invocatum est super civitatem et super populum tuum.—Ibid. 18-19.

Text.

Ecce non est abbreviata manus Domini, ut salvare nequeat, neque aggravata est auris ejus ut non exaudiat.—Isa. lix. 1.

“Behold, the hand of the Lord is not shortened, that it cannot save, neither is His ear heavy, that it cannot hear.”

Introduction.

But what is the use of praying for favorable weather? The season is over; there is no hope of the wine-crop; most of the vines have been destroyed by the harsh cold of the winter; the remainder have ceased to blossom; the cold nights, the morning mists, and the incessant rain leave us but little hope; the sap drawn up from the earth runs chiefly into wood. What hope, then, is there of the grapes coming to maturity? If we have not a second summer in place of the autumn this year, our wine-crop is gone beyond hope, and the poor people along the Moselle may write it down among their debts and other misfortunes; nay, as matters stand, the prospect for next year is not a whit better. What, then, is the good of prayer under such circumstances? Such, my dear brethren, are the complaints that we hear now and then during this unfavorable weather. But, O ye of little faith! for so I must address you in my displeasure, as Judith addressed the inhabitants of Bethulia, when they were about to surrender to the enemy, in despair of finding help: “Who are you that tempt the Lord? This is not a word that may draw down mercy, but rather that may stir up wrath, and enkindle indignation. You have set a time for the mercy of the Lord, and you have appointed Him a day, according to your pleasure.”¹ Will you, then, set bounds to the almighty power and goodness of God, as if He were obliged to observe seasons? Where is your faith? Where your hope and confidence? No, Christians; “the hand of the Lord is not shortened, that it cannot save” and send us an abundant harvest; “nor is His ear heavy, that it cannot hear” our confiding prayers. And therefore, as Judith advised her fellow-citizens, “Let us humble our souls before Him. . . Let us humbly wait for His consolation.”² But, you object, there is, humanly speaking, no hope of a harvest. I grant you that; and what then? That is no reason for saying that it

¹ Qui estis vos, qui tentatis Dominum? Non est iste sermo qui misericordiam provocet sed potius qui iram excitet et furorem accendat. Posuistis vos tempus miserationis Domini, et in arbitrium vestrum diem constituistis ei.—Jud. viii. 11-13.

² Et ideo humillemus illi animas nostras. . . expectemus humiles consolationem ejus.—Ibid. 16 20.

is too late to pray; it is, on the contrary, as I maintain, a reason for praying all the more fervently and confidently, and for hoping all the more firmly that the year will yet bring us abundant blessings, as I shall now try to prove as briefly as possible.

Plan of Discourse.

When everything seems to be lost beyond hope of redemption, then is the time for us to put our hope and trust in prayer to God more firmly than ever. Therefore we must now persevere fervently in prayer. Such is the whole subject.

Almighty God, who art infinitely faithful to Thy promises, by the intercession of our Mother Mary and of the holy guardian angels we beg of Thee to increase and preserve in us Thy sanctifying grace, and at the same time to grant us a confident hope and child-like trust in Thee in our fervent prayers; and then we shall see that, even when things seem to be in the most desperate state, Thy hand is not shortened.

Nearly every one in the world is encouraged and induced to persevere in his labor by the hope of attaining a good result. The hope of an abundant harvest urges the husbandman to work hard in the sweat of his brow in his fields and vineyards; the hope of victory and booty encourages the soldier in battle, so that he disregards even the imminent danger of death; the hope of temporal gain impels the merchant to travel over sea and land, and to consume his life in constant anxiety and bitter cares; the hope of becoming learned and of making a name some day before the world incites the student to work hard at his books and to undergo the usual discomforts of school life; the hope of regaining health makes the sick man swallow bitter pills and distasteful medicine, although his very nature revolts against them; the hope of procuring their daily bread encourages laborers in their workshops and servants in their employment to work hard every day. All live on and with hope. But this lasts only as long as there are reasonable grounds for expecting that one can obtain what one toils for; for if difficulties are foreseen so great that no labor, or care, or trouble will suffice to overcome them, and there is no prospect of attaining the desired end, then hope disappears, and with it the courage necessary to persevere in one's labor. Such, my dear brethren, is the case when we speak of a natural hope, which is founded on mere natural and human means.

Natural
hope is lost
when the
means of
success are
wanting.

Supernatural hope grows stronger the more hopeless things seem.

But it is quite different with a supernatural hope and with the confidence we should place in God. This latter we should never lose nor allow to decrease; it ought rather to grow stronger the more difficulties and obstacles seem to arise between us and the desired end. Nay, if we find by experience that all the human means we have used up to the present have been to no purpose; if we foresee that they will be of little use in the future, and if, humanly speaking, everything appears lost, then must our supernatural hope and confidence of attaining our end be all the stronger, in spite of the difficulties that lie in our way. And why so? Because this hope is not built on the power or efficacy of human means, nor on one's own labor or diligence, so that whether these latter are able to effect anything or not matters little, but it is founded on the almighty God alone, to whom nothing is impossible, whose might and strength no difficulty can hinder, who by one act of His will can restore things that are utterly despaired of, and who finds it as easy to help when human aid is useless, as He finds it easy to refuse His help when everything, humanly speaking, seems to be going on prosperously. Therefore I can never have reasonable grounds for wavering in such a hope, or for doubting as to a favorable result, although things seem to me to be in a very bad state indeed.

For God is wont to defer helping us, that we may ascribe our success to Him alone.

Nay, I have said that our hope must grow all the firmer on that account. Why? Because it is founded on a God of infinite wisdom and goodness, who is accustomed to help those who trust in Him, especially when natural means are either wanting to them, or are insufficient, and who often refuses His help until matters are in an almost desperate state, that He may see whether we have a firm trust in Him, and also that, after a favorable result has been obtained, we may ascribe the success to His goodness alone. If the Lord were always to grant us favorable weather, according to our wishes, we should often look on such a blessing, not as a special gift of God, but as some effect proceeding from purely natural causes, and we should not thank God for it as we ought; and experience proves the truth of this assertion in other matters as well. After an important law-suit that has terminated favorably for us; if husband, wife, child, or friend recovers from a dangerous illness, which filled us with anxiety; if we escape a sudden danger, or an impending calamity, how do we act? We are filled with joy; we congratulate each other a thousand times; but what thanks or service do we render the divine generosity for the favor received? Do we become more

zealous in the service of God, in the love of our neighbor? more humble and modest in our outward demeanor? more merciful and generous to the poor and needy? more devout in prayer? more diligent in the reception of the sacraments? more reverent in the church? more careful in training up our children in a Christian manner? more conscientious in avoiding dangerous company, and the occasions of sin? more determined in our efforts to shun all, even venial sin? No, indeed! things go on in the old way; hardly do we even offer our sincere thanks to God. This is an evident sign of gross ingratitude, or of a want of due recognition of the benefit received, so that we do not look on it as an effect of the divine goodness. Therefore, I repeat, God often defers helping us; He allows us to toil and labor to no purpose, and waits till things are almost despaired of, so that we cannot expect to succeed by any natural means. Then, if we have not altogether lost hope in Him, He brings the affair to a happy termination, either at once, or little by little, that we may be forced to acknowledge and confess that no one but the almighty God has helped us, and therefore that we owe our thanks and special gratitude to Him alone.

He often acted in that way with His chosen people in the Old Law. When the Israelites were brought by Moses out of Egypt into the Promised Land, they seemed to be at first in the greatest danger of utter destruction; before them was the Red Sea, to whose shore they had to flee from their enemies; on either side of them were high mountains, which they could not cross, and behind them was the cruel Pharaoh, with all his host. They cried out to God for help, says the Scripture: "And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, saw the Egyptians behind them, and they feared exceedingly and cried to the Lord."¹ But the Lord seemed not to hear them, and after having prayed and cried in vain, they found themselves on the shore of the Red Sea, with their enemies close behind them. They thought it was all over with them. Ah, said they to Moses, would that we had remained in Egypt! for now we shall certainly be cut to pieces: "Perhaps there were no graves in Egypt, therefore thou hast brought us out to die in the wilderness. Is not this the word that we spoke to thee in Egypt, saying: Depart from us, that we may serve the Egyptians? for it was much

Proved from
the Old Test-
ament.

¹ Cumque appropinquasset Pharaoh, levantes filii Israel oculos, viderunt Ægyptios post se, et timerunt valde, clamaveruntque ad Dominum.—Exod. xiv. 10.

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better to serve them than to die in the wilderness.”¹ Why do you despair? cried out Moses; do not lose confidence; put your trust in God! He has allowed us to get into this difficulty that He may see whether we trust firmly in Him; the greater the danger, the more evident and glorious will be the proofs of His power; “fear not; stand, and see the great wonders of the Lord, which He will do this day.”² Be not afraid of the multitude of your enemies: “The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace;”³ to your great joy, you shall see the destruction of your enemies. And the event justified those words, for when Moses stretched his rod over the waters, they divided, and allowed the Israelites to pass over dry-shod, while the pursuing enemy was swallowed up before their eyes: “And the waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen of all the army of Pharaoh, who had come into the sea after them, neither did there so much as one of them remain. And the Lord delivered Israel in that day out of the hands of the Egyptians. Then Moses and the children of Israel sung this canticle to the Lord, and said: Let us sing to the Lord, for He is gloriously magnified;”⁴ now we see that the Lord is our strength and our hope: “The Lord is my strength and my praise, and He is become salvation to me; He is my God, I will glorify Him; the God of my father, and I will exalt Him.”⁵ See, my dear brethren, how wonderfully God can help us when all seems lost, and how He thereby wins the thanks and grateful recognition of men.

From the raising of Lazarus, in the Gospel.

How did Christ, Our Saviour, act in the New Law, in order to inculcate on all Christians this confidence in God? Lazarus alone is an evidence of it in the Gospel of St. John. He had fallen dangerously ill; his two sisters, Martha and Mary, knowing that he was a special friend of Our Lord, troubled themselves little about his illness, thinking that they would soon be

¹ Forsitan non erant sepulchra in Ægypto, ideo tulisti nos ut moreremur in solitudine. Nonne isue est sermo, quem loquebamur ad te in Ægypto, dicentes: recede a nobis, ut serviamus Ægyptiis? multo enim melius erat servire eis, quam mori in solitudine.—Exod. xiv. 11, 12.

² Nolite timere; state et videte magnalia Domini, quæ facturus est bodie.—Ibid. 13.

³ Dominus pugnabit pro vobis, et vos tacebitis.—Ibid. 14.

⁴ Reversæque sunt aquæ, et operuerunt currus et equites cuncti exercitus Pharaonis, qui sequentes ingressi fuerant mare; nec unus quidem superfuit ex eis. Liberavitque Dominus in die illa Israel de manu Ægyptiorum. Tunc cecinit Moyses et filii Israel carmen hoc Domino, et dixerunt: cantemus Domino; gloriose enim magnificatus est.—Ibid. 28, 30: xv. 1.

⁵ Fortitudo mea et laus mea Dominus, et factus est mihi in salutem; iste Deus meus, et glorificabo eum; Deus patris mei, et exultabo eum.—Ibid. xv. 2.

able to help him. They sent therefore at once to Christ, saying: "Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick."¹ What did Jesus do? He took no notice, but remained where He was for two days: "When He had heard therefore that he was sick, He still remained in the same place two days."² But why does the merciful Saviour, who is always so willing to help, delay so long, while his dear friend is in danger of death, although He could easily have restored him to health? And in fact Lazarus dies meanwhile, and his sorrowing sisters are disappointed of the hope they placed in their prayers and trust in Christ. Were they really disappointed? No, that cannot be. But Lazarus is already dead. No matter. Of course, a mere natural, human hope must be given up under such circumstances, and therefore, when Martha came to meet Jesus, she said to Him, with tears in her eyes: "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."³ Still, Our Lord delayed and did not enter the house until Mary, the other sister, had appeared and made the same complaint; then at last He asked: "Where have you laid him?"⁴ Here I must again ask, why did not Our Lord go at once, at the first question of Martha? Why did He wait till Mary, too, came up? Because the death of Lazarus was not yet placed beyond the possibility of a doubt, since his corpse had not yet commenced to decay in the grave. If Christ had restored him to health when he was sick, the friends and neighbors would have, as is usual in such circumstances, ascribed his cure to medicines and other natural means, and not to Christ; therefore Our Lord waited till Lazarus was dead. And if He had raised him to life immediately after death, the envious Jews, who were always trying to invent calumnies against Him, would have spread the report that Lazarus was not dead in reality, but had merely fallen into a trance; and so the people would not have thought much of the miracle. But now that Lazarus was four days in the grave, so that his body exhibited unmistakable signs of decay, it was high time to show that the supernatural hope placed in God alone cannot be disappointed; for under the circumstances no one could doubt of the miracle, or ascribe its effect to anything but the power of Christ.

"See how He acts," says St. Peter Chrysologus; "He waits Therefore
we should

¹ Domine, ecce quem amas infirmatur.—John xi. 3.

² Ut ergo audivit quia infirmabatur, tunc quidem mansit in eodem loco duobus diebus.—Ibid. 6.

³ Domine, si fuisses hic, frater meus non fuisset mortuus.—Ibid. 21.

⁴ Ubi posuistis eum?—Ibid. 34.

put our
trust in
God.

till there is no more room for human hope, and till men utterly despair." And why? "In order to show that what He was about to do was divine, not human."¹ Such, too, was the meaning of what Christ said to His disciples while Lazarus was still sick: "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified by it,"² and to show men that they are not to lose confidence, even when things appear to be in a most desperate state. From all this, my dear brethren, we must conclude that we should never lose confidence in God in any calamity or misfortune, nor let it waver in the least; nay, since God allows our troubles to go beyond the limit of human hope, that we may ascribe our subsequent relief from them to His goodness alone, our hope in desperate circumstances should rather increase and become firmer; and consequently in our present state, when, as those of little faith say, there is no human hope of a good harvest, not without reason do we send up our prayers to God; not without reason do we hope and trust that He will hear and grant our petitions.

We have
often expe-
rienced the
help of God,
when we
thought all
was lost.

Have we not often experienced the help of God in a wonderful manner in similar circumstances? How often has it not occurred that we were all in the greatest trouble with regard to the harvest, either on account of the drought, or of the long-continued rains; but hardly had we commenced public prayers, when we obtained from heaven either the wished-for rain, or favorable weather? Even now we have evident proof of this. A few days ago public prayers were commanded by ecclesiastical authority, and on the following Thursday the sky brightened up at once, so that the good God seemed to hear our prayers before we had well commenced them. What think you of this, O ye of little faith? Is our prayer of no use, or too late?

Especially
of late
years.

Go back now in thought to the spring of this year. If any one had then said to us, even in the middle of the month of May, rejoice, good people! as far as our vineyards, fields, and orchards are concerned, we shall have an abundant year; there will be no want of vegetables, fruit, hay, barley, and wheat; would we not all have laughed at him as a false prophet? Were we not then in despair about these crops? Alas, we said, what misery stares us in the face! Everything was frozen up during the

¹ Videtis quemadmodum agit, ut humana spes tota pereat, tota vis mundanae desperatio nis accedat. Quatenus quod facturus est, divinum sit, non humanum.—S. Pet. Chrysol. serm. lxxiii.

² Infirmitas hæc non est ad mortem, sed pro gloria Dei, ut glorificetur Filius Dei per eam.—John xi. 4.

winter, and the winter seems to continue into the middle of spring; there is no promise of a summer; the crops and fruit are destroyed; we dare not hope for a wine crop; famine and scarcity are before our doors. Such were our lamentations. And in truth we had no better prospects at the time. Nevertheless, we now see before our eyes, thanks be to God for it! what we never dared to hope for during the spring, vegetables, fruit, corn: and everything we have in abundance. And when did the weather begin to change for the better? Was it not after we had begun public prayers in the churches? Where are you now, O ye of little faith? Do you still think our prayer useless and too late? Truly, my dear brethren, when I reflect on the wonderful events of this year, and consider them seriously, I am forced to say that the good God has wrought a miracle, so to speak, in favor of our country and especially of the archdiocese of Treves. For we have already seen how, when winter crops fail, there is the greatest misery in the land, a great scarcity of bread-stuffs, and almost a famine amongst the people; and that was the case even when we could buy corn from the neighboring countries, that had not suffered as we had. Now, this year, nearly over the whole world, and in the neighboring countries, according to report, fruitful as they are otherwise, there are lamentations everywhere on account of the failure of the harvest, and the scarcity of corn, a scarcity that has continued in some places up to the present time. Now the places from which we were used to draw our supplies are closed to us, in great part, and yet, who would believe it? we have not in this archdiocese experienced any extraordinary difficulty in finding corn or other necessaries of life, so that foreigners who have come into the country are surprised, and think that, in comparison with other places, it is a paradise; and when they find that bread can be had so cheaply at the bakers' shops, they exclaim with gratitude: "God be praised! in Treves, at all events, we can have a bit of bread to eat." Infinite thanks to Thee, O God of goodness! Thy faithful servants, who are here assembled, have no doubt by their fervent prayers obtained that extraordinary blessing from Thee.

From this, my dear brethren, I draw the following conclusion: if the Lord permits us to fall into the extreme of want, so that we may afterwards more readily ascribe our relief to Him, if God has helped us already in such a wonderful manner when our state seemed to be desperate, can we now think that His al-

Therefore
God can and
will help us
now, al-
though
things seem

to be in a
hopeless
state.

mighty hand is shortened, so that He is unable to help us in our present wants, great as they are and beyond all human hope of relief? If the good God has so often assisted us when we began our public prayers to Him, can we believe that He has now closed His ears, and that He is deaf to our petitions?

Unless our
sins prevent
Him.

But if He is really unwilling to hear us, truly I know the reason! For it is none other than that which the Prophet Isaias adds after the words of my text, "The hand of the Lord is not shortened that it cannot save, neither is His ear heavy that it cannot hear;" He is not wanting in power or goodness to help us. What, then, is the cause? "But your iniquities have divided between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He should not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, and your tongue uttereth iniquity. There is none that calleth upon justice, neither is there any one that judgeth truly. Their works are unprofitable works, and the work of iniquity is in their hands. Their feet run to evil."¹ Truly, my dear brethren, herein lies the whole difficulty. Such was the meaning of the question that the Prophet Baruch asked the Israelites when they were dragged away from their native land as captives into Assyria: "How happened it, O Israel, that thou art in thy enemies' land,"² and that thou art now a captive? I will tell thee: "Thou hast forsaken the fountain of wisdom."³ Thou hast abandoned God, and forgotten His commandments. "For if thou hadst walked in the way of God, thou hadst surely dwelt in peace forever."⁴ I might address the same question and the same reproof to many countries at the present time. Why do the heavens seem so unmerciful to you? Why do you sigh and pray to God for favorable weather, without being heard by Him? Do you wish to know why? You have forsaken the fountain of wisdom; you are not yet resolved to amend your lives; for if you were you would find the heavens more favorable to you. Therefore, sinners, be converted to God by true penance; change your lives for the better; and when

¹ Sed iniquitates vestrae diviserunt inter vos et Deum vestrum, et peccata vestra absconderunt faciem ejus a vobis, ne exaudiret. Manus enim vestrae pollutae sunt sanguine, et digiti vestri iniquitate. Labia vestra locuta sunt mendacium, et lingua vestra iniquitatem factetur. Non est qui invocet justitiam, neque est qui judicet vere. Opera eorum opera inutilia, et opus iniquitatis in manibus eorum. Pedes eorum ad malum currunt.—Isa. lix. 2, 3, 4, 6, 7.

² Quid est, Israel, quod in terra inimicorum es?—Bar. iii. 10.

³ Dereliquisti fontem sapientiae.—Ibid. 12.

⁴ Nam si in via Dei ambulasses, habitasses utique in pace sempiterna.—Ibid. 13.

you have done that, unite with just and pious Christians in fervent prayer, and you will see that our prayers are neither useless nor too late; and let us all be on our guard not to disturb the order of Providence by mistrust and want of faith, lest the Lord should withhold the blessings He has prepared for us, provided we fly to His fatherly care with child-like confidence.

O almighty, infinitely good, and most generous God, we know of no refuge but in Thy mercy! We see no human or natural means of obtaining relief in our present necessities! But for that very reason we trust all the more in Thy almighty hand, which is not shortened, and which can still pour down abundant blessings on us. For that very reason we trust all the more in Thy goodness, which is not lessened, and which will be ready to hear our united prayers. But perhaps it is our sins that prevent Thy blessing from coming down upon our land? If such is the case, we humbly acknowledge our guilt; with contrite hearts we repent of and detest all that has hitherto displeased Thee in our conduct, and make a firm resolution of serving Thee in future with all the greater zeal. With contrite hearts, then, and this firm purpose, we now stretch forth our hands to Thee in heaven; to Thee we address our united prayers, and implore Thy divine blessing, confident and assured that, if it is for the good of our souls, Thou wilt hear our prayer, so that, in addition to the many wonderful effects of Thy goodness that we have already experienced, we may have now a new reason to praise, to love, and to bless Thee as our sovereign Benefactor here in time and hereafter in eternity. Amen.

Conclusion
and confident
appeal
to God.

SEVENTY-FIFTH SERMON.

ON THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER TO ST. SEBASTIAN IN DANGER
OF WAR AND IN OTHER CALAMITIES.

Subject.

At the present time we have special reason for appealing to St. Sebastian, as a helper in all necessities.—*Preached on the feast of St. Sebastian, in the year 1727.*

Text.

Voca ergo, si est qui tibi respondeat, et ad aliquem sanctorum convertere.—Job v. 1.

“Call now if there be any that will answer thee, and turn to some of the saints.”

Introduction.

Such was the comfort that Eliphaz gave his friend Job when the latter, abandoned by all and full of misery, was sitting on the dunghill, sighing forth: “The arrows of the Lord are in me, the rage thereof drinketh up my spirit, and the terrors of the Lord war against me.”¹ Unhappy man, said Eliphaz to him, since there is nothing but suffering for you wherever you turn, and the Lord seems to have abandoned you and to have taken up arms against you, then turn your eyes elsewhere, let your voice be heard in some other quarter: “Call now if there be any that will answer thee, and turn to some of the saints.” The feast that we celebrate to-day, my dear brethren, has suggested those words to me as a text fitting the troublous times in which we live. O city of Treves! “Call now if there be any that will answer thee, and turn to some of the saints,” so would I wish to address thee, if I did not see that thou hast already turned to one of the saints, and art imploring his help on bended knees. Yet, in order to encourage thee to persevere in that most advantageous work of devotion, I repeat—

Plan of Discourse.

Just reason hast thou now for appealing to one of the saints, and especially to thy holy patron, St. Sebastian. Such is the whole subject of this panegyric. Therefore call on that saint, but with pure and repentant hearts, if you wish to be heard by him. Such will be the conclusion.

O powerful advocate, holy St. Sebastian! I, too, offer up my petition to thee; give me some of the eloquence with which thou didst during thy life on earth move the minds of men to love God and to persevere in the faith, that I may be able to promote devotion to thee and confidence in thy help in the minds of some at least, and that we may all be induced to do true penance and to amend our lives! Help us herein, O holy angels, and thou especially, Mary, Queen of Martyrs.

We are now
in danger of
a great and
general cal-
amity.

No matter how abandoned a man may be, unless he has lost his senses, or has fallen into despair, he looks out for some means of help when he is threatened with a great danger. In what

¹ Sagittæ Domini in me sunt, quarum indignatio ebibit spiritum meum, et terrores Domini militant contra me.—Job vi. 4.

state are we now, my dear brethren? In what sort of times do we live? We have no difficulty in answering that question; sad experience teaches us plainly enough. But what is in store for us in the future? That we do not yet know; we hope for the best and fear the worst; but we have little ground for hope, while our fears appear to be only too well founded. Indeed, I might hold my tongue and let you yourselves speak. Your hands that you stretch forth in public and united prayer during these days; your knees that are bent before the altars; the fasting and abstinence that you offered up to God yesterday as a sign of humiliation; the alms and penance to which preachers exhort you, all these things show forth that a calamity threatens our land, and that it is well worth our while to try to appease the wrath of God in order to avert it. "The terrors of the Lord war against me," we might say with the afflicted Job. Moreover, the signs and terrible portents of impending danger that are to be seen in the heavens speak plainly, too. There are some who look on them as forerunners of famine, pestilence, or war. Be that as it may, for I do not understand anything of prophecy; experience, at all events, tells us that such signs are seldom followed by anything good. What do people see, and hear, and speak of in the world? From all sides comes the news of warlike preparations. On all sides the minds of Christian potentates appear to be embittered against each other. Everywhere recruiting is carried on, arms are prepared, and, if that is true which is written, spoken of, threatened, and feared, the whole of Europe will soon be in a blaze, and along with war, we shall have its inseparable companions to expect, namely, a number of other evils and miseries.

Deplorable, O Treves, will thy state be, if God does not inspire certain potentates to unite their forces and to avert the worst horrors of war from thee! For who would have more to suffer than thou? Who would feel the burden more heavily, for thou art generally the first to suffer? We know well how that land fares which has to support the enemy in its midst. Many and many a time hast thou had experience of it. What wert thou formerly? What wouldst thou now be, if the burden of war had not pressed on thee so heavily? To say nothing of ancient times, how often dost thou not now turn thy tearful eyes to the years 1673-74-75, and the first years of the present century? Nor are the wounds thou didst receive in the wars then yet healed; the teeth of many children are still set on edge by the bitter mor-

Which will be particularly severe for us.

sels their fathers had to swallow. The broken bridge over the Moselle, the convents and churches burnt and plundered, the sad traces, near at hand, too, of conflagration and plunder, of the passage of a rude soldiery, of the contributions and taxes levied on an exhausted land, speak eloquently of the evils that war has caused thee. But to no purpose do I renew thy sorrow by recalling such sad events to thy memory, for, as it is, thou hast enough to sadden thee. Unhappy Treves, I say again, if fresh calamities are in store for thee, in addition to those which thou hast suffered already and of which thou still feelest the smart.

We have reason, then, for appealing to heaven for help.

Good reason hast thou, therefore, while the terrors of the Lord menace thee with new evils, and make war against thee, to look carefully around thee to see if there be any means of securing help. "Call now if there be any that will answer thee." Let thy sighs and prayers ascend to heaven, from which alone advice and help can be expected, for there is no hope elsewhere; nay, without whose assistance all other means must come to naught. Fly to the Lord of heaven for refuge, for He has the hearts of all potentates in His hands; in a moment He can change their plans, confound their might, and protect thee when thy condition seems most desperate, and even raise thee up whilst thou art in the very act of falling. And this is what the gracious Lord seeks by His threats and terrors, or rather I should call them the warnings of His goodness and mercy. For by those threats and terrible signs of His wrath He gives us to understand that it is not always His intention to punish and actually to smite us, but rather to warn and exhort us to appeal to Him and His saints with humble and penitent hearts, and thus to wrest out of His hand the rod He has seized to strike us.

For God is wont to help us at the intercession of His saints.

"Turn to some of the saints." In the Fourth Book of Kings we read that the kings of Israel, Juda, and Edom entered into an alliance against the Moabites. While on the march they came with their three great armies to a dry, desert place, in which there was no water for men, or horses, or beasts of burden. What were they to do? Joram, the king of Israel, began at once to lose heart and to complain of God, as if He were the cause of the misfortune: "And the king of Israel said: Alas, alas, alas, the Lord hath gathered us three kings together, to deliver us into the hands of Moab."¹ Truly, a foolish complaint! as if one could find water by giving way to despair, and appease

¹ Dixitque rex Israel; heu, heu, heu, congregavit nos Dominus tres reges, ut traderet in manus Moab.—IV. Kings lii. 10.

God by not being resigned to His will! Josaphat, the king of Juda, had better ideas, that were more becoming his piety; his advice was to appeal to some prophet, who by his prayers might obtain the necessary help from God. "And Josaphat said: is there not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may beseech the Lord by him? And one of the servants of the king of Israel answered: Here is Eliseus, the son of Saphat, who poured water on the hands of Elias." ¹ Mark, my dear brethren, the connection between those two things, pouring water on the hands of Elias, and obtaining water from heaven. Why did they hope for the latter through the prayers of Eliseus? The commentators of holy Scripture answer by saying that, since Eliseus had faithfully served Elias, who had obtained water at the request of king Achab, there was good reason for hoping that, if Eliseus prayed to his former master, he would obtain by his intercession the water they were so much in need of. And the event justified their expectations. "Thus saith the Lord," said the Prophet to them: "you shall not see wind nor rain; and yet this channel shall be filled with waters, and you shall drink, you and your families, and your beasts." ² There you have an example of how we, too, should act in our present circumstances. It is by the saints in heaven that God wishes to dispense His graces, not that He cannot do that immediately of Himself, but to make known their glory to the world, as they honored and served Him during their lives on earth. And this is the teaching of St. Thomas: "By their means divine charity produces its effects in us." ³ They are the mediators between Christ and men, who by their prayers free us from our necessities; and therefore for every trial and misfortune God has appointed one of His saints as our patron and deliverer. "Call now if there be any that will answer thee, and turn to some of the saints." Turn thy eyes, O Treves, heavenwards, and see if there be any one there who will answer thee and come to thy aid.

But what am I saying? If there be any one there who will aid thee? Thou certainly hast thy patron saints in heaven, and amongst countless others even the very one before whose altar you are now assembled, to renew your vows in His honor, ac-

*His patron
saints are our
helper in all
necessities.*

¹ Et ait Josaphat: estne hic propheta Domini, ut deprecemur Dominum per eum? Et respondit unus de servis regis Israel: est hic Eliseus, filius Saphat, qui fundebat aquam super manus Eliae.—IV. Kings iii. 11.

² Hæc dicit Dominus: non videbitis ventum, neque pluviam, et alveus iste replebitur aquis, et bibetis vos, et familie vestrae, et jumenta vestra.—Ibid. 17.

³ Per eos divina charitas in nos suum effectum infundit.

ording to the rules of your celebrated confraternity, and to offer Him your sincere thanks, namely, the glorious martyr St. Sebastian. It is well known all over the world that he is a powerful protector against pestilence; that we all have just reason for imploring his help with confidence in all other necessities and dangers, I will prove on another occasion. But it is not only from pestilence that St. Sebastian can protect us; the Lord has given to this faithful servant of His a special power, that few saints have, namely, of helping in every necessity. Therefore some maintain that God allowed him to be set up as a target for arrows, that the world might have a protector and patron who by his powerful intercession would intercept all the arrows of the divine anger, an anger which the Prophet David likens to a bow. "Except you will be converted, He will brandish His sword; He hath bent His bow and made it ready. And in it He hath prepared the instruments of death, He hath made ready His arrows for them that burn."¹ Not without reason does the Catholic Church appoint for this feast that part of the Gospel of St. Luke, "And all the multitude sought to touch Him: for virtue went out from Him, and healed all."²

Shown from
miracles
wrought by
his interces-
sion.

There is hardly a nation in Europe that does not acknowledge its obligations to this Saint; there is no illness, or other evil, no matter what its name may be, whether public or private, against which he is not invoked, against which he has not already often stretched out his powerful hand. Do you wish to have a proof of this? Read the Bollandists, who have compiled the life of this Saint from the most ancient documents and records, and you may read for hours proofs of his wonderful power, which time does not allow me to quote for you. In former times, to enter a church dedicated to St. Sebastian, to venerate his relics, or merely to touch with reverence and confidence a cloth that had been applied to them, was enough to give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, soundness of limb to cripples, to cleanse lepers, free those possessed of the devil, and restore hope and courage to the despairing. Many miracles of the kind have been wrought at Piacenza, where some of his bones were brought, and at Soissons, in France, where they rest. "So powerful is this Saint," says the historian, "in relieving all kinds of necessities, that no one could understand the number

¹ Nisi conversi fueritis, gladium suum vibrabit; arcum suum tetendit et paravit illum, et in eo paravit vasa mortis; sagittas suas ardentibus effecit.—Ps. vii. 13, 14.

² Et omnis turba querebat eum tangere; quia virtus de illo exibat, et sanabat omnes.—Luke vi. 19.

of miracles wrought by him, or relate them in words; and the multitude of people who flock to his shrine resemble a swarm of locusts and fill the neighboring towns.”¹

As far as the dangers of war in particular are concerned, the pious hero Eberhard, when he was besieged in a castle by the Hungarians and was deprived of all hope of human aid, by the mere invocation of St. Sebastian was enabled, not only to keep off the enemy, but also to overcome them with great slaughter. Maximilian, duke of Bavaria, being reduced to the greatest straits, had to fly before his enemies and to abandon everything to them; but he caused the relics of St. Sebastian to be carried into the camp, as the Israelites of old did the Ark of the Covenant, and thereby he was enabled to save his own life and that of his troops. The emperor Louis, surnamed the Pious, describes how he experienced immediate relief and assistance at the intercession of the holy Martyr; for when some of his soldiers and his own sons rebelled against him and expelled him from the throne, he besought St. Sebastian to help him, making the usual vow in his honor, and it is to his intercession that he ascribed his restoration to the throne; the same Saint also revealed to him the day of his death. Many cities, especially Rome, Milan, and Soissons, look on St. Sebastian as their deliverer from destruction. In the latter place, as some of its inhabitants assure us, there were heard some time ago, throughout the town and in the neighboring villages, terrible cries and a voice announcing a threefold woe, threatening the town with the fate of Sodom; these cries proceeded from the top of a certain tower; the people attribute it to the powerful intercession of their holy patron St. Sebastian that this threat was not carried into execution, as you may see in detail in the second volume of the Bollandists, under the date of January the 20th.

I am not astonished, then, to find that the honor and glory of this great Saint is spread so widely over the world. Truly, none of the holy martyrs is held in greater reverence and is more generally honored than St. Sebastian. There is hardly a Catholic town to be found which has not at least his picture in the churches or in public streets. Both towns and the country districts, as the Bollandists testify, seemed to vie with each other, when his name came first to be known and venerated, in procuring a relie

He is a special helper in the dangers of war.

And therefore is honored as a patron almost over the whole world.

¹ *Tanta virtutum vis in omni genere sanitarum in nomine ejusdem beatissimi martyris emicuit, ut a nullo mortalium eorundem miraculorum aut numerus comprehendere, aut varias verbis valeat enuntiari. --Bolland. in vita.*

of him. Those that succeeded in obtaining even a small particle of his bones looked on it as the most precious treasure, which they were ready to defend at the risk of their lives; and lately the Holy See has declared him the patron and protector of the Catholic Church, to whom she is to fly in all her troubles and necessities, imploring his help in the following prayer: "Giant, O Lord, that amid the trials that we suffer for our sins we may obtain, by the intercession of Thy Blessed Martyr Sebastian, that which our confidence cannot procure for us."¹

Therefore
he can help
us now.

Since that is the case, my dear brethren, we have a well-grounded hope and confidence that, in spite of the dangers that threaten us, we shall in reality have nothing to fear. Let us only continue with renewed fervor the devotion we have begun in honor of this mighty intercessor, who is so powerful with God. If he undertakes to protect our city, and to defend it with the arrows that pierced him, we shall be far safer from the attacks of the enemy and from the ravages of pestilence than we should be in the strongest fortress. "Behold, the hand of the Lord is not shortened that it cannot save," says the Prophet Isaias of the almighty God; the same might be said of our holy Martyr; his power with the Lord is not lessened, that he cannot help us. He who has freed so many thousands from calamity, and so many cities and countries from destruction, can help us, too, in our necessities, and avert from us, by his intercession, what we fear. And why should he not help us as well as others, if he finds that we are equally devoted to him, and have equal confidence in him? We are children of the Catholic Church, whose patron he has been named by Pope Caius. There is no doubt about it; he can and will help us, if there is nothing on our side to prevent him; for the same God is still in heaven, and He is as willing now as ever to hear the prayers of His saints.

And ap-
pease the
anger of
God against
us.

Is God, perhaps, angry with us on account of our sins, and is it on that account that He has drawn His sword of vengeance and threatened us with grievous afflictions? But He is at the same time a God of infinite mercy, who is easily appeased, and who, as I have told you before, threatens us, that we may have time to look about us for the means of escaping punishment. Angry as He was with the friends of Job, yet He referred them to one who by his intercession would obtain mercy and pardon for them: "My wrath is kindled against thee," said He to Eli-

¹ Ut inter adversa quæ pro delictorum debito sustinemus, quod fiducia nostra non obtinet, beati Martyris tui Sebastiani intercessione consequamur.

phaz, "and against thy two friends, because you have not spoken the thing that is right before Me. Take unto you, therefore, seven oxen and seven rams, and go to My servant Job, and offer for yourselves a holocaust: and My servant Job shall pray for you: his face I will accept, that your folly be not imputed to you."¹ Imagine that the Lord now speaks to us in the same way, my dear brethren. My anger is kindled against you; great misfortunes are hanging over you, and are now near at hand; yet go to My servants, turn to some of My saints, fly with confidence to Sebastian, and offer sacrifice: he will pray for you; his face I will receive, that the punishments impending over you on account of your sins may not be inflicted on you. "Offer for yourselves a holocaust;" that you do when you assemble every week before the altar of that great servant of God, and assist at the august sacrifice of the Mass. Oh, would that the example of this confraternity inspired all with a similar devotion!

Go, then, all of you, to My servant, for the danger threatens all; offer a holocaust; but take heed that your sacrifice is united with the inward sacrifice of the soul, that, namely, of which My Prophet David says to Me: "A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit; a contrite and humble heart, O God, thou wilt not despise,"² that is, a heart filled with sorrow for its sins, a heart that is cleansed from sin. If that is wanting, exterior works of devotion and recourse to the saints will avail nothing. "For this," says the Psalmist, "shall every one that is holy pray to Thee, in a seasonable time."³ That is, according to Cardinal Hugo, "when one firmly purposes to abandon sin."⁴ If we neglect to do this, the same fate shall befall us as that with which God threatened Moab by the Prophet Isaias: "He shall go into his sanctuaries to pray and shall not prevail."⁵ The wicked shall appear in My churches, prostrate themselves before My altars, and implore the intercession of My saints; but they shall implore in vain; they shall, to their great grief, experience the effects of My anger and shall feel the blows of My rod.

Let us go back in thought to the kings of whom I have already

We must appeal to him, then, but at the same time we should repent and amend.

Otherwise the saints

¹ Iratus est furor meus in te, et in duos amicos tuos, quoniam non estis locuti coram me rectum. Sumite ergo vobis septem tauros et septem arietes, et ite ad servum meum Job, et offerite holocaustum pro vobis; Job autem servus meus orabit pro vobis; faciem ejus suscipiam, ut non vobis imputetur stultitia.—Job. xlii. 7, 8.

² Sacrificium Deo spiritus contribulatus: cor contritum et humiliatum, Deus, non despicies.—Ps. l. 19.

³ Pro hac orabit ad te omnis sanctus, in tempore opportuno.—Ps. xxxi. 6.

⁴ Cum homo habet propositum relinquendi peccata.

⁵ Ingrederetur ad sancta sua, ut obsecret, et non valebit.—Isa. xvi. 12.

will speak
against us,
and not for
us.

spoken, and who were suffering from want of water; they humbled themselves before the Prophet Eliseus; they went to the servant of God and cast themselves at his feet: "And the king of Israel, and Josaphat, king of Juda, and the king of Edom went down to him."¹ So do we, too, act, to obtain the help of the saints in our grievous necessities; we humble ourselves before them; lords and ladies, the gentle and simple, all bend the knee and honor the statues and relics of the saints. But will that humiliation of ours be acceptable if we come to them as enemies of God, in the state of sin? Joram, the king of Israel, was the first of the three to address the Prophet, and what answer did he get? "And Eliseus said to the king of Israel: What have I to do with thee? go to the prophets of thy father and thy mother," whom you have hitherto thought so much of: "As the Lord of hosts liveth, in whose sight I stand, if I did not reverence the face of Josaphat, king of Juda, I would not have hearkened to thee, nor looked on thee."² Such is perhaps the answer that our holy patrons give us, when we appeal to them without amending our lives; what have I to do with thee? Go to those from whom you are wont to ask advice; go to the coffers you have filled with the proceeds of injustice and usury; go to the object of your impure passion, whom you have thought of even in the church, before our very altars; go to those for whose sake you violate the law of God; let them help you if they can. Eliseus did obtain the water for the three kings; but it was at the request of the just Josaphat and not for the sake of the two others, although they humbled themselves before him. In the same way, if we are sometimes helped in our necessities by the intercession of the saints, we owe that to pious Christians, who have procured that benefit for us by their fervent prayers. It often happens, too, that God will not allow the saints to intercede for those who do not submit to Him with contrite and humbled hearts. When the people of Juda were in difficulties, He expressly forbade the Prophet Jeremias to pray for them: "Pray not for this people for their good. When they fast, I will not hear their prayers; and if they offer holocausts and victims, I will not receive them; for I will consume them by the sword,

¹ Descenditque ad eum rex Israel, et Josaphat, rex Juda, et rex Edom.—IV. Kings iii. 12.

² Dixit autem Eliseus ad regem Israel: quid mihi et tibi est? vade ad prophetas patris tui et matris tue. Vivit Dominus exercituum, in cujus conspectu sto, quod si non vultum Josaphat, regis Judæ, erubescerem, non attendissem quidem te, nec respexissem.—Ibid. 13, 14.

and by famine, and by the pestilence.”¹ Nay, sometimes the saints actually beg of God to punish us until we repent of our sins. In the reign of Achab, king of Israel, the people suffered from a severe drought, for not a drop of rain had fallen during three years and a half.² Imagine the state of the people and of the country under those circumstances. In those days the Prophet Elias was on earth, and he was looked on as the only one who could wrest the rod of chastisement out of the hand of God. The king sought him everywhere, even outside the kingdom, and the search was so accurate that Abdias, the governor whom the king had entrusted with it, was able to affirm on oath that there was not any country in which he had not been to look for the Prophet: “As the Lord thy God liveth,” said he to Elias, “there is no nation or kingdom whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee.”³ And yet Elias was the very one who, to compel the people to do penance for their sins, had prayed to God for that long and grievous drought; nor did he himself escape suffering, as well as the others, from that calamity, as we read in the Epistle of St. James: “Elias was a man passible like unto us, and with prayer he prayed that it might not rain upon the earth, and it rained not for three years and six months.”⁴ At last Elias prayed for rain, and obtained it: “And he prayed again: and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.”⁵ But when did he do so? When the false prophets of Baal had been duly punished, and the people had repented: “Take the prophets of Baal,” said the zealous man of God, “and let not one of them escape. And when they had taken them, Elias brought them down to the torrent Cison, and killed them there.”⁶ The people meanwhile had prostrated themselves on the ground, filled with sorrow for their sins: “And when all the people saw this, they fell on their faces and they said: The Lord He is God; the Lord He is God.”⁷ Then Elias went to

¹ Noli orare pro populo isto in bonum. Cum jejunaverint, non exaudiam preces eorum, et si obtulerint holocaustomata et victimas, non suscipiam ea, quoniam gladio, et fame, et peste consumam eos.—Jerem. xiv. 11, 12.

² Non pluit annos tres et menses sex.—James v. 17.

³ Vivit Dominus Deus tuus, quia non est gens aut regnum, quo non miserit Dominus meus, te requirrens.—III. Kings xviii. 10.

⁴ Elias homo erat similis nobis passibilis: et oratione oravit, ut non plueret super terram, et non pluit annos tres et menses sex.—James v. 17.

⁵ Et rursus oravit, et cœlum dedit pluviam, et terra dedit fructum suum.—Ibid. 18.

⁶ Apprehendite prophetas Baal, et ne unus quidem effugiat ex eis. Quos cum apprehendissent, duxit eos Elias ad torrentem Cison, et interfecit eos ibi.—III. Kings xviii. 40.

⁷ Quod cum vidisset omnis populus, cecidit in faciem suam et ait: Dominu ipse est Deus, Dominus ipse est Deus.—Ibid. 39.

Mt. Carmel and prayed for rain: "And there fell a great rain."¹ My dear brethren, God is now threatening us with misfortunes and calamities; we run to the churches to implore the help of our holy patrons; but how can we rely on them if we continue obstinately in our sins; for we have just reason to fear that the saints themselves will pray to God to afflict us, that we may be induced to amend. Therefore let us first get our sins out of the way, and have recourse to true penance; then we can have an assured confidence that the saints will help us by their mighty intercession.

And we
should re-
pent at
once.

Nor should we delay about this, nor wait till we feel the rod on our shoulders. That was the folly of which Pharaoh was guilty; he saw the frogs and vermin that filled the country; he saw the rivers and springs running blood, so that his subjects were forced to dig for water to cook and to quench their thirst; he knew well that, if he obeyed the command of God, Moses and Aaron would appease the divine anger by their prayers, and free the land from the plagues that were harassing it; yet he foolishly persisted in his obstinacy, and although he felt the stripes, he refused to submit. Driven at last to desperation, he had recourse to the two powerful intercessors and promised to obey the command of God. "But Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron, and said to them: Pray ye to the Lord to take away the frogs from me and from the people: and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the Lord."² "Set me a time," said Moses to him, "when I shall pray for thee. And he answered: to-morrow."³ One might think that Pharaoh looked on the plagues as blessings, since he did not ask to be freed from them at once. Foolish man! should you not rather have said: pray for me at once to the Lord, that He may free me from this plague, and I will immediately obey Him, and let His people go? Christians, while we wonder at the folly of this king, do we not condemn our own? For do we not act as he did, when we feel the pressure of misfortune? God wishes us to turn to Him, to amend our wicked ways, and to obey His law in all things; and we have recourse to the saints and beg and implore of them to help us, promising at the same time to do penance. But when is the penance to be done? When are we to amend our lives? To-morrow, at some future time. And thus we defer repentance until the punishment has

¹ Et facta est pluvia grandis.—III. Kings xviii. 45.

² Vocavit autem Pharaoh Moysen et Aaron, et dixit eis: orate Dominum ut auferat ranas a me, et a populo meo; et dimittam populum, ut sacrificet Domino.—Exod. viii. 8.

³ Constitue mihi, quando deprecer pro te. Qui respondit, cras.—Ibid. 9, 10.

actually overtaken us. No, not to-morrow, nor at some future time, but at once, without delay, we must do penance, if we are in earnest about averting the punishment.

And such is now our intention, O just and merciful God! Conclusion
and prayer
to avert
calamity.
“Behold, Thou art angry, and we have sinned.”¹ We have deserved the rod, that we cannot deny; but restrain Thy hand.

“Be not very angry, O Lord, and remember no longer our iniquity; behold, see, we are all Thy people.”² We are now ready to detest our sins. We cast ourselves with contrite hearts at Thy feet, firmly purposing to amend our ways. Cast Thine eyes on Thy servant Sebastian, through whose merits and intercession we implore Thy mercy, and for his sake turn away from us the danger that threatens us, a danger that, we have every reason to dread, will be much worse after a time, but which in any case we must acknowledge we have richly deserved. Save and protect us, who fly for refuge to Thee and Thy saints; and we shall be able to fulfil what Christ said to His disciples: “When you shall hear of wars and seditions, be not terrified;”³ if nations and kingdoms war against each other; if famine and pestilence menace the world; if signs and portents are seen in the heaven; be not terrified. No, O God, we shall not be terrified, if Thou art with us! As long as we are under the protection of our powerful patron, we shall have nothing to fear, even if half the world were to take up arms against us; for we believe that to be true which Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, when he was about to attack the enemy: “It is easy for the Lord to save either by many or by few.”⁴ O holy St. Sebastian, powerful intercessor, and, as we believe with child-like confidence, special patron of this city and country! to thee we present our humble petition in our trouble and necessity; cease not to pray for those who, as long as they live, will, as they now unanimously promise, work zealously and constantly for God’s honor and thine. Amen.

For several Panegyrics on St. Sebastian, see the following Sixth Part.

¹ Ecce tu iratus es, et peccavimus.—Isa. lxiv. 5.

² Ne frastearis, Domine, satis, et ne ultra memineris iniquitatis nostræ; ecce respice, populus tuus omnes nos.—Ibid. 9.

³ Cum autem audieritis prælia et seditiones, nolite terreri.—Luke xxi. 9.

⁴ Non est Domino difficile salvare, vel in multis, vel in paucis.—1. Kings xiv. 6.

*SEVENTY-SIXTH SERMON.***ON THE NEW AND THE OLD YEAR, FOR SINNERS AND THE JUST.**

Subject.

1. To the living I wish the old year; 2. to the dead, a happy new year.—*Preached on the feast of the Circumcision.*

Text.

Postquam consummati sunt dies octo.—Luke ii. 21.

“And after eight days were accomplished.”

Introduction.

The year has again come to an end, and in it many times eight days have been accomplished. New weeks, new months, and new years are beginning. I am not sure, my dear brethren, that it would not be better for us to remain by the old days and years than to expect new ones. It is true that to-day I hear everywhere the joyful wish: “A happy New Year!” Such is the greeting uttered by all, young and old, rich and poor, as if the new year were to bring some great treasure with it. For my part, I would prefer changing that greeting altogether, and wishing you and myself the old year back again; for we know what we have had in the old year, but we cannot say what the new will bring. However, not to depart altogether from the old custom, and at the same time not to concede too much to it, I wish you to-day the old year, and the new as well; and not to exclude any one, I take both the living and the dead into account in my wish.

Plan of Discourse.

To the living I wish the old year ; first part. To the dead I wish a happy new year ; second part. In the third and longest part I shall address that wish to all, of whatever condition they may be. The division of my discourse however, must be made, not by me, but by the conscience of each one of you. But I do desire from my heart that every one of you could bring home that wish about the old year. At all events, I trust that this sermon will be for the good of our souls.

That, as it is the only subject I now aim at, I beg of Thee, O Jesus, who, after the eight days were accomplished, didst show

in the circumcision that Thou art a Saviour of the living and the dead! This I beg of Thee through the intercession of Thy dearest Mother Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

My first wish, then, concerns the living. But what do I mean by that? Could I speak perhaps to the stones and walls and pillars of the church, and not to the men and women here present? And yet there is none of you who does not feel that he is alive. I allude, my dear brethren, to the living of whom St. Paul writes: "So do you also reckon that you are dead to sin, but alive unto God, in Christ Jesus Our Lord;"¹ for they who live in that way are the only ones that really merit the name of being alive, as St. Augustine remarks on this passage: "He who, by leading a good life, lives unto God, really lives."² In a word, I allude to those who have spent the past year zealously serving God, attending to the great affair of their souls, and in the state of grace, for that is the only true life of the soul. To them I wish the old year. And what better thing could I desire for them than the days, with all their circumstances, that they have spent with a pure conscience, as dear children and friends of God? O happy days, how well spent you were! Who will bring you back to us again? O time precious beyond gold, would that we could have you to live over again!

The old year was a happy one for the good and pious.

Other days and times are approaching; but who can say of what kind they will be? Who can assure us that they will be as good for our souls? Ah, we are warned by the Wise Man: "Boast not for to-morrow, for thou knowest not what the day to come may bring forth."³ And there is reason for the warning. You have lived holy and pious lives during the old year; do you know whether you will be holy and pious during the new? If I consider what man is in himself, how inclined to evil, how weak and miserable in the faculties of his soul, how inordinate in his appetites, how changeable in his will, how inconstant in his resolutions, how many difficulties he has to contend with on the narrow path of virtue, how many dangerous occasions of sin, how much bad company he is exposed to on all sides; when I consider the lusts of the flesh, the deceits and false maxims of the world, the rage of the devil, which assail him in a thousand different ways, ah, how frightened I am! what anguish overcomes my heart on my own account as well as

But they may change and be perverted in the new year.

¹ Et vos existimate vos mortuos quidem esse peccato, viventes autem Deo, in Christo Jesu, Domino nostro.—Rom. vi. 11.

² Qui bene agendo vivit Deo, hic vere vivit.

³ Ne gloriaris in crastinum, ignorans quid superventura pariat dies.—Prov. xxvii. 1.

on yours! For, perhaps in the future time we may change our determinations, and in that occasion, that temptation, that house, that company, those circumstances, which are already known to the almighty God, and which the new year will bring with it, we may prove untrue to our God and to our good resolutions, go over to the devil, and commit mortal sin. Until the ship actually comes into port there is reason to fear that she may not accomplish her voyage safely; in a moment a storm may arise which will send her to the bottom. Our whole life is a dangerous sea; until we have reached the haven of a happy eternity, we cannot say for certain that our souls will not suffer shipwreck; a moment is enough to change a pious and holy man into a wicked sinner.

Many, from being saints, became great sinners.

To say nothing of daily experience, which abundantly proves the truth of this, read the holy Scripture, and you will find examples enough of men who, after having lived for a long time in great sanctity, were shamefully perverted. David, a man after God's own heart, as the Lord Himself says of him, whom no difficulty nor the unceasing persecution he had to sustain at the hands of Saul could seduce from the path of virtue, who used to spend the day and the night in praising God, by one careless glance became changed into a wicked adulterer, an unjust murderer, and for a long time afterwards remained in his sins, utterly forgetful of God. Solomon, the wisest man the world ever saw, who had conversed with God, and by His inspiration had written the holiest books, and laid down maxims of the deepest wisdom relating to holiness of life, who had spent enormous sums of money in building the glorious temple of Jerusalem to the true God, this Solomon, (who could believe it if the Eternal Truth did not assure us of it?) this Solomon allowed himself to be so befooled by women, that he adored stocks and stones as gods, and left the world in doubt as to whether he ever repented or not before his death. Joas spent over forty years in innocence, but afterwards he became an idolater. And there are countless similar examples. O human weakness, how great Thou art! O inconstancy, how general! If the lofty cedars fall so easily, what have not the frail reeds to fear? And that is the warning that St. Paul gives even to the most pious: "Wherefore he that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall."¹ How many are now burning in the flames of hell, for whom it would have been much better if they had died during their

¹ Itaque qui se existimat stare, videat ne cadat.—I. Cor. x. 12.

youth, and whom a new year brought into sin and the power of the devil! How many are now rejoicing in heaven, who would have been lost forever, if they had had a new year! Of them the Wise Man says: "Living among sinners, he was translated: he was taken away, lest wickedness should alter his understanding."¹ Thus we often know not how foolishly we act when we desire a long life for ourselves or our friends, or when we deplore the premature death of an innocent child. True are the words of Thomas à Kempis, "if it is terrible to die, perhaps it will be still more dangerous to live long."²

There, O just and pious souls, you have the reason of my wish in your regard; and if I could make it efficacious, I would desire nothing else for you but that the old year, which you have spent in the state of grace, would continue for you to the end of your lives. But I cannot go beyond the mere wish, which will effect nothing; the old year is gone, and there is an end of it; not a moment of it will ever return. Therefore I must be satisfied with wishing heartily, and begging of you by all that is dear to you, that you continue to live as you have lived during the past year; keep up during the new year your faith, your confidence in God, your devotion and piety, your justice, your zeal in the divine service, your love of God and of your neighbor, your modesty and humility, your devotion and love for the Mother of God and your holy guardian angels: in a word, stick to the old habits you have formed of Christian virtue and good works. Do not allow yourselves to be turned away from them by any new year, or new hour, or moment in it, by no new temptation, or occasion, or difficulty, or friendship, or company, or money, or wealth, or joy, or sorrow, or man, or devil, or any creature; let no one or nothing ever lead you into mortal sin. For what will it profit you to have lived as servants of God during the old year, if you become slaves of the devil during the new? What will it profit you to have lived holily during the old year, if you lead vicious lives during the new? What will it profit you to have gained heaven during the old year, if you forfeit it in the new, and perhaps die impenitent and go to hell? "Woe to them that have lost patience," is the threat that God utters by the wise Ecclesiasticus, "and that have forsaken the right ways, and have

Therefore it is to be wished that they continue to live in the old year.

¹ Vivens inter peccatores translatus est; raptus est, ne malitia mutaret intellectum ejus.—Wisd. iv. 10, 11.

² Si formidolosum est mori, forsitan periculosius erit diutius vivere.—Thom. Kemp. l. i. c. 23.

gone aside into crooked ways.¹ It is neither a good beginning, nor a good continuing, but a good ending that ensures our salvation: "He that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved,"² says Our Lord.

Exhortation
to persevere
in virtue.

Therefore you will remain steadfast, will you not? "Stand fast," I implore of you, in the words of St. Paul, "and be not held again under the yoke of bondage."³ You will have the same God in the new year as you had in the old, and the sole end of our being is to love and praise Him. Your souls will be just as precious and immortal in the new year, as in the old, and our only business should be to secure their eternal happiness; stand fast, then, and see that they suffer no harm. The fire of hell is there, too, and if we fall into it during the new year, we shall be unhappy forever; stand fast, then. We have still the same heaven to gain; stand fast. Our lives are just as uncertain as ever, we know nothing more about the hour of death, and the judgments of God are as strict as ever they were; be steadfast, then; let us be always on our guard, so that we may be ready to meet the Lord when He comes. To this end, renew every morning your good resolutions, examine your consciences every evening, let all your sighs and desires in prayer, all your care and anxiety in unavoidable occasions and dangers of sin tend to preserving your fidelity to God, so that you may always be resolved not to allow anything to turn you away from His service. Stand fast, then, my dear brethren! Almighty God of infinite goodness, grant by Thy grace that this wish of mine may be fulfilled!

Second Part.

Sinners are
not really
alive.

A happy new year to you who are dead! I do not mean the damned in hell; for no wish can help them. Nor the blessed in heaven, for they are not in need of wishes. Nor the souls in purgatory, for they do not desire to spend another year in the midst of torments. To you, O sinners! I am speaking, for, although you seem to be alive, yet in reality you are dead. All the days and hours you have spent in the state of sin during the past year are not to be reckoned as days and hours of life; all the works, even those that in themselves are most holy, performed in that state, are lifeless and without merit. "I know thy

¹ *Væ his qui perdidērunt sustinentiam, et qui dereliquerunt vias rectas, et dixerunt in vias pravās.*—Ecclesi. ii. 16.

² *Qui autem perseveraverit usque in finem, hic salvus erit.*—Matt. x. 22.

³ *Stare, et nolite iterum iugo servitutis contineri.*—Gal. v. 1.

works," might be said of you, as God told St. John to announce to the angel of the church of Sardis; "that thou hast the name of being alive, and thou art dead. For I find not thy works full before my God." ¹ O man, who have been hitherto in the state of sin! you have the name of being alive, and you are dead. You go about among the living; you eat, drink, laugh, and amuse yourself with them; you see, hear, and feel as they do; but you have merely the name of being alive; in reality you are dead; your body, as St. Ambrose says, is nothing but a foul grave, in which your miserable, wretched soul, that is an object of horror in the sight of God, is buried. ²

This is a truth that often helps the holy Fathers to reconcile passages of the Scriptures that seem to contradict each other. In the Book of Genesis we read that "Abram was seventy-five years old when he went forth from Haran."³ But how could that be true, for we read in another place that he was a hundred and thirty-five years old at that time? St. Jerome, who at first found an insuperable difficulty in this text, answers as follows: the years that Abraham spent amongst idolaters in Chaldea are not reckoned; but the years of his life are counted from the time when he first came to the knowledge of the true God, and abandoned idolatry. In the Book of Exodus, when God had determined to free His people from slavery, He said to Moses: "This month shall be to you the beginning of months."⁴ But had they had no months before, nor the beginning of a new year? Were they not over two hundred years in Egypt? True, says St. Gaudentius, "but the years they spent in Egypt are not reckoned; but when they sighed to the Lord, then they heard the words, "this month shall be to you the beginning of months."⁵ In the First Book of Kings we read that "Saul was a child of one year when he began to reign, and he reigned two years over Israel."⁶ What? A child of one year? Was he not the tallest of all the people when they chose him as king? "And he stood in the midst of the people, and he was higher than any of the

Proved from
Scripture.

¹ Scio opera tua quia nomen habes quod vivas, et mortuus es. Non enim invento opera tua plena coram Deo meo.—Apc. iij. 1, 2.

² Carnem suam sicut tumulum circumferentes, cui miseram infoderunt animam suam.—S. Amb. l. ii. de Cain., c. 6.

³ Septuaginta quinque annorum erat Abram, cum egrederetur de Haran.—Gen. xii. 4.

⁴ Mensis iste vobis principium mensium.—Exod. xii. 2.

⁵ Non sunt imputati Israelitis illi dies quos consumpserunt in Ægypto; sed quando inveniunt ad Dominum, tunc audiverunt: mensis hic vobis initium mensium.

⁶ Filius unius anni erat Saul cum regnare cepisset; duobus autem annis regnavit super Israel.—I. Kings xiii. 1.

people from the shoulders and upward.”¹ It is equally certain that he reigned more than two years over Israel. The first words are interpreted by commentators to mean that, when he began his reign, he was like a child in innocence and purity of heart. St. Gregory explains the latter words by saying that he kept his innocence only two years after he had ascended the throne, and he adds: “The only time of our lives in which we can be said to live is that in which we live innocently and humbly.”² Now I can understand that strange text of the Prophet Isaias: “The child shall die a hundred years old.”³ Truly, that is a queer specimen of a child that is a hundred years old! But if you have spent a hundred years in the world, and passed the whole time at enmity with God, you are, as far as your moral life is concerned, like a newly-born child that has just commenced its first hour of life.

They have, then, been dead hitherto.

Such was the meaning of the epitaph that Adrian made for himself; he lived in the time of the emperor Adrian, and filled a very important office, which he laid down, that he might live in retirement and in the practice of virtue. These are the words he ordered to be put on his grave-stone: “Here lies Adrian, who could count many years of his age, but who lived not more than seven.” You see now, O sinner, that you cannot reckon those years that you have hitherto spent in sin; perhaps there were twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, or sixty of them; for out of your whole life the time alone that you passed in the grace of God is worth taking into account; all the other hours and days are dead and useless. If you have not yet begun to weep for your sins, you are not yet alive; if you are still the slave of the perverse world, or of the flesh and its inordinate appetites, you are not alive; if you are not yet freed from the slavery of Egypt and Babylon, if you have not yet left the miserable state of sin, you are not yet alive; if you are not resolved to return to God by true penance, to restore your ill-gotten gains, if you can, to their lawful owner, to shun the proximate occasion of sin, to give up forever that impure intimacy, you are not yet alive; you have the name of being alive, but you are dead; you seem to live, but your soul is in reality dead.

They must begin to live in the new year.

Oh, then I wish you a happy new year! For you want it in order to begin to live, or else you will go from temporal to eter-

¹ *Stetitque in medio populi, et altior fuit universo populo ab humero et sursum.*—I. Kings x. 23.

² *Illo solum tempore nos vixisse gaudeamus, quo innocenter et humiliter viximus.*

³ *Puer centum annorum morietur.*—Isa. lxx. 20.

nal death. I wish you a happy new year; for, if you spend the coming year as miserably as you did the past, and continue so to the end, then, indeed, I should recall my words, and not wish you a single day, nor a single hour, since it would be far better for you to die now, and to go to hell, than to increase the number of your sins by living longer, and thus add to your eternal torments. May the good God save you and me from such a fate! A happy new year to you, then, that you may do penance, and that, too, without delay, for you may not see the end of the new year. Unhappy man, if the old year had been your last, if death had seized you and had hurried your body into the tomb, what would have become of you? Where would you be now? Where would you be for all eternity? Alas, amongst the demons in a hell that after thousands and millions of years will not come to an end! You have luckily escaped that fate up to this; rejoice, then, and thank God for His patience and mercy in giving you time to repent; for, during the past year, the same God has hurled into the abyss of hell countless souls who were in the same state as you. But do not run any further risk, I advise you; perhaps in this new year, on this first day of it, you will hear the words: "Time shall be no longer."¹

Have you ever read what became of the fig-tree, of which St. Luke writes in his Gospel? "A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it, and found none."² What is the meaning of this? said he with displeasure to the dresser of the vineyard. "Behold, for these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and I find none."³ I am tired of seeking to no purpose. "Cut it down therefore; why cumbereth it the ground?"⁴ Into the fire with it! It is not worth the room it occupies! But lord, said the man, wait a little; have patience for another year. "Let it alone this year also, until I dig about it and dung it."⁵ Perhaps it will bear then; "if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."⁶ O sinner, how many years is it now that you are on this earth to no purpose? How many years has the good God been seeking fruits of penance and good works in you, and has

Otherwise they run the risk of eternal death.

¹ Tempus non erit amplius.—Apoc. x. 6.

² Arborem ficulneam habebat quidam plantatam in vinea sua, et venit querens fructum in illa, et non invenit.—Luke xiii. 6.

³ Ecce anni tres sunt, ex quo venio querens fructum in ficulnea hac; et non invenio.—Ibid. 7.

⁴ Succide ergo illam; ut quid etiam terram occupat?—Ibid.

⁵ Dimitte illam et hoc anno, usque dum fodiam circa illam, et mittam stercora.—Ibid. 8.

⁶ Siu autem, in futurum succides eam.—Ibid. 9.

not found any? Alas, exclaims St. Augustine, “after three years, what other fate is in store for you, but the axe and the fire?”¹ After three years, sayest thou, O great saint? Ah, and how will it then be with those who have spent ten, twenty, thirty years, or more in vice, without producing fruit? What other fate have they to expect, but an unhappy death, and the fire of hell? But, O good God, have patience yet a year! O Father of mercy, have mercy for a while longer! Jesus Christ, our meekest Saviour, grant a respite of another year to these sinners! Well, then, is the answer that God seems to give us: here is a year, which you commence to-day. But if you allow this, too, to pass by without producing fruit; if you abuse My patience and long-suffering as you have hitherto done; if you will not give up sin, do penance, and amend your lives, what will you have to expect but that the axe will be laid to the root of the useless tree, and that it will be cast into hell?

Exhortation
to begin to
serve God
in the new
year.

Hear, O man! I do not pretend to be a prophet, nor to be able to tell you what will happen to you; but, for God’s sake, do not trifle with the time now granted you; remember how much depends on it! If this new year is to be the last for you, and it will be the last for many thousands, (do you know for certain that you will not be amongst their number? Can you promise yourself the morrow?) if, I say, this is to be your last year, and you do not amend your life meanwhile, what will become of your poor soul this year? It will go where it would have gone in the old year, if you had been hurried off by death in your sins. And what better will you then be for having obtained another year from the divine mercy, which graciously consented to prolong your life, if you are lost forever in the new year? Therefore act on that heart-felt wish of mine, and delay no longer to fulfil it. Let this be for you a happy new year, in which you will put off the old man with his vices, and put on the new man, leading a virtuous life in the service and zealous love of God, to whom you owe all the years of your life, to whom you should devote them all for countless reasons, as St. Paul warns you: “To put off, according to your former conversation, the old man, who is corrupted according to the desire of error. And be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, who, according to God, is created in justice and holiness of truth.”²

¹ Post triennium quid restat, nisi securis?—S. Aug. serm. lxxii.

² Deponere vos secundum pristinam conversationem veterem hominem, qui corrumpitur secundum desideria erroris; renovamini autem spiritu mentis vestræ, et induite novum hominem, qui secundum Deum creatus est in iustitia, et sanctitate veritatis.—Eph. iv. 22-24.

Again I cry out to you, sinners, you who are dead, a happy new year! There, my dear brethren, you have my twofold wish for the new year. Each one of you will find the wish that will suit him; let him only examine himself in the duties and obligations of his state of life, and his own conscience will tell him whether he is to go on in the old way, or to commence a new mode of life. I will help you briefly to make this examen in the

Third Part.

I begin with the most excellent state of the priesthood and the clergy. But you, gentlemen, are not in need of any instruction from me; you understand, or at least ought to understand, what your most weighty obligations require of you; obligations that you do not satisfy by living merely as good Christians, unless you also are good priests and religious. The very name of priest tells us clearly what we have to do. "A priest," says a learned author, "is one who is devoted to sacred things, who dispenses sacred things, who teaches sacred things;"¹ he has to teach others and show them the right road to heaven. Have you fulfilled that obligation carefully during the old year? Then I congratulate you, if so, and recommend you to continue in the same line of conduct. But have you, perhaps, failed in your duty by omission, by unlawful conversation, by words or works that are unbecoming your state, or even by giving scandal? Oh, then I wish you a happy new year! and it must begin all the quicker, your efforts to amend should be all the more zealous, the more the splendor of the Catholic Church, the progress of a whole Christian community, depends on your lives and example. For what will the people be, if the priest has no virtue? What relish will others have for the things of eternity, if the salt of the earth loses its savor? Where will the feet go, if the eyes are blind, which should give them light and lead them? But a few words suffice for the learned.

Wish addressed to the clergy.

Temporal superiors, judges, counsellors, lawyers, and officials! Jethro long ago described what the duties imposed on you by God require of you: "Provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, in whom there is truth, and that hate avarice, and appoint of them rulers of thousands, . . . who may judge the people at all times."² Mark those words: they must be "able

To temporal superiors.

¹ Sacerdos idem est, quod sacris datus, sacra dans, sacra docens.

² Provide autem de omni plebe viros potentes, et timentes Deum, in quibus sit veritas, et qui oderint avaritiam, et constitue ex eis tribunos, . . . qui judicent populum omni tempore.—Exod. xviii. 21, 22.

men," that is, experienced and capable of doing the duties of their office. So should you be, gentlemen; but this is a matter that not every one considers as he ought. Remember, then, that it is not enough to take office if the duties of it are not properly fulfilled; remember that to your counsels and deliberations, to your hands and pens, are entrusted the common weal, the honor and property, nay, the lives of men; and if you are guilty of a grievous error in your office, through carelessness or incapacity, you will have to make restitution for it. You must be men that fear God; if the fear of the Lord controls your actions, no human respect, nor the fear of any man, no matter who he is, will find place in you, or keep you from doing what you owe to God and your country. "In whom there is truth," that is, justice. If you love justice, O how much good you can do! how much evil you can hinder! Justice is blind, it goes on straight ahead, and observes equality in all things. In its scales a poor man weighs as heavily as a rich man; a stranger, as a relation; a lowly workman, as a powerful statesman; a poor widow, as a great lord. Its drawn sword punishes public vices, scandalous customs and abuses contrary to God's honor and the common good, and banishes them from the state. "That hate avarice:" if that vice has once taken possession of the heart and mind, then good-bye to justice and the fear of God! for it blinds the eyes, stops the ears, ties the hands, and silences the tongue; it makes black white, and white black; unjust transactions are defended, just ones shelved, and many unhappy results follow, that some poor people will have to deplore for many years. Happy, gentlemen, are your past years, if you have been during them as Jethro says you should be! Continue on in your old fashion. But if the conscience of any of you pricks him on this head, there is a new year beginning to-day, in which you may make good the faults of the past, and so prepare for that account which even those who judge the world will one day have to render.

To married
people.

How was the old year with you, married people? Have conjugal fidelity, mutual love, and a good understanding been preserved among you inviolably? You must love one another, as St. Paul tells you: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the Church, and delivered Himself up for it,"¹ that is, you must love each other with a holy, chaste, trusting, kind, and constant love, which keeps away all suspicion of your

¹ Viri, diligite uxores vestras, sicut et Christus dilexit Ecclesiam, et seipsum tradidit pro ea.—Eph. v. 25.

mutual fidelity, makes you share in each other's joys and sorrows, bear with each other's faults, and help each other to lighten the burden of the cares of your state. Have you trained up your children and servants, according to your duty, for their last end, in the fear and love of God and for heaven, by instructing them in their duties as Christians, by keeping a watchful eye on them, by correcting their faults in a parental manner, but above all by giving them good example? I congratulate you a thousand times if such is the case! The past year must have been filled with blessings and graces for you, both spiritual and temporal. Continue in the old way till death. But, alas, if your children are trained according to the ways of the world, or are neglected altogether; if your mutual love has been changed into jealousy, misunderstanding, hatred, and quarrelling, or, what is still worse, if you have been wanting in conjugal fidelity, a sin to which the wife often gives occasion by her peevish and fault-finding disposition, by her obstinacy, or by too great freedom with the opposite sex, but still more frequently the husband by the habit of drunkenness, which causes him to neglect his family, while his poor wife and children have to bear his excesses with patience, or, as St. John Chrysostom says, have to look at him as they would at a fierce tyrant, or a wild beast, trembling in every limb at his approach, so that the wife is not his companion, but rather his bond-slave and servant; oh, unhappy the married life of such people! the old year has been utterly useless for them! a happy new year to you, then, married people! You must change at once, if you do not wish to drag each other as well as your children into eternal ruin.

Christian young women, what shall I wish you? I need not reflect long; for, while you are unmarried, your state is the only one that comes completely to an end when a grievous sin is committed against it. If you have hitherto preserved the treasure of your holy purity, then, according to what all the Fathers say, you are humble, modest, restrained in your eyes, your movements, your dress, and all your inward and outward actions; your only care, then, may be how to please that God who has enabled you by the help of His grace to preserve untarnished such a precious jewel. "The virgin thinketh on the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit."¹ Go on, then, in the old way, until God calls you to another state, for He alone is the Lord over our souls and bodies. Meanwhile be

To young
unmarried
women.

¹ Virgo cogitat quæ Domini sunt, ut sit sancta corpore et spiritu.—I. Cor. vii. 34.

careful during the new year to preserve by the utmost modesty of demeanor this precious treasure, and to avoid all that might expose it to the danger of being lost. You should look after it with a kind of holy pride; for if you keep modestly at home, and avoid dangerous company and gatherings and promenades with those of the opposite sex; if you refuse to do as the children of the world do (I call them children of the world, for there is no sign of maidenly modesty about them), you will not escape ridicule; you will be called simple-minded fools, who do not know the ways of the world. But you must take no notice of that, and keep all the more firmly to your good resolutions; you must look on yourselves as far too respectable to act as those others do. They alone know how to live well who love God above all things with their whole hearts.

To widows. The widows will be helped in their examen by St. Francis de Sales; there are, he says, two ornaments that widows should wear in their daily lives, namely, humility and patience; two that they should wear on the tongue, decency and kindness;¹ two in their eyes, modesty and reserve;² and in their heart they should have nothing but the love of Jesus Christ crucified.³ If those beautiful virtues have adorned your souls and bodies during the past year, then continue steadfastly in the old way, certain that your very state, as Tertullian says, is a recommendation to the divine mercy, and that God will take you under His special protection. "The Father of all," such are the words of Tertullian, "has undertaken to protect the names of widow and orphan, as having special claims on His mercy."⁴ If sometimes you have to suffer persecution which you are not able to repel, then abandon yourselves and those belonging to you to your almighty and merciful Father, and have full and perfect confidence that He will look after you.

To young unmarried men.

Young unmarried men! how did you get on during the past year? You are now in a state and at a time of life in which God is making special efforts to gain your hearts and affections; for He always tries to keep the first fruits for Himself; but at the same time you are in a state and an age which is, generally speaking, the most dangerous of all, as far as your innocence is concerned. Have you always kept sight of God and your souls,

¹ *Honestas et verborum benignitas.*

² *Modestas et pudicitia.*

³ *Unicus cordis illius amor Jesus Christus crucifixus.*

⁴ *Duo ista nomina, viduæ et pupilli, divinæ misericordiæ exposita suscepti tueri Pater omnium.*

carefully avoided dangerous companions and occasions of sin, and shunned idleness as the devil's favorite pillow and the home of all sins and temptations? Have you frequented the sacraments, been devout to the Mother of God and to your holy guardian angels? Have you had a desire to hear the word of God in sermons (a necessary means of preserving your innocence)? If so, then rejoice and keep on in the old way! But if not, if the devil or the flesh has induced you to consent to a mortal sin, I am sorry for you! You must at once begin a new life with the new year, and resume your former innocent conversation. Take to heart those words of the Holy Ghost in the Book of Proverbs: "A young man, according to his way, even when he is old, he will not depart from it."¹

Children, how have you behaved during the old year to your parents? Servants, what has been your conduct to your masters and mistresses? Have you followed the rules I laid down for you in detail on a former occasion, that is, have you shown obedience, reverence, fidelity, and love to those to whom you owe your lives after God, or whom God Himself has placed over you? If so, go on, and keep to the old way; if not, if you have been wanting in this duty, then I wish you a happy new year, in which you may begin at once to correct such an abominable fault. For he who does not honor his parents or masters cannot expect grace or blessing from God.

Finally, ye poor and oppressed souls, who are overwhelmed with crosses and trials! how did things go with you during the old year? Alas, badly enough, you answer, and if the new year is no better, then may God help us! Of course, He will help you. But why do you say that things went so badly with you? Have you had to suffer one trouble after another? Were you visited by adversity, bodily pain, misfortunes, hunger and thirst, so that your hot tears were mingled with your bread? That is hard indeed. But how did you bear those adversities? Did you endure them with Christian patience, with a good intention for God's sake, in union with the will of God and in the state of sanctifying grace? If so, the old year was not such a bad one, after all; it was, in fact, a very good one. Exult, then, and rejoice in the Lord! All the troubles you have had to bear are over now, are they not? But what a glorious crown you have gained in heaven by the means of them, a crown that will last forever! Go on, then, in the old way; the new year and

To children
and ser-
vants.

To the poor
and op-
pressed.

¹ *Adolescens juxta viam suam, etiam cum seuerit, non recedet ab ea.*—Prov. xxii. 6.

all the other years of your lives will pass perhaps like the last, and at the end will leave nothing but consolation and joy of soul for you. But if you have not resigned yourselves to the will of God; if you have borne your daily trials without a good intention, or, what is worse, with murmuring and discontent, and given way to cursing or despair, then, indeed, the past year was a bad one for you, and I pity you with all my heart! And, in God's name, what better are you now for all you have suffered? You have actually made your crosses heavier, because you bore them without the hope of a reward and in a spirit of opposition to the will of God. Will the new year be like the old one in that respect? Let us hope not; for you will not get rid of your troubles in that way. I do not wish you a new year of adversity; yet, if the new year should bring its load of trouble for you, begin at least to bear it in a different manner, and to make a virtue of necessity, and thus in one hour you gain more than all the treasures of the earth put together. Seek consolation from Him who is the only true Consoler, Jesus Christ, who for your sake and mine died on the cross; who, as the Apostle says, became poor for your sake, although He is the richest of all; who was sorrowful even to death, although He is the joy of the angels; who was a man of sorrow, although He is the almighty God. Continue, then, or begin, as the case may be, to carry your cross; and you will have a happy new year, although it may be filled with all sorts of trials.

Prayer to
God to
grant by
His grace
the wishes
expressed
for all.

By way of conclusion I turn to Thee, O great and almighty God, and in the name of all present I thank Thee from the bottom of my heart for all the benefits Thou hast lavished on us with fatherly love during the old year; and firstly for the great grace by which Thou hast preserved the just from sin, and hast kept the spiritual life of their souls; and in the second place for the wonderful patience with which Thou hast borne with me and all other poor sinners, and hast given us time to repent and amend our lives. I have still one request to make of Thee, in the words of Thy servant David, when he prayed for his people: "O Lord God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Israel our fathers, keep forever this will of their hearts, and let this mind remain always for the worship of Thee;"¹ preserve in the pious the mind with which they have hitherto served Thee;

¹ Domine Deus Abraham, et Isaac, et Israel patrum nostrorum, custodi in aeternum hanc voluntatem cordis eorum, et semper in venerationem tui mens ista permaneat.—I. Paralip. xxix, 18.

keep them from all dangers and occasions of sin, or strengthen them therein by Thy grace, so that they may never be separated from Thy love! Touch with the same grace the hearts of all sinners, that they may come to know the danger in which they are, and return to Thy holy service by speedy penance. Come, O sinners, come with me! let us no longer delay, but, according to the advice of St. Chrysologus, make the unalterable resolution "to give to God the remnants of the life we have devoted entirely to the world; we have given the year to the body, let us give a few days to the soul."¹ How ashamed I am when I think of it, O my God! I must acknowledge with confusion that I have given the best years of my life to the flesh and the devil; so many months, days, hours, and countless moments I have squandered away in useless cares and occupations, and even in sin. Oh, if I had used all that time to serve Thee, what an exceeding great reward I should now have laid up in heaven! And now I present to Thee the remnant of my life, although Thou shouldst have had the whole of it. Yet I know that I do not come too late for Thy infinite goodness; "receive, then, O Lord," I exclaim in the words of St. Bernard, "the years that remain to me, and do not despise a contrite and humbled heart, for those I have lost by living in sin."² I will begin with this new year to lead a new life; new with regard to my eyes, which I will turn away from all sinful and dangerous objects; new with regard to my ears, which I will close against all impure and slanderous talk; new with regard to my tongue, which I will keep better in check, that it may not break out into useless or slanderous conversation, or into that abominable cursing and swearing; new with regard to my hands, which will nevermore be stretched out to do an act of injustice or impurity; new with regard to my feet, which will nevermore bring me into that house, that company in which, alas, I have so often sinned; new with regard to my whole body, which I shall mortify with instruments of penance instead of tricking it out in an indecent and extravagant manner; new with regard to my thoughts and desires, which shall be withdrawn from earthly things in order to be fixed on heavenly; new with regard to my whole heart, which I now wish to devote, although somewhat late, to loving Thee above all things with all the more zeal. Do Thou, O God

¹ Vivamus Deo paululum, qui sæculo viximus totum; dedimus corpori annum, demus animæ paucos dies.

² Suscipe igitur, Domine, obsecro, residuum annorum meorum; pro his vero quos vivendo perdidit qui perditte vixit, cor contritum et humillatum non despicias.

of goodness, grant me Thy powerful grace to this end, while I give in Thy name to all here present Thy holy blessing to the same end: May the Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost bless you. Amen.

For several Sermons on the New Year, see the preceding First and the following Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Parts.

END OF THE SIXTH VOLUME.

To the greater honor and glory of God, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Queen of heaven, and of our holy guardian angels, and to the salvation of souls.

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