

# SERMONS

ON THE

## SEVEN DEADLY SINS,

AND THE DIFFERENT SINS AGAINST GOD AND OUR  
NEIGHBOR WHICH FLOW THEREFROM.

ADAPTED TO ALL THE SUNDAYS AND HOLYDAYS OF THE YEAR.

BY THE

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# CONTENTS OF VOLUME I.

## BAD CHRISTIANS IN GENERAL.

SERMON	PAGE
I. On the Malice with which Bad Christians Assail the Catholic Church, - - - - -	7
II. On the Incredulity of Bad Christians, - - - - -	23

## ON THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS.

### ON PRIDE.

III. On the Vain Labor of the Proud, - - - - -	39
IV. On the Folly of the Proud, - - - - -	53
V. On the Characteristics of Pride and the Means of Attaining Humility, - - - - -	68

### ON AVARICE AND INJUSTICE.

VI. On the Vain Labor of the Avaricious, - - - - -	84
VII. On the Carelessness of the Avaricious in Neglecting God during Life, - - - - -	98
VIII. On the Unhappy Death of the Avaricious, - - - - -	112
IX. On Injustice as an Effect of Avarice, - - - - -	126
X. On the Necessity of Restoring Ill-gotten Goods, - - - - -	140
XI. On the Circumstances of Restitution, - - - - -	154

### ON LUST.

XII. On the Folly of Impure Desires of Sensual Pleasures, - - - - -	170
XIII. On the Incurableness of the Vice of Impurity, - - - - -	183
XIV. On the Anger of God against the Vice of Impurity, - - - - -	197

### ON ENVY.

XV. On the Folly of the Envious, - - - - -	210
XVI. On the Malice of Envy, - - - - -	223

ON GLUTTONY AND DRUNKENNESS.		
SERMON		PAGE
xvii.	On the Nature and Characteristics of Gluttony, -	236
xviii.	On the Injurious Effects of Gluttony, - - -	249
xix.	On how the Fasts of the Church which are violated by Gluttony, are to be observed, - - - -	259
xx.	On the End and Object of Fasting, which is frustrated by Gluttony, - - - -	271
xxi.	On the Unaccountable Folly of those who Injure their Health by excessive Drinking, - - - -	283
xxii.	On the Shameful Malice of those who impoverish them- selves and Injure their Good Name by excessive Drinking, - - - -	294
xxiii.	On the Guilt and Sinful Effects of Habitual Drunken- ness, - - - -	306
ON ANGER AND VINDICTIVENESS.		
xxiv.	On the Unreasonableness of giving way to Anger, and the best Means of controlling it, - - -	320
xxv.	How Unbecoming it is to seek Revenge, - - -	333
xxvi.	On the Injustice of Revenge, - - - -	351
xxvii.	On Sloth in the Service of God, - - - -	367
ON SINS AGAINST GOD.		
ON SUPERSTITION.		
xxviii.	On those who seek Advice from Fortune-tellers, -	382
xxix.	On the Different Kinds of Superstition and its Malice,	397
xxx.	On Superstition in Sacred Things, - - - -	411
ON DISRESPECT TO GOD AND HOLY THINGS.		
xxxi.	On Blasphemy, - - - -	425
xxxii.	On Unworthy Communion, - - - -	438
xxxiii.	On Irreverence to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, - - - -	450
xxxiv.	On Irreverence in Church, - - - -	462
xxxv.	On the Malice of Irreverence in Church and the Punish- ment it deserves, - - - -	476
xxxvi.	On the Profanation of Sundays and Holy-days, - -	490
xxxvii.	On False and Useless Prayer, - - - -	502

# ON BAD CHRISTIANS IN GENERAL.

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## FIRST SERMON.

### ON THE MALICE WITH WHICH BAD CHRISTIANS ASSAIL THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.

#### Subject.

Bad Christians assail the Church by their sins : for, 1. She is a most holy Church, whose good name they disgrace and calumniate. 2. She is the only Church in which salvation can be found ; but her efforts to save souls are frustrated by bad Christians, who force her to help them to a deeper damnation.—*Preached on the Feast of SS. Peter and Paul.*

#### Text.

*Portæ inferi non prævalebunt adversus eam.*—Matth. xvi. 18.  
“ And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

#### Introduction.

In vain, oh, heathen tyrants, do ye rage and storm against the Christian Church, with your torments and persecutions! The religion you tried to destroy has been confirmed and spread throughout the world by the very means you used to destroy it ; the blood of the martyrs was a fruitful seed, from which many Christians sprung. In vain, oh, perjured heretics, have you whetted your teeth against the Church ; in vain do you calumniate her still in your writings ; you have thereby only made her truth more evident and clear to the whole world! Vain, oh, infernal powers, is your wrath! it has been, is now, and always will be true, according to the promise of Christ : “ The gates of hell shall not prevail against ” the Church that is built upon Peter. Her enemies can do nothing against her ; she need fear

no harm from them ; would that she had nothing to fear from domestic foes ; then, indeed, would she be in a desirable condition ! But, my brethren, what do I say ? Has the Church of God, then, violence to dread from another quarter ? Is she threatened to be overwhelmed by another danger ? Alas ! to our shame be it said, that what neither the persecutions of tyrants, nor the treachery of heretics, nor the fury of the demons could ever accomplish, has been done, and is done against the Christian religion, by her own friends, the members of her own household, her own children. I mean by bad Christians, who live in opposition to her laws, as I shall now prove.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*Bad Christians assail the Church by their sins ; why ? Because she is a most holy Church, whose good name they disgrace and calumniate. As I shall prove in the first part. Because they frustrate her efforts, and force her to help them to a deeper damnation. As I shall prove in the second part. For the encouragement of the good, that they may continue to live in a Christian manner, and as a salutary warning for the wicked, that they may begin to live in a Christian manner.*

Jesus Christ, founder of the true Church, we beg of Thee grace to this two-fold effect, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin and the holy angels guardian.

Wicked  
children are  
a shame to  
their  
parents.

By the fruit we know the tree : if the fruit is good, the tree is good ; if the fruit is bad, the tree is bad. This holds true always with regard to senseless plants ; but not always with regard to reasoning creatures. Sometimes a pious father has a wicked son, and a holy mother an irreligious daughter. On the other hand, pious children sometimes have wicked parents. Yet, as a general rule, the proverb holds good which says : “The apple falls not far from the tree ;” and, when the contrary is not known to be the case, we can learn what the character of the parent is from the morals of the child, according to the words of the wise Ecclesiasticus : “A man is known by his children.”<sup>1</sup> If you see a licentious, dissolute youth, who spends his time in fighting, cursing, and swearing, and that, too, before the very door of his father’s house, no matter how innocent the parents may be, nor how ignorant of their son’s bad conduct, you may generally conclude, without any danger of

<sup>1</sup> In illis suis agnoscitur vir.—Eccles. xi. 30.

judging rashly, that there is something wrong in that family, that the children are not properly looked after, or that they do not get good example. However that may be, there is not the least doubt that an ill-reared, undutiful child is not an honor, but rather a shame and disgrace to its father and mother before the world, as Ecclesiasticus says: "A son ill taught is the confusion of the father . . . . A daughter that confoundeth becometh a disgrace to her father."<sup>1</sup> In the same way, it sometimes happens that a whole religious community in a town is disgraced by the conduct of one of its members, who has been so unfortunate as to have given public scandal; nay, even amongst the holy college of the apostles there was a traitor. If there were many religious of that kind in an Order, it would soon lose its good name, and be cried down as a corrupted and perverted Order, no matter how holy its rules and constitutions may be.

Wicked Christians (is it possible that such a holy name can be thus qualified?), what mischief you work by your sinful lives! You are selected as intimate friends by the Almighty God, and you are not afraid to despise Him, although His all-seeing eye beholds you, nor to declare yourselves His sworn enemies. That is the most terrible feature of sin. You have been made heirs of the kingdom of Heaven, and you have bartered away your souls to the devil and to the eternal fires of hell, for a momentary satisfaction of an unbridled passion: such is the terrible misfortune that sin brings with it. But there is still another that is deeply to be deplored: you are children of a mother, whose good name you take away, and whom you disgrace before the world by your evil lives. What mother is that? She from whom you received your second birth in baptism, the holy Catholic religion; a religion which never had, and never will have an equal on earth in sanctity and perfection. Hear what St. Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, says of it to the Ephesians: "Christ loved the Church, and delivered Himself up for it, that He might sanctify it, cleansing it by the laver of water in the word of life, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish."<sup>2</sup>

The Christian religion is most holy.

<sup>1</sup> Confusio patris est de filio indisciplinato . . . Filia quæ confundit in contumeliam fit genitoris.—Eccles. xxii. 3, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Christus dilexit Ecclesiam, et seipsum tradidit pro ea, ut illam sanctificaret, mundans lavaero aquæ in verbo vitæ, ut exhiberet ipse sibi gloriosam Ecclesiam, non habentem hujusmodi, sed ut sit sancta et immaculata.—Ephes. v. 25-27.

It would have been enough, O glorious Apostle, to prove the holiness of this Church, if you had merely said that her Founder is Jesus Christ, that Man, who even if He were not known to be God, would still be esteemed the most just and holy of all men on earth; whose life, both interior and exterior, was so free from blame and from the least shadow of a fault, that He could ask even His worst enemies, "Which of you shall convince Me of sin?"<sup>1</sup> against whom the whole synagogue of the Jews conspired to watch His least movements with lynx-eyed vigilance, but so fruitlessly that, with the aid of two false witnesses, they were not able to prove even the suspicion of a sin against Him: "And the chief priests and all the council sought for evidence against Jesus, that they might put Him to death, and found none," says St. Mark. "For many bore false witness against Him: and their evidences were not agreeing."<sup>2</sup> That Man whose innocence was openly proclaimed by His judge: "I find no cause in Him;"<sup>3</sup> whose more than human virtues were proclaimed even by those who crucified Him: "Indeed, this was the Son of God,"<sup>4</sup> as the Centurion said of Him after His death. He it is who founded the religion of which we Catholics make profession, which He caused to be preached throughout the world by His apostles, and which He still announces to us by the uninterrupted succession of His vicars on earth in the Chair of Peter.

Prescribes a  
most holy  
law.

What could be expected from such a holy Founder, but holiness of institution, laws, morals, and customs? In effect, everything we read of the Church, in the Gospel of Christ, points out its holiness. We need only read the 5th and 6th chapters of the Gospel of St. Matthew to find out that; the greatest poverty and humility, charity, union, and meekness with one another, as if we had only one heart and one soul together; purity of conscience, even to the extent of excluding an unworthy thought; mercy and compassion towards the poor and needy, as if we saw Christ Himself in their persons; modesty and mortification of the outward senses, to such a degree that we should rather tear the eyes out of our head, or cut off our hands or feet, than go freely into the occasion of sin; patience, contentment, nay, even joy and rapture in persecutions, troubles, and difficulties; hatred

<sup>1</sup> Quis ex vobis arguet me de peccato?—John viii. 46.

<sup>2</sup> Summi vero sacerdotes, et omne concilium quærebant adversus Jesum testimonium, ut eum morti traderent; nec inveniebant. Multi enim testimonium falsum dicebant adversus eum: et convenientia testimonia non erant.—Mark xiv. 55, 56.

<sup>3</sup> Ego nullam invenio in eo causam.—John xviii. 38.

<sup>4</sup> Vere Filius Dei erat iste.—Matth. xxvii. 54.

and renouncement of the world and its vain customs; and insatiable hunger and thirst after justice and perfect holiness of life. These, and such as these, are the Gospel teachings to Christians. In former times, as our Lord says, murder was forbidden: "You have heard that it was said to them of old: Thou shalt not kill . . . but I say to you that whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment."<sup>1</sup> Not merely he who curses his neighbor, but even he who calls him a fool, out of hatred and anger, "shall be in danger of hell fire."<sup>2</sup> In former times the law was: "Thou shalt not commit adultery. 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."<sup>3</sup> Formerly the law was: "Thou shalt not forswear thyself . . . But I say to you not to swear at all . . . Let your speech be yea, yea: no, no."<sup>4</sup> That is, you shall not use any stronger expressions than yes or no, to confirm what you say. Formerly the law was: "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, not to resist evil, but if one strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him also the other. And if a man will contend with thee in judgment and take away thy coat, let go thy cloak also unto him."<sup>5</sup> Formerly the law was: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thy enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you, that you may be the children of your Father who is in Heaven."<sup>6</sup> You must be in your hearts so dead to temporal goods that you have not even care for the morrow, as to what you shall eat or drink, or as to wherewith you shall be clothed, so that you may place the most childlike confidence in Him alone who feeds the sparrows of the air, etc. In a word, "Be ye perfect as also your heavenly Father is perfect."<sup>7</sup>

Oh, what a wonderful and perfect, law is the Christian relig- From which

<sup>1</sup> Audistis, quia dictum est antiquis: Non occides. . . Ego autem dico vobis: Quia omnis, qui irascitur fratri suo, reus erit iudicio.—Matth. v. 21, 22.

<sup>2</sup> Reus erit gehennæ ignis.—Ibid. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Non concubaberis. Ego autem dico vobis: Quia omnis, qui viderit mulierem ad concupiscendum eam, jam concubatus est eam in corde suo.—Ibid. 27, 28.

<sup>4</sup> Non perjurabis. . . Ego autem dico vobis: Non jurare omnino. . . Sit sermo vester: Est, est: non, non.—Ibid. 33, 34, 37.

<sup>5</sup> Oculum pro oculo, et dentem pro dente. Ego autem dico vobis: Non resistere malo, sed si quis te percusserit in dexteram maxillam tuam, præbe illi et alteram: et ei, qui vult tecum iudicio contendere, et tunicam tuam tollere, dimitte ei et pallium.—Ibid. 38-40.

<sup>6</sup> Diliges proximum tuum, et odio habebis inimicum tuum. Ego autem dico vobis: Diligite inimicos vestros, benefacite his qui oderunt vos, et orate pro persecquentibus et calumniantibus vos, ut sitis filii Patris vestri, qui in caelis est.—Ibid. 43-45.

<sup>7</sup> Estote ergo vos perfecti, sicut et Pater vester cœlestis perfectus est.—Ibid. 48.

holiness its  
truth is  
known.

ion ! says St. Augustine. "There are many things which convince me of the truth of the Catholic Church :"<sup>1</sup> the astounding commencement and spread of it throughout the world by twelve poor fishermen ; the countless miracles that confirmed it everywhere, and at all times ; the uninterrupted succession of bishops from the time of St. Peter ; the very name of Catholic or Universal Church, which it alone, amidst so many apostates and heretics, has always kept ; these things compel my understanding to submit itself to this truth without doubt or hesitation ; but there is nothing which proves to me clearer and plainer that it comes from God, than the holiness of its laws and morality. The whole world and even our worst enemies have acknowledged this holiness, they wonder at it, openly give testimony to it and freely confess that if the true religion must also be the most holy, then ours is the only true one. Certainly, O Lord, what Thy Prophet says must be true : "The law of the Lord is unspotted, converting souls ;"<sup>2</sup> a law that must be in every way fit to sanctify souls. What an honor and a happiness for us ! Eternal thanks to Thee, O God, for having called us, in preference to so many others, to such a holy religion !

This good  
name is  
disgraced  
by bad  
Catholics.

Oh, sinful Catholics, wicked Christians, away with you, away from the lap of such a holy Mother ! It is you alone who, by your wicked and perverse lives, disgrace her sanctity and her good name. But hear what St. Paul writes to the Romans : the Jews thought themselves much greater than heathen nations, because they had received such a holy law from God, yet there was nothing they disregarded more than this law, and they gave much scandal to the heathens by their transgressions ; so that St. Paul asks them how can they boast of the holiness of Judaism, if they live like heathens. Who would not be scandalized, he says, to see how you live ? You who say you are a Jew, and who know how your law forbids sin and vice, yet commit those things without shame : "Thou, therefore, that teachest another, teachest not thyself ; thou that preachest that men should not steal, stealest ; thou that sayest men should not commit adultery, committest adultery ; thou that abhorrest idols, committest sacrilege ; thou that makest thy boast of the law, by transgression of the law dishonorest God."<sup>3</sup> So that

<sup>1</sup> Multa me in Ecclesia justissime retinent, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Lex Domini immaculata convertens animas.—Ps. xviii. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Qui ergo alium doces, teipsum non doces ; qui predicas non furandum, furaris ; qui dicitis non moechandum, moecharis ; qui abominaris idola, sacrilegium facis ; qui in lege gloriaris, per prevaricationem legis Deum inhonoras.—Rom. ii. 21—23.

you blaspheme the name of God, and disgrace before heathens the law you boast of with the lips: "For the name of God through you is blasphemed among the gentiles."<sup>1</sup> So far the holy Apostle. Are there not many Christians nowadays who deserve the same reproach? My dear brethren, it is not apostates and heretics who bring shame on the Church of God; they may burst with envy and publish or preach what lies and calumnies they will; instead of bringing shame on our holy religion, they will only help to make its truth more evident; just as if one who is overcome by another, and who is lying on the ground groaning with pain, were to abuse and insult his victorious antagonist. The children of the Church of God, who have sworn to observe her law, and who make a boast of her holiness, are the ones who do violence to her, and disgrace and dishonor her by their wicked lives.

For, if I were an infidel, and knew nothing of the Christian law but what I learned from general hearsay, and if I were to consider the conduct of most Christians of the present day; if I were to see those bad habits that so many are subject to, and which they cannot conceal from their own conscience at least; the spirit of pride and vanity, avarice and injustice, immorality and unrestrained intercourse of the sexes, hatred and disunion between citizens, neighbors, and relations, nay, even between husband and wife; gluttony and drunkenness; the little care and watchfulness of many parents in training their children; the fearful amount of cursing, swearing, calumny, and detraction; the want of reverence and respect in church, etc.; what, I ask, should I think if I saw all this? I must doubt whether such people really have a religion. But they call themselves Christians and Catholics. Is it possible? Are they the chosen people of whom I have heard so much? Are they the glory and honor of the Incarnate God, as I have been told they are, the fruit of His bitter sufferings, the object of His special care and Providence in this mortal life? Is this the religion that I have been told to look upon as the only true, spotless, and holy one amongst all the religions on earth? No, that cannot be! I have been deceived about it; that religion is worth nothing; or, if there ever was any good in it, it must now be completely perverted and useless; I do not care for a religion of that kind. In fact, my dear brethren, the heathens of the Indian Islands have often spoken in that way, as the Annals of our Society re-

By their  
wicked  
lives.

<sup>1</sup> Nomen enim Dei per vos blasphematur inter gentes.—Rom. ii. 24.

late ; for they were disgusted at the wicked lives of the European Christians who were living amongst them ; so that the sermons and exhortations of our missionaries were in many cases fruitless. Such also is the opinion of the negroes who are brought as slaves to America, and whose conversion is hindered principally by the dissolute lives of Christians. One of our Fathers, who went to those countries as a missionary, told me once, with a sigh, that before there could be any hope of converting the natives and bringing them to the service of God, the greater part of the European Christians should be sent out of the country. I have no doubt, too, that many heretics, who live here and there amongst Catholics, are of the same opinion.

Of which  
the Church  
can justly  
complain.

With reason, then, can the Church complain, in the words of the Canticle : “The sons of my mother have fought against me.”<sup>1</sup> My own children, whom I have brought forth by water in holy baptism to divine grace and the kingdom of Heaven ; whom I have so carefully instructed from their youth in my holy laws and doctrine, and fed so often with the Flesh and Blood of Christ, and strengthened with the other sacraments, are those who attack and try to overthrow me. Formerly, in the first two centuries, when I was persecuted without truce or rest by bloodthirsty tyrants, I had such a glorious name in the world, that my very enemies, who refused to submit to the yoke of my law, were obliged to have respect for me. If in those days any one outside the time of persecution were accused of a crime before the judge, he needed no defence beyond proving himself a Christian ; if he succeeded in doing that, he was at once declared innocent. “Our experience teaches us,” says St. Lucifer, Bishop of Sardinia, “that by this one venerable word, I am a Christian, all suspicion of crime is removed.”<sup>2</sup> If a woman were tempted by an idolater to impurity, the mere words, “I am a Christian,” were enough to deprive him of all hope of succeeding in his design ; neither threats nor prayers would help him. There was no one who would have exchanged my name for all the honors and riches of the world. If the heathen emperors sometimes tried to pervert old men, tender maidens, or weak children, by kindness, so as to induce them to adore false gods, or to give way to forbidden pleasures, “I am a Christian,” was the only and the sufficient answer. “Take away my life, but

<sup>1</sup> Filii matris mee pugnaverunt contra me.—Cant. i. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Cernimus hac una religiosa voce, Christianus sum, omne crimen excludi.

leave me my name.”<sup>1</sup> Oh, glorious and holy name, what a fate is thine! In these times of peace, that were so longed for, I can well cry out: “Behold in peace is my bitterness most bitter.”<sup>2</sup> “The sons of my mother have fought against me;” my own children have taken away my good name, that name which neither the torments of persecutors, nor the attacks of heretics, nor hell itself, with all its rage and fury, could tarnish; that name, you, wicked Christians, disgrace by your perverse lives. Instead of my making you holy, you dishonor my holy name (mark, my dear brethren, the first attack of bad Christians against the Church), instead of my making you happy forever, you compel me to help you to a deeper damnation. This is the second attack of bad Christians against the Church, and the subject of the

**Second Part.**

It has never yet been doubted amongst Christians that faith can and must help us to salvation. The General Council of Trent calls it, “The beginning, foundation, and root of all our justification.”<sup>3</sup> Without it, according to St. Paul, it is impossible to please God.<sup>4</sup> All heretics agree with us so far, but they rely too much on faith and attach no value to good works, under the false idea that faith alone is necessary to salvation. This latter assertion cannot be true. It is also certain and consistent with right reason, that there is only one true religion in the world, in which the true faith can be found; for it is impossible that God can affirm and deny the same truth, which He should do, if two contradictory dogmas had equal claims to be believed. Now, it is not necessary for me to prove that our holy Catholic religion is the only true one; none other has the marks of the true Church, and if it be false, then God has deceived us. What a great blessing it is for us, my dear brethren, to be called by God, in preference to others, to this Church, outside of which salvation is not to be found, in which alone the necessary means of salvation are given to us in abundance!

The Catholic Church the only one in which salvation can be found.

But how is it, then, that we can say that this only true religion is capable of hurling a believing Christian deeper into hell? Alas, it is only too true, and we need not wonder at it! Jesus Christ, the Author of our salvation, came into the world for no

Yet is the cause of deeper damnation to bad Christians.

<sup>1</sup> *Christianus sum. Tolle vitam et linque mihi nomen meum.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ecce in pace amaritudo mea amarissima.—Isai. xxxviii. 17.*

<sup>3</sup> *Initium, fundamentum et radix totius justificationis nostræ.*

<sup>4</sup> *Sine fide autem, impossibile est placere Deo.—Heb. xi. 6.*

other purpose than “for us men, and for our salvation.”<sup>1</sup> Yet when He was still a child, and was presented in the temple at Jerusalem to His heavenly Father, Simeon predicted of Him : “Behold this child is set for the fall of many,”<sup>2</sup> who will make a bad use of His graces and merits. So that the faith, which is given to us to justify and bring us to Heaven, will certainly condemn us, if we do not live according to it. This truth is founded on the words of Christ in the Gospel of St. Luke : “And that servant who knew the will of his Lord, and prepared not himself, and did not according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. . . . And unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required, and to whom they have committed much, they will demand the more.”<sup>3</sup> One feels too much pity for a stupid, ignorant person, to be angry with him when he commits a fault ; just as a mother excuses the child, when the father is about to beat it, by saying, oh, it is only a child, it knows no better. But there is neither excuse nor pity for one who, with full knowledge and deliberation, sins against his duty, no matter how severe the punishment with which he is threatened.

Since they can and should live holily, but do not.

And this is the undeniable testimony which the Christian religion will bring against bad Christians : you could have led a better life ; you should have lived as a Christian, and you have not done so. You could have done it, for you knew your duty ; neither light nor grace was wanting to you ; I have often instructed you in my laws and doctrine by my servants ; unceasingly have I exhorted you to observe this law, sometimes exciting your hope by promises, showing you how God has prepared eternal joys in Heaven for you, if you serve Him truly for a short time ; at other times threatening you with the eternal torments of hell, as a punishment for a momentary pleasure ; again, showing you the infinite mercy and beneficence of a God who is infinitely amiable and good in Himself, a thought that should suffice to move you to serve Him most zealously ; again, I have tried to excite you to sorrow and repentance for your sins, by inspiring your conscience with fear and anxiety, as you must admit. Not only could you have lived in a Christian manner,

<sup>1</sup> Propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem.

<sup>2</sup> Ecce positus est hic in ruinam multorum.—Luke ii. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Ille autem servus, qui cognovit voluntatem domini sui, et non præparavit, et non fecit secundum voluntatem ejus, vapulabit multis . . . . Omni autem qui multum datum est, multum quæretur ab eo, et cui commendaverunt multum, plus petent ab eo.—Ibid. xii. 47, 48.

but you were bound to do so, according to the promise you made before the altar in baptism, a promise you afterwards confirmed when you came to the full use of reason, a promise by which you bound yourself to renounce the devil and all his works, the world and all its pomps, the flesh and all its sinful lusts ; by which you undertook to submit to my law, to make public profession of being a Christian, to live according to that profession, and, as far as is possible for you, to follow your humble, crucified Head. Now, you have not at all kept your word ; compare your life and actions with those of Christ, and with my holy laws and doctrine ; they resemble each other like night and day. You are therefore a wicked servant who knew the will of your Master, and could and should have fulfilled it, but through sheer malice you refused to do so. See now for yourself what a sentence is in store for you. Such will be the complaint of the Christian Church against her wicked children.

Oh, how I pity you, Turks, heathens, Jews, infidels, and heretics ; for every day your souls, for which Christ shed His precious blood, are hurled into hell ! Ah, if you had only the light that has shone on us, and the opportunities and means of salvation that we possess ! But what am I saying ? You are still, so to speak, happy in your misfortune, when I compare your condition with that of many believing Christians ; for, if you do not serve the true God, it is because you do not know Him fully ; if you do not serve the God whom you know, as He wishes to be served, you are not to be wondered at, since no one has told you how He wishes to be served. If you lead bad lives, you have an excuse, because you do not know the principles of piety. We know them, believe them, make public profession of them, and acknowledge our duty to live according to them ; we have a thousand to one more opportunities of doing so than you, and yet we are wanting. In truth, your misfortune deserves pity, while ours has no excuse.

These are, therefore, more guilty and deserving of damnation than heathens and infidels.

Lamech is to be excused for having killed Cain, for he did not know him ; but who will excuse Cain for having killed Abel, whom he knew to be his brother ? Jonathan is to be excused for having tasted the honey, for he had not heard that it was forbidden to do so ; but what excuse is there for Saul, who deliberately refused to obey the command of God ? King Ezechias, moved by a silly vanity, showed the treasures of his palace to the Assyrian ambassadors, and at once the Prophet Isaias came, in the name of an angry God, and threatened him with punish-

Shown from the Scriptures.

ment: "Hear the word of the Lord: Behold the days shall come that all that is in thy house, and that thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. And of thy sons also, that shall issue from thee, whom thou shalt beget, they shall take away."<sup>1</sup> King David, inflated with pride on account of his power, caused a census of his subjects to be taken; this vanity of his cost the lives of seventy thousand of his people, who were carried off by a plague. "Go number Israel and Juda,"<sup>2</sup> said David, and on account of this "the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel."<sup>3</sup> Such was the punishment. King Saul usurped the office of priest in order to ensure victory over his enemies, and offered sacrifice to God; at the same moment the Prophet Samuel was there to threaten him: "Thy kingdom shall not continue."<sup>4</sup> In consequence of this threat, his army was beaten, his three sons miserably slain, and Saul himself, driven to desperation, put an end to his own life. O my God, what severe punishments for a little vanity, a slight disobedience! And yet Thou hast not punished so severely many others who committed greater sins. Did not King Assuerus show far greater pride when he gave a feast to all the princes of his kingdom, that lasted for one hundred and eighty days, for no other motive than "that he might show the riches of the glory of his kingdom, and the greatness and boasting of his power"?<sup>5</sup> Was not the Emperor Augustus as vain as David when he wished to know the number of his subjects: "There went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled"?<sup>6</sup> Did not Mesa, king of Moab, usurp the priesthood with much greater cruelty, when he slew his first-born with his own hand? "He took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall."<sup>7</sup> And yet, in all these cases, we hear nothing of the threats of a prophet, much less of a plague, or an unhappy death, as a punishment for those sins. Why this

<sup>1</sup> Audi sermonem Domini: Ecce dies venient, et auferentur omnia quæ sunt in domo tua, et quæ condiderunt patres tui usque in diem hanc, in Babylonem: non remanebit quiddam, ait Dominus. Sed et de filiis tuis qui egredientur ex te, quos generabis, tollentur.—IV. Kings xx. 16-18.

<sup>2</sup> Vade, numera Israel et Judam.—II. Kings xxiv. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Immisit que Dominus pestilentiam in Israel.—Ibid. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Nequaquam regnum tuum ultra consurget.—I. Kings xiii. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Ut ostenderet divitias gloriæ regni sui, ac magnitudinem, atque jactantiam potentissus.—Esth. i. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Exiit edictum a Cæsare Augusto, ut describeretur universus orbis.—Luke ii. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Arripiensque filium suum primogenitum, qui regnatus erat pro eo, obtulit holocaustum super murum.—IV. Kings iii. 27.

difference? Because, according to the general interpretation, Saul, David, and Ezechias had the true faith, while Mesa, Augustus, and Assuerus were infidels. Hear this, O Christians, it is not our misfortune, when we lead bad lives, that increases our malice and deserves a deeper damnation, but our knowledge and the light we have received. "He who sins, after having received the grace of the New Testament," says the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas of Aquin, "is deserving of greater punishment, because he is unthankful for greater benefits, and has not used the grace given to him."<sup>1</sup> "Better," says the Wise Preacher, "is a living dog than a dead lion."<sup>2</sup> "And," says Cardinal Hugo, "better is a pagan than a wicked Christian."<sup>3</sup> Therefore, O heathens and Turks, you are better off than we, if we lead a bad life; for in that case, it would have been better for us never to have had the light of faith, as the Apostle St. Peter expressly says: "For it had been better for them not to have known the way of justice, than after they have known it, to turn back from that holy commandment which was delivered to them."<sup>4</sup>

When you will stand with us on the last day at the left hand of the Judge, your case will be already settled, for, "He that doth not believe is already judged, because he believeth not in the name of the only begotten Son of God."<sup>5</sup> But what a series of questions we Christians shall have to answer, what a severe judgment, what a terrible sentence we shall have to expect; because, not only have we, like you, the light of nature, but also the light of faith, the law of God, the example of God, the numerous benefits He has bestowed on us, His oft-repeated exhortations, and our own knowledge, which will all be brought forward against us. You yourselves, O heathens, will condemn us, inasmuch as many of you have lived better than we, although you had only the light of reason; and you would have led holy lives if you only had had half the graces that are given to us by the goodness of God. If you will have to hide your faces through shame, we must call upon the hills and mountains to fall upon us and hide us from the sight of Heaven and earth. If you will be buried a foot deep in hell, many hundred times deeper must our damnation be.

They have less to answer for at the judgment-seat of God.

<sup>1</sup> Si quis post acceptam gratiam Novi Testamenti peccaverit, majori poena est dignus, tanquam majoribus beneficiis ingratus, et auxilio sibi dato non utens.

<sup>2</sup> Melior est canis vivus, leone mortuo.—Eccles. ix. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Mellior est paganus, Christiano impio.

<sup>4</sup> Mellius enim erat illis non cognoscere viam justitiæ, quam post agnitionem, retrorsum converti ab eo, quod illis traditum est sancto mandato.—II. Pet. ii. 21.

<sup>5</sup> Qui non credit jam judicatus est, quia non credit in nomine unigeniti Filii Dei.—John iii. 18.

Bad Chris-  
tians will be  
mocked at  
in hell.

And how you will then jeer and mock at us ! It seems to me that I see a bad Christian going down to hell, bearing on his forehead the character of the Christian faith that he received in baptism, and bearing it to his eternal shame, although it was given him for his eternal glory. This indelible mark lets loose all the fires of hell to rage against him, increases immensely his pains and torments, gives cause to the demons and the other reprobate to mock at him more pitilessly. What hellish joy the demons will experience at seeing given over to them to be their slave, him who was once their master, and who could put them to flight and utterly vanquish them with the mere sign of the cross ! How the heathen and infidel reprobates will jeer at him, when they see him suffering in hell ! The Prophet Isaias gives us an idea of this, when he describes the entry of a proud man into hell: "Hell below was in an uproar to meet thee at thy coming, it stirred up the giants for thee. All the princes of the earth are risen up from their thrones, all the princes of nations." The infidels and the gentiles shall cry out to thee: "All shall answer and shall say to thee: Thou also art wounded as well as we, thou art become like unto us; thy pride is brought down to hell." How is it that you are here, in the same prison with us, in the same damnation? "And thou saidst in thy heart, I will ascend into Heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God." During life you boasted that you were in the one true Church, and that the Incarnate Son of God had applied the merits of His bitter passion and death in a special manner to your sanctification and salvation. You gloried in being called the temple of the Holy Ghost, the brother of the Saviour, a child of God and a future heir of the kingdom of Heaven. You looked on us as mere slaves of the devil, as savages who knew nothing of the true God. You condemned all who were not of the same religion as yourself as having no right to Heaven, and now you are lost as well as they. "Thou shalt be brought down to hell, into the depth of the pit. They that shall see thee shall turn towards thee and behold thee. Is this the man," who formerly made such a boast of his Christianity?

<sup>1</sup> Infernus subter conturbatus est in occursum adventus tui, suscitavit tibi gigantes. Omnes principes terre surrexerunt de solis suis, omnes principes nationum.—Isai. xiv. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Universi respondebunt, et dicent tibi: Et tu vulneratus es, sicut et nos, nostri similis effectus es. Detracta est ad inferos superbia tua.—Ibid. 10, 11.

<sup>3</sup> Qui dicebas in corde tuo: in cœlum conscendam, super astra Del exaltabo solium meum.—Ibid. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Ad infernum detraheris in profundum lacu: qui te viderint, ad te inclinabuntur, teque prospicient: Numquid iste est vir?—Ibid. 15, 16.

What have you done with yourself now ? What have you done with the merits and the blood of Jesus Christ ? If we had known, as you did, that they could have been of use to us, we should, perhaps, have profited better by them than you did. God our Creator, our damnation is just, because we have misused the light of reason, by which we might have come to a knowledge of Thee ; but, God our Saviour, we knew nothing of Thee ; if we have not believed, we have at least not dishonored Thy faith, nor disgraced Thy holy baptism, nor trampled Thy blood under foot, like this wicked Christian ! It is on him that the whole weight of Thy anger must fall. Is there any torment in hell great enough for him ? Cease your complaints, ye unhappy ones ; what you ask for is already decreed ; your torments will be much lighter than theirs. Ah, says Salvianus, what a terrible sight, what a sad spectacle awaits the bad Christian when he enters hell ! How he will be filled with shame and anger at the bare recollection that he was in the one true Church ! This very fact will be his worst torture. Full of despair, he will say to himself for all eternity : If I had not been a Christian, I would not now be damned like so many infidel nations ; I could not be reproached with the abuse of graces that I never received, nor be tortured more severely on account of them ; but I am a Christian, and am lost. Oh, sin, how hast thou been able to bring those two things together, hell and a Christian ? Hell and one who has been baptized ? Hell and a brother-member and co-heir of Jesus Christ ? Alas, what might I not have been, if I had lived according to my belief ? And what am I now, what shall I be for all eternity ? Such will be the thoughts of a lost Christian in hell. But they will come too late.

My dear brethren, now is the time for us to consider this, and often to bring this thought before our minds : my holy faith must either make me happy, or else it must be the cause of my deeper damnation ; both these alternatives are now in my own power and choice. If I live as the laws of my religion prescribe, I am an heir of Heaven ; if I live otherwise, I shall suffer more severely in hell. Which shall I choose ? But why ask ? Can I hesitate a moment when there is question of selecting an eternity of happiness, or an eternity of misery ? None of us, I hope, will select the latter. Oh, no, my God, preserve us from such folly and desperation ! If we have not acted up to the present in accordance with the dignity and holiness of Thy religion, if we have sometimes dishonored it by our sins, we repent bitterly

Conclusion  
and resolution  
of  
amend-  
ment.

of having done so, and on this very day we are determined to wipe out that shame by the holy Sacrament of Penance, which Thou hast instituted in the true Church for the forgiveness of sins. Do Thou, O dearest Saviour, give us Thy powerful grace, that we may henceforth worthily bear the name of Christian, which we have received in baptism, and that we may be always distinguished from those who have never received this name, and from those who dishonor it; so that, by a living faith in Thy one true Catholic Church, we may come to the enjoyment of Thy Church triumphant in Heaven. Amen.

*Another Introduction for the second Sunday after Easter :*

**Text.**

*Et fiet unum ovile, et unus Pastor.*—John x. 16.

“ And there shall be one fold, and one Shepherd.”

By the fold is meant the true Church of Christ. By the sheep we understand the faithful who belong to this Church ; Jesus Christ declares that He Himself is our Shepherd, since He is the Supreme Head of the Catholic Church, whose vicar on earth is the Pope. Oh, my dear brethren, when will that wished-for time come, when those words shall be verified, when in the whole world there will be but “one fold and one Shepherd” ? When all heathens, Turks, Jews, infidels, and heretics, who are now being lost outside the true Church, will be converted to the true Faith, and will become members of the Catholic Church, in which alone salvation is to be found ? But this wish of mine goes too far ; I should rather ask, when will the time come, when all who are now in the true fold, will act as becomes worthy sheep of Christ ? For not all who profess to be sheep hear the voice of their Shepherd ; not all who say they are Catholics, have a true and lively faith ; for they do not live according to the laws and truths of their faith ; nay, by their bad lives they greatly hinder the Church from spreading herself, and from extending her influence ; as I shall now show.

**Subject.**

Bad Christians hinder the spread of the Christian Church. Why ? She is a most holy Church, whose name they disgrace and calumniate. As I shall show in the first part. She is the only Church in which salvation is to be found, etc.—*continues as before.*

*SECOND SERMON.*

**ON THE INCREDULITY OF BAD CHRISTIANS.**

**Subject.**

Very many Catholics have faith, but not a lively faith; this does not help them to eternal life.—*Preached on the Tuesday of Pentecost.*

**Text.**

*Ego veni, ut vitam habeant, et abundantius habeant.*—John x. 10.

“I am come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly.”

**Introduction.**

What is the meaning of those words, “That they may have life, and may have it more abundantly”? Have we not life enough? Can we enjoy two, three, ten, or twenty superfluous lives at once? Barradius gives a beautiful interpretation of St. Augustine and many others, on this text, which is admirably suited to my present subject. “I am come,” he says, “that my sheep may have life in this world by a lively faith, and that they may more abundantly have eternal life in Heaven.”<sup>1</sup> The Gospel of to-day is in perfect accord with this interpretation. “I am the door,” says Christ, of the fold, that is, of the true Church; “by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved.”<sup>2</sup> Joy of joys, my dear brethren, we shall go to Heaven! Eternal life is ours! For, are we not all in the fold, in the true Catholic Church? Have we not all life in this world by the one true Faith, and therefore, according to the promise of Christ, have we not a right to abundant life in Heaven? But we must not claim a triumph before we have gained the victory. Perhaps we flatter ourselves with the idea that we have the true Faith, while in reality it is only the appearance of a true faith; we are Catholics and profess to be so; others, too, know that we are Catholics, yet it may be that we have the name alone of Christian. According to the words of our Lord, we must have

<sup>1</sup> Veni ut oves mee vitam habeant in hoc sæculo per fidem vivam, et abundantius habeant vitam in cœlo æternam.

<sup>2</sup> Ego sum ostium: per me si quis introierit, salvabitur.—John x. 9.

a living faith if we wish to have eternal life in Heaven. Oh, how I fear that amongst the great mass of human beings, who profess the Catholic Faith, there are but few who have a living faith; while there are many, very many, who have but a dead faith, which will profit them nothing to eternal life! Let us see now whether any of us belong to that number, according to the words of St. Paul: "Try your own selves, if you be in the faith."<sup>1</sup> To-day I wish to begin this examination partially, and I say—

#### Plan of Discourse.

*Very many Catholics have the faith, but not a lively faith; this does not help them to eternal life. Such is the whole subject of the present instruction; to the consolation and encouragement of pious Christians, and as a wholesome warning for tepid and careless Christians, that they may henceforth not depend too much on their faith alone, lest they find themselves betrayed in the end.*

Holy Spirit of God, who hast so abundantly bestowed life and energy on the vacillating faith of the apostles, cause our weak faith also to live by the influence of Thy grace, which we now humbly beg of Thee, through the intercession of Mary and of our holy angels guardian.

What is meant by living and dead faith.

Has death, then, such an unrestrained right over men, that he can take possession of and kill even their hidden virtues and the most secret acts of their understanding? Yet that must be so, else how could we speak of a dead and of a living faith? True enough, my dear brethren, even faith in a Catholic Christian is subject to death; not, indeed, to that natural death which separates the soul from the body, but to a moral death which takes away the soul from the faith. St. James describes to us clearly in what the life and soul of faith consist, namely, in its works: "For, even as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead."<sup>2</sup> Although a tree may be in a most beautiful garden, yet, if it produces neither leaves nor fruit, it is nothing more than a dry piece of wood, whose roots cannot draw up the sap necessary to nourish it; a body, although it is lying on a most magnificent bed, is no better than dead carrion, if it has neither life nor movement; so also a Christian, although he is in the true Church and makes profession of the Catholic

<sup>1</sup> Vosmetipsos tentate, si estis in fide.—II. Cor. xiii. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Sicut enim corpus sine spiritu mortuum est, ita et fides sine operibus mortua est.—James II. 26.

Faith, if his works are not in accordance with his faith, that is, if he does not live in obedience to its laws, and fulfil the duties they impose on him, then he bears about in his soul a dead and lifeless faith. Faith, as St. John Chrysostom says, is a wonderful light that shines in the understanding, and enables us to see what we could not see with our bodily eyes, according to the words of the Psalmist: "For Thou lightest my lamp, O Lord."<sup>1</sup> How long would the light shine in a lamp without oil to nourish the flame? It would very soon go out, and leave you in darkness. The oil that keeps alive the flame of faith is the practice of good works; when there is no more of these, the flame must go out. "So faith also, if it have not works, is dead in itself."<sup>2</sup> Such is the conclusion drawn by St. James.

Now what is the good of such a dead faith? It makes little difference to me, says St. Augustine, whether I have a faith of that kind, or none at all, for it will not help me to eternal life. There is, as I believe, no heretic here, otherwise I should bring forward many proofs to make this point clear, for heretics are accustomed to depend altogether on faith; we may live as we will, they say, as long as we believe in Christ; that is enough to bring us to Heaven. But that is what you have to prove. I am speaking now to Catholics, so that it is not necessary for me to adduce further proof, than to say that the truth I am alluding to is an article of faith. If it were enough to believe in order to gain Heaven, oh, then I could easily undertake to convert the whole world to the Catholic religion; for the greatest obstacle to most people is, not the difficulty of submitting the understanding to the mysteries of our faith, but the difficulty of observing its laws, which make the Catholic religion hateful to them, because they are given to sensuality. Oh, I would say to those people, why are you afraid of our laws and precepts? Let them be as difficult as they may, what is it to us? All we have to do is to believe; we need not keep those laws. If faith alone were enough to gain Heaven, we should have no more to do than the devils. Here what St. James says: "Thou believest that there is one God: thou dost well; the devils also believe and tremble."<sup>3</sup> So that they do more than believe; they tremble when they think of the severity of His justice; but you, O man, if you think it is sufficient to believe, have no need to tremble.

Dead faith is of no help to eternal life.

<sup>1</sup> Quoniam tu illuminas lucernam meam, Domine.—Ps. xvii. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Sic et fides si non habet opera, mortua est in semetipsa.—James ii. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Tu credis, quoniam unus est Deus: bene facis; et dæmones credunt, et contremiscunt. —Ibid. 19.

It is not enough to believe; our works must harmonize with our faith. Proved from Scripture.

No, my dear brethren, that will not do. "What shall it profit, my brethren," asks St. James, "if a man say he hath faith, but hath not works? Shall faith be able to save him?"<sup>1</sup> Even so little as a dead foot can walk, or a dead wing raise itself in the air. "Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord," says the Gospel of St. Matthew, "shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven; but he that doth the will of my Father who is in Heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven."<sup>2</sup> It is not enough for us to raise the eyes of the understanding to God; we must also stretch out a working hand to Him. St. Paul calls faith the foundation of things to be hoped for in the next life.<sup>3</sup> How so? Look at a map; there you will see all the countries and kingdoms of the world marked down. Are they yours therefore? Certainly you have them on your map, and can look at them there; but the mere looking at them will not bring them into your possession; you must toil and strive a great deal if you wish to become the owner of them. Faith is like a map, on which Heaven and its glory are marked down; but we must labor in order to possess Heaven. "The kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence," such are the words of infallible Truth; its walls are not to be climbed by merely looking at them and standing still, for "the violent bear it away."<sup>4</sup> "If I should have faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing,"<sup>5</sup> says St. Paul. Therefore the same Apostle says of himself elsewhere: "I fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh."<sup>6</sup> But what do you say, holy Apostle? Do you think that something is wanting to the perfection of the sufferings of Christ, which you must supply? Yes, he seems to answer, the sufferings of Christ are indeed infinitely perfect, but they want something to make them profitable to us. And what is that? Even that which is wanting to a medicine that is prepared to heal me—I must take it; even that which is wanting to the bread that is already baked to feed me—I must eat and swallow it. The medi-

<sup>1</sup> Quid proderit, fratres mei, si fidem quis dicat se habere, opera autem non habeat: numquid poterit fides salvare eum?—James ii. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Non omnis, qui dicit mihi: Domine, Domine, intrabit in regnum cœlorum, sed qui facit voluntatem Patris mei, qui in cœlis est, ipse intrabit in regnum cœlorum.—Matth. vii. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Est autem fides sperandarum substantiarum rerum, argumentum non apparentium.—Heb. xi. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Regnum cœlorum vim patitur, et violenti rapiunt illud.—Matth. xi. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Si habuero omnem fidem, ita ut montes transferam, caritatem autem non habuero, nihil sum.—I. Cor. xiii. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Adimpleo ea, quæ desunt passionum Christi, in carne mea.—Col. 1. 24.

cine is good enough in itself, but it will not restore me to health as long as it remains at the chemist's; the bread is good, nourishing food, but it will give me no strength as long as it lies in the oven. In the same way, the merits of Christ are infinite, and have an infinite power to save my soul; but for them to be really profitable to me, it is not enough for me to meditate on them by faith, I must participate in them by good works. Therefore, "I fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh." Very many Christians will come forward on the last day with the miracles they wrought by their firm faith: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name, and cast out devils in Thy name, and done many miracles in Thy name?"<sup>1</sup> But the Lord will condemn them to hell with their miracles: "And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me you that work iniquity;"<sup>2</sup> your lives do not harmonize with your faith. Let no one, then, flatter himself with the promise of Christ in St. Mark: "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved."<sup>3</sup> Let no one say to himself, I believe, I am baptized, I shall be saved. "He speaks the truth, if his works accord with his faith,"<sup>4</sup> St. Gregory says.

God wishes to save all men by the true Faith, but just in the same way as He will help me to cross a river, when there is no means of doing so unless by swimming; it is not enough for me to have the water, nor to have hands and feet; I must jump in, and struggle bravely with the current, or I shall not get across. It is not the water of holy baptism, which has already been poured on me, nor an idle faith, that will bring me to the haven of eternal life, but an active faith, joined with good works. God wishes to save all men by the true Faith; but in the same way in which Agelmundus, the Lombard king, saved the life of a little boy. The king was once walking on the bank of a river, when he saw some children floating about in a box. Fearing they would drown, and moved with pity, he held out his spear to them, that they might draw themselves in to the shore. The little ones looked on at his proceeding with astonishment, and

Confirmed  
by etimles.

<sup>1</sup> Multi dicent mihi in illa die: Domine, Domine, nonne in nomine tuo prophetavimus, et in nomine tuo demonia ejecimus, et in nomine tuo virtutes multas fecimus?—*Matth. vii. 22.*

<sup>2</sup> Et tunc confitebor illis: Quia nunquam novi vos: discedite a me, qui operamini iniquitatem.—*Ibid. 23.*

<sup>3</sup> Qui crediderit, et baptizatus fuerit, salvus erit.—*Mark. xvi. 16.*

<sup>4</sup> Verum dicit, si fidem operibus tenet.

only one of them had presence of mind enough to seize hold of the spear and save himself from drowning. Agelmundus took the boy in his arms and adopted him as his son and successor. The other children, who saw the spear that was held out to save them, but who did not grasp it, were carried away by the waters and drowned. We Christians, my dear brethren, according to the words of St. Peter, are like new-born babes ;<sup>1</sup> we are placed upon many waters,<sup>2</sup> in which we are in danger of drowning at any moment. God, the King of Heaven, reaches out His spear to us, that is, the true Faith, along with sufficient helps of His grace, to save us from the danger and to bring us safely to the haven of eternal happiness. Now, he who, like the drowning children, merely looks at those graces, without stretching forth his hand to seize them and use them properly, how will he fare ? He will sink into the depths, and will be lost forever. Once for all, a faith that is dead, a faith according to which one does not live, is of no help to eternal life.

Many  
Christians  
have a  
dead faith.

Now, my dear brethren, let us see what the Christian world is like in our days. Even of those Catholics who appear daily in our churches and hear Catholic sermons, who assist at the Holy Sacrifice, and make public profession of their faith, even of these I might with justice use the words of our Lord in the Gospel of St. Luke : “ But yet the Son of man, when He cometh, shall He find, think you, faith on earth ? ”<sup>3</sup> I ask you if the Son of man were now to come down on earth, and to begin a search, do you think He would find faith in the world ? Would He find faith, I do not say amongst heathens and Turks, but in His own true Church, in His own holy house, amongst His own chosen people, whom He has called to the true Faith ? Yes, Lord, faith enough as far as words go !

They accept  
all the arti-  
cles of faith.

I will now, in Thy name, put some questions on the articles of faith from the Catechism ; the answers to them will be easy enough. Is there a God in the world, O Christians ? Certainly, all acknowledge and confess that. If so, where is God ? Only in Heaven ? No, He is in all places. Is He here in our midst ? In the streets ? In your houses ? In your rooms ? In your workshops ? In places of meeting for young persons of both sexes ? In dancing-houses ? In the most hidden corners ? Yes, He is everywhere, in all places, by

<sup>1</sup> Sicut modo geniti infantes.—1. Pet. ii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Super aquas multas.—Ps. xxviii. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Verumtamen Filius hominis veniens, putas, inveniet fidem in terra ?—Luke xviii. 8.

day and night ; from His all-seeing eye not even the most secret thought is concealed. Has this God any right over you ? Most certainly ; from Him we have our beginning, He has created us and given us all that we have ; He is our lawful and supreme Master. For what end has He created you ? That we may serve Him, keep His commandments, and love Him above all things. Does He, then, notice those who serve and those who do not ? Yes, He takes note of all our desires, words, and actions. He remembers them, and on the day of judgment He will bring them forward and make them known to the whole world. What reward will He give you, if you serve Him and keep His commandments ? For every good work, for every momentary service He will give His eternal kingdom of Heaven, which is filled with endless joys. But, if one does not serve Him, and transgresses His commands, what has such a one to expect ? Endless torments and flames amongst the demons in hell. When will each one receive his reward, or his punishment ? Immediately after death. But must we all die ? Oh, certainly. When ? No one knows ; I may die this week, this day, this very hour ; the time is uncertain. How often can one die ? Only once ; and if anything goes wrong then, it cannot be amended for all eternity. Very well ; now, do you believe all that to be true ? I believe it, I believe it, you would all cry out, we are all ready to give our lives for these truths ; not the least one of them can be false ! And why so ? Because they have all been revealed by the One God, who knows all things and who cannot be deceived, who cannot reveal anything, unless according to His own knowledge, and who therefore cannot betray or deceive. Hear this, O Lord, and see what a number of believers there is !

But if we could all see what Thou seest, if we could find out what impression, what effect those well-known truths have had on the mind of each one, and how the life of each individual corresponds with those truths ; would the right faith be found in every one ? Alas, I am afraid that we might affirm of a vast number what the Abbot Guericus says of his own times : “ If you were to inquire in our days about the articles of faith, you would find almost every one a Christian ; if you examine the way in which people live, you will find very few real Christians. ”<sup>1</sup> For, to believe in a great, Almighty God, who is

But their  
lives do not  
harmonize  
with them.

<sup>1</sup> Hodie si de mysterio fidei interrogas, omnes fere invenies Christianissimos ; si conscientiam discutas, paucos admodum invenies vere Christianos.—Gueric. Abb. Serm. 4, *De Epiph.*

worthy of infinite love, as we all acknowledge, and yet to refuse Him so often the obedience due to Him, to despise His will and neglect His law ; to believe in a God who is present everywhere, and yet to have as little respect for Him as if He were a blind God ; to do acts of wantonness in His presence that one would be ashamed to do before a beggar ; to appear in His house with so little reverence ; to convert the church, in which He dwells really, into a place of idle talk, into a workshop of sin, of impure looks and desires ; to believe that one must die, and yet to sacrifice all one's thoughts, cares, and troubles, nay, even one's whole heart to earthly things, as if one could live here forever ; to believe that we can die but once, and that it is uncertain how, when, or where, although on that one death an eternity of happiness or misery depends, and yet to take such little trouble to prepare for death, and spend weeks, months, and years in sin ; to believe that a judgment awaits us in which all our actions will be made manifest, and yet, through a childish shame, to conceal our sins in confession ; to believe that an eternal Heaven awaits us as a reward, and yet to take such little trouble to secure it, to refuse to suffer or bear anything for the sake of it, to barter it even, by sin, for some worthless thing ; to believe that there is a hell, that is, a place of all imaginable tortures, without any comfort or mitigation, without a moment's rest from suffering for all eternity, without the hope of ever being released ; to believe that this hell is the punishment of a single mortal sin, even of thought, and yet to live as if it were only a fable, to choose this hell for the sake of a momentary pleasure, and to live in the state of sin without repentance and in danger of being lost at any moment. We shudder when we look into a flaming furnace : we laugh, and sin, and yet believe in an eternal hell. How are all these things to be reconciled ?

Therefore,  
they are  
Christians  
only out-  
wardly.

What can we say of a faith of that kind, my dear brethren ? It is astonishing that there are Christians who refuse to believe in what is terrible or fearful to them ; is it not much more astonishing that there are Christians who are neither frightened nor terrified at what they themselves believe to be terrible ? And yet do not, we might say, the greater number of Christians live in that way, in spite of their faith ? Oh, no, they can hardly have any faith ; if they had, they would not live as they do. St. Paul says, with good reason : “ They profess that they know God, but in their works they deny Him ; being

abominable, and incredulous, and to every good work reprobate.”<sup>1</sup> It is only a lip faith, but not a real one ; it is a faith that appears outwardly, but has no substantial existence. Hear what Herod Atticus once said to a philosopher whom he had admitted to an audience. Having asked him what he was, the philosopher answered : “ Sir, I am a philosopher ; do you not see that by my dress ? ” “ Excuse me, my dear man,” said Herod, “ I see the dress, but I do not see the philosopher.”<sup>2</sup> Oh, Christians, the same might be said to very many of you ; you have the crucifix and pictures of the Saints in your rooms ; you go every day to church to hear Mass, to listen to a sermon, to pray for one or two hours ; you carry your rosaries in your hands, your prayer-book under your arm ; when occasion offers, you can speak cleverly enough of the articles and mysteries of our faith, etc. But it is all only outward show, for your lives are vain, idle, impure, and impious. Oh, you poor people! I see the dress, the appearance, the outward show of a Christian ; but the mark of a true Christian I do not see in you. You have a dead faith, which has neither life nor power, and cannot help you to Heaven.

Hitherto we have been speaking of those mysteries and articles of faith which Christians have in common with Jews, and Catholics in common with heretics. Now, if one were to examine those truths which concern Catholic morality, which Jesus Christ Himself has preached, and caused His apostles to preach, and which He has taught and confirmed by His own example ; would we nowadays find a proper lively faith in all Catholics ? Bring them again to the proof, O Lord ! let us again hear the maxims which Thou hast laid down as the foundation of a Christian life, such as will bring us to Heaven : “ Amen, I say to you, unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven.”<sup>3</sup> “ If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”<sup>4</sup> “ Love not the world nor the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him ;”<sup>5</sup> that is to say,

The moral doctrine of the Church is holy.

<sup>1</sup> *Confitentur se nosse Deum, factis autem negant: cum sint abominati, et incredibiles, et ad omne opus bonum reprobi.*—Titus i. 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Habitus video, philosophum non video.*

<sup>3</sup> *Amen, dico vobis: nisi conversi fueritis et efficiamini sicut parvuli, non intrabitis in regnum cœlorum.*—Matth. xviii. 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Si quis vult post me venire, abneget semetipsum, et tollat crucem suam quotidie, et sequatur me.*—Luke ix. 23.

<sup>5</sup> *Nofite diligere mundum, neque ea quæ in mundo sunt. Si quis diligit mundum, non est caritas Patris in eo.*—I. John ii. 15.

we must not follow the vain fashions and customs of the world. "He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me."<sup>1</sup> "But I say to you, love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, etc."<sup>2</sup> "Thou shalt love thy neighbor," that is, all men, "as thyself."<sup>3</sup> "If riches abound, set not your heart upon them;"<sup>4</sup> for it will be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man, whose soul is in his wealth, to enter into Heaven by the narrow gate. "Be ye merciful."<sup>5</sup> What you shall do to the least of my brethren, you shall do to Me. Do unto others as you wish they should do unto you. "Be sober and watch."<sup>6</sup> "If thy eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee."<sup>7</sup> If thy hand or foot scandalize thee, cut it off; that is, watch over thy senses with the greatest care, lest they be an occasion of sin to thee. "Wo to that man by whom scandal cometh,"<sup>8</sup> who in any way gives occasion to sin. Blessed are the poor, the meek, the pure of heart, those that hunger and thirst after justice, those who suffer persecution for justice' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.<sup>9</sup> Strive, do violence to yourselves, that you may travel on the rough way and enter by the narrow gate.<sup>10</sup> Look upon yourselves as strangers and pilgrims on earth, whose only business it is to go to Heaven, their true country.

▲ All Christians profess these things with the lips.

Enough, O Lord, enough! How is it with us Christians? Do we believe all these truths? Yes, you would all cry out, I believe, I believe; for, if it is infallibly true that there is a judgment, a Heaven, and a hell, because the God of truth has said so, then it must also be infallibly true that they cannot enter Heaven who are not humble, nor merciful, who do not forgive their enemies, nor bear their cross with patience, nor avoid the wicked customs of the world, and so on; because the same God has said so, and He can no more deceive or be deceived in these, than in the other things; so that we must believe one as well as the other. Such is the case; we all believe it, O Lord. We admire the example Thou hast given us to show us the right

<sup>1</sup> Qui amat patrem aut matrem plus quam me, non est me dignus.—Matth. x. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Ego autem dico vobis: Diligite inimicos vestros, benefacite his, qui oderunt vos, etc.—Ibid. v. 44.

<sup>3</sup> Diliges proximum tuum sicut teipsum.—Ibid. xix. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Divitiæ si affluent, nolite cor apponere.—Ps. lxi. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Estote misericordes.—Luke vi. 36.

<sup>6</sup> Sobrii estote et vigilate.—I. Pet. v. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Si oculus tuus scandalizat te, erue eum, et projice abs te.—Matth. v. 29.

<sup>8</sup> Væ homini illi, per quem scandalum venit.—Ibid. xviii. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Beati pauperes, etc.—Ibid. v. 3-10.

<sup>10</sup> Contendite intrare per angustam portam.—Luke xliii. 24.

way to Heaven ; for we know Thee to be a humble, meek, merciful, and patient God, and we have long since sworn in holy baptism to do our best to follow Thy doctrine and Thy mode of life.

Such is the belief and profession of the proud man, who is so exalted in his own estimation that he will hear nothing of humbling himself, or giving way to others. Such is the belief and profession of that vain woman who thinks only of her own comfort and gratification, and leads a luxurious, idle life ; who is more impressed by the new fashions and the usages of the world, than by the humility and holiness of the Gospel. Such, too, is the belief and profession of that impure young man, who seeks no other Heaven than that which his sensual pleasures procure for him. Such is the belief and profession of that dissipated worldling, who gives occasion, to innocent eyes and hearts, of impure desires and actions, by a too great luxury or immodesty in dress, or by a too great freedom of manner. Such is the belief of the miser, who looks upon gold and riches as his God ; who often prefers to lose his soul, rather than a piece of money ; who has not even a kind word, much less a bit of bread, for the poor at his door ; who seeks to enrich himself by all kinds of injustice and cheating in contracts, sales, and purchases. Such is the belief and profession of the vindictive man, who cannot bear the least word of contradiction, but gives way to hatred and anger against his opponent. Such is the belief and profession of the drunkard, whose god is his belly ; who ruins his health, and impoverishes his wife and children by his gambling and drinking. Such is the belief and profession of those evil-tongued persons, who rarely mind their own affairs, but are very attentive to those of others ; who carry stories about their neighbor's faults, and take away, or lessen the good name of others. Such is the belief and profession of those who laugh at the ceremonies of the Church, retain heretical books that are forbidden to be read, and read them under the pretext that they are in no danger of perversion, or that they seek only to pass away the time, etc. No, Christians, that will not do. It is forbidden, under pain of excommunication, even to keep such books in one's house, although one may not intend reading them ; and that, not only on account of perversion, but especially through hatred and execration of the heretical and wicked doctrine which they contain ; therefore, just as it is forbidden to have anything to do with one who is excommunicated, so it is

But most  
act contrary  
to them.

also forbidden to use any books that are condemned by the Church. In a word, such is the belief and profession of all Catholics ; yet we see and experience with most of them, customs and habits that are directly opposed to the poor, humble, meek, pure, and patient life and teaching of Jesus Christ. How, I ask again, can these things be reconciled, how can such lives harmonize with such a faith ?

How wrong  
this is.  
Shown by  
smiles.

A certain painter was once guilty of a fearful blasphemy : he made a hideous figure of a devil, and wrote under it the words : “ This is Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God.” It is hardly less blasphemous for a sensual, impure, unjust, proud, and impious man to boast of bearing the name and title of Christian, that is, a follower of Christ. “ Ah,” says St. Augustine, “ in vain does he bear the name of Christian who does not endeavor to imitate Christ,” according to the words of St. John : “ He that saith he abideth in Him, ought himself also to walk, even as He walked.” Christ is our Head ; if He is not to be seen in us and in our actions, we are not Christians, but abortions, for we are as members without a head, and we cannot have any real, supernatural life in us. The celebrated Godfrey of Bouillon, when he was fighting against the Saracens, cut off a Turk’s head and right arm, on one occasion, with one stroke of his sword, yet the mutilated body remained on horseback, and was carried off at full gallop towards the town. If any one had seen this from a distance, he could have sworn that it was a living rider ; but those who were near and saw that the rider was headless, must have been convinced that it was not a living body, but a corpse. It is the same with many Christians : to judge from outward appearances, they seem to have true life in Christ, for they act like real Christians: they go to church, are present sometimes at public devotions, and say their prayers ; but when we look more closely into their actions, we see that they are far from following the example and practising the virtues of Christ. Then we find out that they are men without a head, that they are Christians separated from Christ, that their faith is dead. Wicked man, we must say: “ Thou hast the name of being alive, and thou art dead.”<sup>3</sup>

The early  
Christians

Happy times of the early Christians, why are you no longer

<sup>1</sup> Christiani nomen frustra sortitur, qui Christum minime imitatur.—S. Aug. l. 6, *de Vita Christiana*.

<sup>2</sup> Qui dicit se in ipso manere, debet sicut ille ambulavit, et ipse ambulare.—I. John ii. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Nomen habes quod vivas, et mortuus es.—Apoc. iii. 1.

with us? In those days, says the holy Bishop Pacianus, in the beginning of the Church, Christians had not so many and such clear instructions in their faith as we have nowadays; they knew nothing of the learned explanations of our mysteries which the holy Fathers, the exegetes, and theologians have since given; they could not dispute nor argue with heathens and infidels, nor convince them of error by force of reasoning: they knew how to die for their faith, although they could not argue in its defence;<sup>1</sup> but their lives and actions were a far more powerful argument than mere words. See, they might have said to the heathens, how edifying and blameless our lives are, behold our humility and modesty in dress and in outward behavior, our piety and fervor in prayer and in the divine service, our moderation in eating and drinking, our meekness and patience in bearing persecution and trials, our concord and brotherly love towards one another, our aversion to the public games and amusements so common among the heathens, etc. From these things you may infer the dignity and holiness of our religion.

proved the holiness of their religion by their lives.

Have we not the same faith as they, my dear brethren? But can we boast of it with the same reason as the early Christians? If a heathen were to come to me now, and ask me questions about the mysteries of our faith, which to him are incredible, and I venture to explain them to him, showing how they cannot be false, so that our religion must necessarily be the true one; and if he, after having listened to and understood what I said, were to ask me, How is it, then, that of the vast number of Christians who profess that faith, there are so many whose practice in no way accords with what they believe? How is it that in such a holy, pure, and perfect religion, such perversity is to be found? What answer could I make him? I should be dumb-founded with shame, and could only acknowledge to myself that his question is reasonable enough. But I might turn aside his awkward question by quoting the words of Pic de la Mirandole: "It is great madness not to believe the Gospel, whose truth is confirmed by the blood of the martyrs, proved by miracles, approved of by reason, proclaimed by the elements and acknowledged by the demons."<sup>2</sup> Even then he could answer me in the words of the same writer: "Far greater is the madness of you Christians, who do not doubt of the truth of the Gospel, to live

Many nowadays are put to shame by heathens.

<sup>1</sup> Sciunt mori et non disputari.

<sup>2</sup> Magna est insania Evangelio non credere, cujus veritatem sanguis martyrum clamat, prodigia probant, ratio confirmat, elementa loquuntur, dæmones constituentur.

as if you had no doubt of its being false.”<sup>1</sup> I would pretend not to understand his reproof, and would say: Are you not ashamed to worship stocks and stones in your temples, as if they were gods, although they can do you neither good nor harm? None of us Christians would be so foolish as to set foot in one of your temples, much less bend the knee before your idols. And are you not ashamed, he could retort, that in your churches, nay, anywhere, since you say your God is present in all places, you show so little respect and fear of Him, although He can reward or punish you eternally; are you not ashamed, I ask, to offend Him in His very presence? You are not foolish enough to set foot in our temples, but you are not ashamed to adopt our manners and customs. So that he would again reduce me to silence. Early Christians, where are your times gone? They knew not how to argue about their faith, but for its sake and for the sake of preserving their virtue, they knew how to give up life and property.<sup>2</sup> We sometimes boast that we are ready to shed our blood for our faith if it were necessary, and yet we cannot restrain our evil desires nor endure the least difficulty for the sake of observing the laws of this faith. We should think it an honor and glory to die as martyrs for our religion, and yet we are often ashamed and lack the courage to observe the maxims and principles of the faith; many, in fact, are ashamed to be called pious, innocent, humble, and devout Catholics.

They have, then, a dead faith, which is of no use to procure salvation, but helps to a deeper damnation.

What sort of a faith is that? Ah, we might well cry out with the Prophet David: “There is now no Saint: truths are decayed from among the children of men.”<sup>3</sup> There are few zealous, upright, pious Christians to be found, because there is hardly any faith amongst Christians. The truths of faith are believed in, but only in a half-hearted way, only so far as it suits each one’s convenience, and even that belief hardly goes beyond mere words. Our faith consists of a mere speculative knowledge, which does not show itself in work and practice; it is a dead faith, which has neither life nor spirit. What is the good of a faith like that? Will it help us to Heaven, to eternal life? By no means; in fact, I have said too little against it, because it is a faith of that kind which will rather help us to eternal death and to a deeper damnation; for, if a heathen is sent to

<sup>1</sup> Sed longe major insania est, si de Evangelii veritate non dubites, vivere tamen, quasi de ejus falsitate non dubitares.

<sup>2</sup> Sciunt mori, et non disputare.

<sup>3</sup> Defecit sanctus, quoniam diminutæ sunt veritates a filiis hominum.—Ps. xl. 2.

hell because he did not serve God, whom he did not know, but could have known if he had wished, what will become of a wicked Christian, who has received the light of the true faith in such abundance, and who knew the duties and obligations of his religion clearly enough, but did not fulfil them? A single hell for the former, a tenfold hell for the latter. "Go, thy faith hath made thee whole," are the words of our Saviour, which He so oft repeated when on earth. But He will speak in a far different tone to many Christians, at the last day, when He will come to judge the world: "Away with you to everlasting fire; thy faith hath condemned thee." You have said, I believe in the Gospel of Christ; that very Gospel in which you believed has condemned you, because you have not lived according to it; thy faith hath condemned thee.

Ah, my dear brethren, I hope those words will never be said to any one of us; for otherwise, it were better that we never had the light of faith. Therefore, I will conclude with the exhortation of St. Paul to Timothy: "Holding the mystery of faith in a pure conscience."<sup>2</sup> We are Christians and we belong to the one true Church of Jesus Christ. Eternal thanks and praise to the good God, who has called us, in preference to so many others, to the true fold! But let us always live like true Christians, and profess our faith, not merely with the lips, but in our actions; above all, let us avoid mortal sin, which darkens and extinguishes the light of faith, the life of which is kept up by zeal in doing good; and then by a living, active faith, we shall attain to the possession of that abundant life which is promised us in Heaven. Rejoice, therefore, ye good Christians, who endeavor to serve God with zeal and piety. You will certainly hear the words: "Thy faith hath made thee whole." Amen.

Conclusion and exhortation to a Christian life.

*Another Introduction for the Feast of the Ascension:*

**Text.**

*Qui crediderit et baptizatus fuerit, salvus erit.*—Mark. xvi. 16.

"He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved."

Rejoice, my brethren, we are going to Heaven. Hear those words: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."

<sup>1</sup> Vade, fides tua te salvum fecit.—Matth. ix. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Habentes mysterium fidei in conscientia pura.—I. Tim. iii. 9.

But we are all baptized. We also believe; and not merely like heretics, but like true children of the Roman Catholic Church, the one true Church of Christ. Therefore the reward belongs to us, which Christ has promised to those who are baptized and believe: we shall be saved. Rejoice, then, I say to you again. But, wait; we must not claim a triumph before gaining the victory. Perhaps we flatter ourselves with the idea that we have the true Faith, whereas we may have only the appearance of it. How so? Hear what St. Gregory says on the words of the text: "Perhaps each one may say to himself, I believe, therefore I shall be saved. He says the truth if he proves his faith by his works,"<sup>1</sup> that is to say, if his faith is alive and active. Oh, how I fear that, amongst the great mass of Catholics, there may be very few who have a lively faith; many, very many whose faith is dead and unprofitable to eternal life, to whom might be addressed the reproach that Christ gave His disciples before His Ascension, as we read in to-day's Gospel: "He upbraided them with their incredulity and hardness of heart."<sup>2</sup> Let us see now whether any of us be of the number of those, as St. Paul exhorts us, etc.—*continues as before.*

The same sermon may be delivered on the first Sunday after Easter and on the Feast of St. Thomas, the Apostle, on the words: "Be not faithless, but believing."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Fortasse unusquisque apud semetipsum dicat, ego jam credidi, salvus ero. Verum dicit si fidem operibus tenet.

<sup>2</sup> Exprobravit incredulitatem eorum et duritiam cordis.—Mark xvi. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Noli esse incredulus, sed fidelis.—John xx. 27.

# ON THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS.

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## *On Pride.*

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### THIRD SERMON.

#### ON THE VAIN LABOR OF THE PROUD.

##### Subject.

The ambitious man who seeks honor and authority amongst men : 1. Gains nothing from men on earth. 2. Gains nothing from God in Heaven.—*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.

What an annoying thing it is to labor and effect nothing, to fish and catch nothing! No wonder, then, that the fishermen, of whom we read in to-day's Gospel, brought their nets and boat to land in sheer vexation. Why should we give ourselves further trouble, they thought? “ We have labored all the night and have taken nothing.”<sup>1</sup> We are tired of this useless toil. How many fishermen there are nowadays, my dear brethren, who also labor in vain! The world is often compared to a great sea, in which worldlings toil day and night to secure a large fish; some fish for honors, praise, reputation, and authority amongst men; others for wealth and temporal goods; others for sinful and impure pleasures. And according to the testimony of St. John, that is all that this great sea of the world contains. But

<sup>1</sup> *Per totam noctem laborantes, nihil cepimus.*

what fruitless labor! After having toiled and troubled for many years, they must at last cry out, like the Apostles: "We have labored all the night, and have taken nothing." And so it is in reality, when we consider the matter in the right light. Nothing is more capable of inducing a reasonable man to withdraw his heart and his desires from the vanity of the world, in order to fix them on God and heavenly things, than due knowledge and consideration of this truth. I will speak to-day only of the first class of those fishers of the world; that is, of those who strive for honors; and I say—

#### Plan of Discourse.

*The ambitious man, who seeks honor and authority amongst men, gains nothing. Such is the subject of the sermon. He gains nothing from men on earth. The first part. He gains nothing from God in Heaven. The second part. Therefore he labors foolishly who seeks for anything else but to be humble and to please God. Such shall be the conclusion.*

Oh, most humble Virgin, and you, holy angels guardian, obtain for us the grace of God, that we may know this truth!

Most people try to gain honor and authority amongst men.

Honor and authority amongst men on earth consist in a sentiment of esteem which others have for one, either on account of his excellent skill and natural gifts, or on account of his virtue and piety, or on account of the high offices and dignities which raise him above others. This sentiment causes people, generally, to speak in high terms of such a one, and to show him outward marks of respect. See, my dear brethren, that is all the fish that an ambitious man can catch. For the sake of it, people of both sexes and all conditions give themselves no end of trouble and labor. For this, many a soldier goes into the field and exposes himself to the greatest danger, to gain the reputation of courage. For this, many a one wastes himself away with study, so as to gain a reputation for learning. For this, many a one gives away his money by hundreds and thousands, to get a mere name and title of honor, which will give him a higher rank than others. For this, many a one makes himself a regular slave in the service of some great man, wearing his life away day and night by constant bowing and scraping, so as either to gain or to retain the favor of his master, and that he may thus compel others to treat him with respect and honor. For this, many a one is extravagant in outward show, in building and furnishing houses, in giving parties and entertainments,

in order to get a name and authority for himself, by the influence of his wealth. For this, many a woman dresses above her station, and adorns and tricks herself out, more sometimes than the Gospel laws allow, in order to exhibit herself, as if for sale, to the eyes of men, that she may be admired by others, or that she may not appear to less advantage than others. For this the commandments of God are often set aside, either to please men, or not to displease them, so that many a one drinks more than he is able, or can afford, to the injury of his health, and many a vindictive man refuses to bear the least insult, that he may gain the reputation of bravery ; nay, what is more to be wondered at, there are hypocrites who put on an appearance of humility in word and behavior, so as to gain the name of being humble, pious, and devout. In a word, there are few who are not tickled by ambition, and who do not try to gain the praise of men, now and then.

But is it worth all the labor and trouble ? Suppose I catch the fish I am looking for, what have I ? Nothing ; a breath of air which comes out of the mouths of a few in my praise ; for it is in that that my praise and glory consist, and of course it vanishes with the breath, and leaves no trace behind. Or it is an empty imagination, a fleeting thought that a few men conceive of me, which constitutes my honor and reputation ; a thought which the first distraction that comes drives away completely ; a thought which I cannot see, of which I often know nothing, nor will ever know anything. And what can it matter to my happiness whether the Pope of Rome, or any lady or gentleman here has a good or a bad opinion of me, as long as I know nothing about it ? If I am sometimes aware of it, if men show me the esteem they have of me by their words and by outward tokens of respect, I cannot know, nor be certain that these come from the heart, and that they are not mere flatteries and compliments, which are cheap and common enough nowadays, so that one has a servant and attendant in almost every man he meets in the streets. Even if I am certain that people really respect me, and that their praise of me comes from the heart, do I gain anything by that, which I had not before ? Am I better, because others think highly of me ? Am I greater or nobler, because they pay me compliments and show me respect ? Am I happier because they speak well of me ? Have I attained greater perfection, skill, or virtue, or have I acquired any praiseworthy quality, be-

A foolish labor, because it seeks what is nothing in itself.

cause I enjoy a high position and dignity? No, I am the same as I was before in the eyes of God, and not a whit greater. Even the pagan philosopher, Aristotle, says: Honor and esteem are not in the person honored, far from it; they are in the person who pays the respect or conceives the esteem.<sup>1</sup> Hence, since that which is not in me can have no effect on me, the good opinion and praise of the one can no more do me good, than the bad opinion and blame of the other can do me harm. Tell me, oh, ambitious man, if I have a bad opinion of you, and say that you are ugly, weak, sickly, stupid, and ignorant; have you really those faults and frailties in you, because I say that you have them? No, certainly not. Very well; but, if so, you will surely not be any greater or better, if I, and every one, were to think and speak well of you; nor will you be any worse or more contemptible if we neither think nor speak of you in that way. It would be a foolish thing, then, for me to trouble myself about a breath of air. It would be a case of fishing in vain, and although I should get what I sought for, yet, if I consider the matter in its true light, I shall have to say that all that I have obtained for my trouble is worth nothing.

Nay, in high positions there is more trouble and annoyance.

With regard to the favor of the great, and positions of authority, which are so much sought after by the ambitious man, it is with us as with little children. Sometimes a child looks up to the top of a high tower, and thinks that Heaven is up there. Oh, it thinks, if I could only climb up, I might hear the angels sing and touch Heaven with my hand! Well, there are the stairs; you can go up, if you wish. And the little one climbs up with a great deal of trouble. Well, do you hear the angels yet? No; but instead of that the poor child has become dizzy. How foolish I was, it thinks, to imagine that Heaven was here; I find that it is as far off as ever; how am I to get down again? I am so tired climbing up that I am afraid to go down. The same thing happens to many an old man; he looks upon important offices and great honors as a high tower, on the top of which he will find, as he imagines, a Heaven full of happiness; he looks with envious eyes at those who have already gained the summit; he sees the pomp and magnificence they display, the favor and influence they have with the great, the titles they enjoy, the honor that is paid them, the obsequiousness of those who expect favors from them, etc. He sees all this outward glitter, and thinks, oh, what a beautiful tower! if I could only

<sup>1</sup> Honor non est in honorato, sed in honorante.

get to the top of it ! If I could have that office, that employment, how happy I should be, how people would respect me ! If, after long running hither and thither, and bowing and scraping in all directions, and seeking the favor and patronage of all kinds of people, and spending money right and left, if even then he succeeds in reaching the top of the tower, what sort of a Heaven has he discovered ? A very indifferent one ; he grows giddy, he finds all the care, trouble, and labor that such important positions bring with them, when one endeavors to do his duty properly in them ; he who before could live independently in his proper state, and look after his own interests, must now, after having sold his freedom, be a servant and attendant upon others ; he who formerly could enjoy his meals in quiet, is now very often prevented by his business from doing so ; even the honor shown him, the audiences he must give, the compliments he must hear, become burdensome to him at last, so that he is not his own master, and cannot any longer enjoy himself after his own fashion, in peace and quiet. I need not say that a necessary consequence of all this will be, that he gives up his usual devotions, and has no time left for the service of God, and the important business of his salvation. Besides, he has so much secret enmity and envy to contend against, that he must be always in dread of being supplanted and of being turned away in disgrace.

Cardinal Baronius used to say that, after he became cardinal, he was no longer at liberty to go out and visit his dear friends, as he wished ; for he could not go out without a whole retinue of servants in his train ; whereas, before, he might go as he pleased. Margaret Aldobrandina, as Cardinal Pallavicini writes, after her marriage with the Duke of Parma was obliged to dress in very costly style, and she grew so tired of it, that she wrote to her uncle, Pope Clement VIII., to allow her to give up this magnificence, and to dress like any ordinary woman of respectable standing, for comfort's sake. The same Cardinal says that he knew princes and dukes, with whom he was well acquainted, to be more unhappy, in the midst of all their splendor, than ordinary citizens who had to depend on their daily labor. And in fact, my dear brethren, if we look at the matter rightly, we shall see that it is very difficult for great men to enjoy themselves heartily. For, where can they go to enjoy themselves ? Not in the midst of their own state and magnificence, certainly, where they expect every one to bend the knee

Proved by  
examples.

to them. Oh, no ; there they dare not speak a word, nor make the least movement unbecoming their dignity ; there all must be in earnest, for it is not the place for amusements ; no chance, therefore, of a hearty laugh in the midst of that grandeur. How, then, can they enjoy themselves ? By disguising themselves once or twice a year, and putting on the dress of an innkeeper, a coachman, or a lackey, as is the custom at Shrove-tide, so that they may move about freely among their own servants, and that the latter may not be obliged to show them any special marks of respect. That is the pleasure they enjoy—a pleasure which their servants can have every day.

The ambitious do not find even the worthless thing they seek.

But why should I spend so much time describing the vanity and nothingness of worldly honor and glory ? The ambitious man, who toils and struggles for it, very often fails in securing the object of his search. In a public lottery there are countless tickets, from which one may draw after having paid a certain sum ; all sorts of costly things are hanging up—silver plate, swords, mirrors, and other objects, all designed to catch the eye and attract people to the lottery, by inspiring them with the hope of winning some of these things. Yet, how many there are who spend ten, twenty, or thirty dollars, and draw nothing but blanks each time ; or else they get some worthless thing, a knife or a spoon of no value, which they throw away in disgust ; and so they have to go home full of discontent at having squandered so much money for nothing. It seems as if the world gets up a lottery of that kind to cheat the ambitious. Honor, authority, esteem, praise, and a good reputation amongst men are the prizes offered ; the ambitious are easily caught by the bait, and eagerly stretch forth their hands to seize something valuable ; but after having spent much labor and money, they get, very often, nothing but blanks ; rarely do they succeed in gaining the particular prize they long for ; they wish to be honored, esteemed, and praised by men, but they are bitterly disappointed.

But nearly always the opposite.

For, nearly always the event is in direct opposition to their wishes ; instead of honor and authority, they draw down upon themselves hatred and envy ; instead of gaining praise and making a great name for themselves, they lose the reputation they already enjoyed ; instead of being spoken of with respect, they are laughed at ; instead of being honored, they are treated with contempt. Nor can it be otherwise ; for there is nothing more intolerable than an ambitious man who is known to think too much of himself, and tries to raise himself above others ; he

draws down upon himself the anger of the great, and the hatred of the common people. The two children of Zebedee, as St. Cyril remarks, desired to be greater than the other apostles; they asked their mother to obtain for them from Christ the privilege of sitting, one at His right, the other at His left hand, in His kingdom: "Say that these my two sons may sit, the one on Thy right hand, and the other on Thy left, in Thy kingdom."<sup>1</sup> But what did they gain by their request? Nothing but the displeasure of the other apostles; for St. Matthew says: "And the ten hearing it, were moved with indignation against the two brethren."<sup>2</sup> And so it happens nowadays amongst men; a proud man, who is arrogant in speech and bearing, and tries to make others honor him, imagines that every one thinks him a learned, prudent, experienced, and clever man, while the contrary is really the case; for he is looked upon as a conceited man, who thinks a great deal too much of himself, and who looks down upon his fellows. A vain woman adorns and tricks herself out, until she looks, as the Holy Scriptures say, like a magnificent temple: "Their daughters decked out, adorned around about after the similitude of a temple."<sup>3</sup> She seeks to gain the respect and esteem of men, and imagines that every one must say of her: Oh, how beautiful she is, how well dressed! she cannot be one of the common people. Believe me, she is mightily deceived, especially if her dress is above her condition, or if it shows signs of excessive vanity or immodesty. In that case, a good and sensible Christian must say to himself: What worldliness she shows, what frivolity; it would be far better for her good name if she dressed more reasonably. The common people point at her, and turn her into ridicule. Such is the honor and respect shown to that kind of people. They try to please men, and are bitterly disappointed. That is the way the false world betrays its servants.

It is true that those who occupy high positions, or who display great magnificence, are treated with outward respect; every one bows to them; they hear flattery and praise on all sides, especially from those who require their assistance; but where is the honor or glory in that? You might as well say that a poor student has attained a high position, because he acts

Honor does not consist in outward tokens of respect.

<sup>1</sup> Dic. ut sedeat hi duo filii mei, unus ad dexteram tuam, et unus ad sinistram in regno tuo.—Matth. xx. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Et audientes decem, indignati sunt de duobus fratribus.—Ibid. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Filie eorum compositæ, circumornatæ ut similitudo templi.—Ps. cxlii. 12.

the part of king on the stage ; for he has even more respect paid to him, and the praises of his heroic deeds are loudly sounded. But when the play is at an end, he wraps his ragged mantle around him, and carries home the books of the little boy, born of wealthier parents, who bent the knee before him on the stage. Honor and glory before the world consist, as I have said, in the good opinion that men have of one, and in the terms of sincere praise in which they speak of him on account of that opinion. They do not consist in empty compliments. How often do not people praise outwardly what they inwardly detest and despise ? Many a one receives tokens of respect, who, when his back is turned, is laughed at. Many a one, who is accustomed to fawn upon others, through necessity or policy, really detests the persons he pretends to admire.

Therefore,  
they labor  
in vain.

“ We have labored all the night and have taken nothing.” These words may be used with truth by all who are influenced by ambition, and who seek honor and glory before the world. They labor long in vain ; they fish for a long time and with great trouble, but catch nothing ; generally, in fact, the opposite of what they desire happens. And this is in perfect accordance with Thy justice, O great God, for thereby Thou makest the pride and vanity of men to be the cause of their greater shame and disgrace. So true are the words Thou hast spoken by the Wise Man : “ The promotion of fools is disgrace ; ”<sup>1</sup> their honor will be their shame. Happy he who tries to please Thee alone, O Almighty God, and to be held in honor and esteem by Thee. As Thou hast said also by Thy Prophet Jeremias : “ Let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me,”<sup>2</sup> otherwise, “ Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, and let not the strong man glory in his strength, and let not the rich man glory in his riches ; ”<sup>3</sup> whoever seeks honor and glory, let him seek it alone in honoring and serving Me. But the worst of all is, that the ambitious man not only fails to find honor and praise amongst men, but also that he loses, through his ambition, all honor and esteem with God in Heaven, as I shall show in the—

<sup>1</sup> Stultorum exaltatio ignominia.—Prov. iii. 35.

<sup>2</sup> In hoc gloriatur, qui gloriatur, scire et nosse me.—Jerem. ix. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Non gloriatur sapiens in sapientia sua, et non gloriatur fortis in fortitudine sua, et non gloriatur dives in divitiis suis.—Ibid. 23.

Second Part.

In the game of ball, as is well known, when two or more are playing against each other, the players must try to keep the ball constantly in the air ; if one of them lets the ball fall to the ground, or allows it to catch in his clothes, the others cry out at once that he has lost. This comparison will help me in my present subject, my dear brethren, for it seems that God plays the same game with men. Honor, praise, glory, authority, what else are they but a ball thrown into the air ? God, who bestows His gifts in different ways, allows, nay, decrees that those o whom He gives special graces or dignities should be esteemed, respected, and honored more than others ; even so He is accustomed to exalt His most holy and humble servants in the eyes of the world, so that, although they despise and shun honor and glory, yet they are on that account all the more esteemed. Now this is the ball that God throws to them ; it is not a losing game, nor is it bad, or vain, or culpable to be praised and esteemed by the world ; but to keep this ball, and not to throw it back again to God, from whom it comes, that is to say, to take the praise and honor to one's self, without referring it to God, to find a vain pleasure in it, or to seek it and work for it, as if it were an absolute good in itself, that means to play a losing game ; for then both Heaven and hell cry out that we have lost, that we cannot play against the Almighty God, that we have no longer grace or favor with Him, for we keep for ourselves what belongs to God alone, according to the words, "To the only God be honor and glory."

Not he who is honored, but he who seeks honor, and arrogates it, displeases God.

Lucifer, a master-piece of the almighty hand of God, who received more beauty and perfection than any other angel, as soon as he gave way to the first vain complacency in his beauty, heard at once the words : Thou hast lost all, away with thee from Heaven, into the deepest abyss of hell, where thou shalt never have the least hope of recovering the Divine favor for all eternity ! See what happened to Adam in Paradise : as soon as he allowed himself to be deceived by the promise of the serpent : "You shall be as gods,"<sup>1</sup> and gave way to pride, he at once lost all—the garment of innocence, sanctifying grace, the immortality of the body, the favor and friendship of God, everything went in a moment. As we read in the 24th chapter of the Second Book of Kings, Joab came to King David, and as David

Shown by examples from Scriptures.

<sup>1</sup> Soli Deo honor et gloria.—I. Tim. i. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Eritis sicut dii.—Gen. iii. 5.

had commanded, brought him the number of his soldiers : “ And there were found of Israel eight hundred thousand valiant men that drew the sword : and of Juda five hundred thousand fighting men.”<sup>1</sup> Ah, thought David, with secret pride, what a great king I am ! Thirteen hundred thousand men can I place in the field. Who will dare to contend with me ? Oh, David, thou hast lost, lost ! Before thou wast a man according to God’s own heart ; now God cannot suffer thee any longer, on account of thy pride ; for thou hast kept to thyself the honor and glory that belong to Him. St. Gregory says : “ David was puffed up with silly vanity, and sinned by causing his people to be numbered against the will of God.”<sup>2</sup> And such certainly was the case, as David himself acknowledged, when, full of repentance, he cried out : “ I have sinned very much in what I have done ; but I pray Thee, O Lord, to take away the iniquity of Thy servant, because I have done exceeding foolishly.”<sup>3</sup> God was so displeased and so angry with David, on account of this one vain thought, that even after David’s repentance, He caused seventy thousand men of his people to die of pestilence : “ And the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel, from the morning unto the time appointed, and there died of the people from Dan to Bersabee seventy thousand men.”<sup>4</sup> So much does God hate pride and ambition.

Amongst all vices there is none more detestable to God than pride.

In fact, there is no vice that God looks upon with greater anger and displeasure than this. “ God resisteth the proud,”<sup>5</sup> writes St. James. St. Augustine, speaking of these words, says : “ There is hardly a page in the Sacred Writings in which it is not stated that God resists the proud.”<sup>6</sup> Hear the words of the Wise Ecclesiasticus : “ He that holdeth it, shall be filled with maledictions, and it shall ruin him in the end.”<sup>7</sup> “ Because the daughters of Sion are haughty,” says the Prophet Isaias, “ and have walked with stretched-out necks, and wanton glances of their eyes, and made a noise as they walked with their feet, and moved in a set pace ; the Lord will make bald the crown

<sup>1</sup> *Inventa sunt de Israel octingenta millia virorum fortium, qui educerent gladium, et de Juda quingenta millia pugnatorum.—II. Kings xxiv. 9.*

<sup>2</sup> *David tumore inflatus, populum numerando peccavit.*

<sup>3</sup> *Peccavi valde in hoc facto: sed precor, Domine, ut transferas iniquitatem servi tui, quia stulte egi nimis.—II. Kings xxiv. 10.*

<sup>4</sup> *Immisitque Dominus pestilentiam in Israel, de mane usque ad tempus constitutum, et mortui sunt ex populo a Dan usque ad Bersabee septuaginta millia vivorum.—Ibid. 15.*

<sup>5</sup> *Deus superbis resistit.—James iv. 6.*

<sup>6</sup> *Nulla fere est pagina sanctorum librorum, in qua non sonet quod Deus superbis resistit.*

<sup>7</sup> *Qui tenuerit illam, adimplebitur maledictis, et subvertet eum in finem.—Eccl. x. 15.*

of the head of the daughters of Sion, and the Lord will discover their hair.”<sup>1</sup> Countless similar passages may be found in the Sacred Writings. In the life of the holy virgin Lidwina, who was a miracle of patience, inasmuch as she suffered all kinds of sickness, so that she had to remain bed-ridden for thirty-eight years, we read that people of all classes used to visit her and ask her prayers. Amongst others there was a certain priest who earnestly and humbly begged of her to pray that God might take away from him whatever was the greatest hindrance to his salvation. The holy virgin began to pray, and behold, the priest’s voice at once became harsh and unmusical, although it had been up to that moment a very fine voice, so that he was able to lead the choir by himself. From this sudden change he understood that the vain pleasure he had in his fine voice was the greatest hindrance to his salvation. Reflect on this, my dear brethren; if a trifling act of vanity, on account of singing the praises of God, so displeased the Almighty that he who gave way to it was in danger of losing his soul, how must not God hate the pride and ambition with which some try to exalt themselves above others on almost every occasion?

And have we reason to wonder at this? What can be more intolerable to the Almighty than to see a miserable worm of the earth puffed up with pride, and trying to arrogate to himself the honor that belongs to God alone, although the great God has not refused to humble Himself and to become the last of men? What more intolerable than to see a worm of the earth, whom He has drawn out of nothing, who in and of himself is nothing, knows nothing and can do nothing, whose life is prolonged every moment by the power of God, to see such a one boasting of the goods that have been lent to him only for a time, and stealing away the glory that belongs only to the Giver of them? What would you say, my dear brethren, of one who is head and ears in debt, who has nothing but what he has borrowed from others, who owes the tailor for his coat, the shoemaker for his shoes, the baker for his bread, his workmen for their labor, in a word, he is in debt all round; what would you say, if he were to make a boast of what he has belonging to other people, and besides that to look down upon and despise his creditors? Oh, you would say, he is an intolerable idiot; no one could have pa-

Because the proud man steals away honor from God.

<sup>1</sup> Proeo, quod elevatae sunt filiae Sion, et ambulaverunt extento collo, et nutibus oculorum ibant, et plandebant, ambulabant pedibus suis, et composito gradu incedebant: decaivabit Dominus verticem filiarum Sion, et Dominus crimen earum nudabit.—Isai. iiii. 16, 17.

tience with him. Poor mortals that we are, St. Paul asks each of us: "What hast thou that thou hast not received,"<sup>1</sup> that thou dost not owe to God? From whom have you received all the goods of nature, understanding, knowledge, learning, skill, health, beauty, etc.? Are they not a debt you owe to God? And the goods of fortune, such as riches, nobility, the favor of the great, high offices and honorable titles, are they yours? Show me a single penny of all your money, a single square foot of your land, of which you can say with truth, this belongs altogether to me. Is it not simply a debt you owe to God, who has lent you these things that you may use them for a time? St. Asterius laughs at those who use the title master or owner, or the words mine and thine, when speaking of things they have in their possession: "I am lost in astonishment, when I hear people say, this is my house, my property, etc. For, by the help of that little word 'my,' these people take possession of what belongs to Another and not to them."<sup>2</sup> But, asks St. Paul again, if that is the case, if you have received everything from God, so that whatever you possess belongs really to Him, why do you act as if you were absolute master? "And if thou hast received, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?"<sup>3</sup> Why dost thou raise thyself against thy good God, and arrogate to thyself the glory and praise that belong to Him? What wonder is it, I repeat, if all esteem, grace, and favor with God are forfeited by him who acts thus?

And many other sins come from pride.

But the evil does not merely consist in the fact that the ambitious man takes away the honor that belongs to God, for from this vice come many other sins against God and man. The Wise Man says, "Pride is the beginning of all sin."<sup>4</sup> When David prayed with all his heart to God to save him from this vice, he said these remarkable words: "Let not the foot of pride come to me."<sup>5</sup> Regarding these words the interpreters of the Holy Scriptures ask the question: Why does David mention the foot and not the head, since it is in the head that pride has its seat principally, and why does he speak of one foot and not of two? They answer, that pride has only one foot, because, like one who limps about on one foot, the proud man is very

<sup>1</sup> Quid autem habes quod non accepisti?—I. Cor. iv. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Cum aliquos audio dicentes, domus mea, pradium meum, etc., satis non possum admirari, cum tribus fallacibus literulis aliena sibi vendicant.

<sup>3</sup> Si enim acceperis, quid gloriaris quasi non acceperis?—I. Cor. iv. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Initium omnis peccati est superbia.—Ecc. x. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Non veniat mihi pes superbiæ.—Ps. xxxv. 12.

liable to stumble and fall. So that each step that the proud man takes is a fall into some other sin, into contempt of his neighbor, injustice, prodigality, hard-heartedness to the poor, oppression of the weak, persecution of his equals, hatred and envy towards those who are preferred before him, rage and desire of revenge when he is slighted, impurity, which latter vice God allows him to fall into in order to humble him, coldness and indifference to God and heavenly things ; in a word, nothing is too wicked or unjust for him, either to defend his honor and authority, or to gratify his ambitious desires. Thus, Jezebel, in her pride and fury, persecuted the innocent Naboth to death, because he thwarted her desires ;<sup>1</sup> the proud Abimelech was so cruel as to put his seventy brothers to death, that he might reign alone.<sup>2</sup> The ambitious Adonibezec, in the height of his unnatural fury, caused the hands and feet of seventy kings to be cut off, and he compelled the unfortunate kings, thus mutilated, to lie down under his table, and eat the crumbs that fell on the floor.<sup>3</sup> So true is it that pride is the beginning of all sin. With reason, then, does David pray : “ Let not the foot of pride come to me ; ” O Lord, permit me not to wander about on this one foot, lest I fall into many sins. He says nothing of the head, because the proud man has not a good head ; for, like the foolish man, he undertakes a great deal of useless labor and trouble to gain honor and authority amongst men, although in most cases he finds the very opposite of what he seeks, and moreover, loses all honor and esteem with God.

See now, oh, ambitious man, how well you have done your work ! A fine fish, indeed, you have caught ! You have sought for honor, praise, and glory in the world ; you have labored for such a long time and have taken nothing ; you have found neither the honor and esteem you sought for from men, nor have you the favor and friendship of God. The very opposite to what you wished has occurred ; instead of the good name you had before, you are now disgraced before the world, and you have lost the true honor you should have with God and His saints. “ Pride is hateful before God and men.”<sup>4</sup> You are like the dog that found a piece of meat : as soon as he got it he ran off to eat it quietly on the bank of a river ; seeing his own shadow in the water, he thought it was another dog coming to

Therefore, the ambitious man labors in vain and foolishly.

<sup>1</sup> III. Kings xxi.

<sup>2</sup> Judges ix.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. i. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Odit illis coram Deo est et hominibus superbia.—Ecclesi. x. 7.

take the meat from him ; starting off afresh he ran as quickly as possible, but of course the shadow kept apace with him ; at last he saw the piece of meat reflected in the clear water, and as it seemed much bigger than the piece he had in his mouth, he dropped the latter and snapped at the shadow ; so that he lost both the meat and the shadow. So it is with the ambitious man ; he strives with the greatest eagerness for the empty shadow of earthly glory, and loses the good name he formerly enjoyed amongst men, and, at the same time, the true honor he had with God ; the one goes with the other.

Conclusion  
and resolution  
to seek  
honor with  
God alone.

How foolish and vain, therefore, my labor has hitherto been, when I tried to please men, and to gain their esteem ! Away with the worthless thing ! I am tired of fishing and catching nothing. Art thou proud, my soul ? Dost thou desire honor and glory ? If so, let thy ambition soar higher. Look up to Heaven ; this earth is too small and low for thee. Thou canst, if thou wilt, be in honor and favor with the mightiest of monarchs, with the angels and princes of Heaven, with the chosen friends of God, the number of whom surpasses that of all living men. This honor will not be taken away from thee : thou canst keep it as long as thou wilt ; it will last all the time of thy natural life and will accompany thee into eternity. Therefore, in order to gain this honor, I will henceforth strive always to please God by Christian humility and true virtue ; I will do what I know to be pleasing to God ; I will avoid everything that I know to be displeasing to Him ; men may think and speak of me as they will or can, it is nothing to me ; their judgments and idle talk cannot make me better or worse than I am in the sight of God. What good is it to me to be praised by them, if Thou, O God, alone despisest me ? What harm is it to me to be looked down upon by them, if Thou alone, O my God, praisest and lovest me ? This love, this praise shall be enough for me. Amen.

**FOURTH SERMON.**

**ON THE FOLLY OF THE PROUD.**

Subject.

One may be great before men, and also great before God ; yet he is a foolish man who on that account has a high opinion of himself.—*Preached on the Feast of St. John the Baptist.*

Text.

*Erit enim magnus coram Domino.*—Luke i. 15.

“For he shall be great before the Lord.”

Introduction.

There are three kinds of great people in the world ; some are great before men, others in their own estimation, and others are great before God. St. John the Baptist was certainly great before God ; if we had not the words of the angel to prove that, we have the infallible testimony of Jesus Christ Himself : “There hath not risen among them that are born of women a greater than John the Baptist.”<sup>1</sup> He was great, too, before men, although he performed no miracles ; for the Jews had so high an opinion of him that they looked upon him as the true Messiah. But one greatness was wanting to him, to his own greater praise, glory, and sanctity, and that was the being great in his own opinion. In spite of his greatness before God and men, he was so little, and so lowly to himself, that he looked upon himself as unworthy to loosen the latchet of our Lord’s shoe. “Art thou the prophet ? And he answered : No ;”<sup>2</sup> although our Lord said of him that he was greater than a prophet, “More than a prophet.”<sup>3</sup> Who are you, then, the Jews asked him. I am nothing but a mere sound, he answered : “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness.”<sup>4</sup> My dear brethren, in what does our greatness consist ? Are we great before men, like St. John ? It is not much matter to us, in any case, and it was a cause of very little concern to that great prophet. Are we great before God ? Oh, that is an important question, indeed ; to that all our thoughts,

<sup>1</sup> Non surrexit inter natos mulierum major Joanne Baptista.—Matth. xi. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Propheta es tu ? Et respondit : Non.—John i. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Plusquam prophetam.—Matth. xi. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Ego vox clamantis in deserto.—John i. 23.

desires, words, and acts should tend. Are we great in our own estimation? Oh, that would be a most foolish thing; for we have not the least cause to be proud, or to have a great opinion of ourselves. Therefore, if we are not so great before God, nor so great before men as St. John the Baptist, let us, at all events, imitate him in being little and lowly in our own eyes; and we have much more reason to be so than he had; all men, no matter who they are, have reason to be so, as I shall now show, and I say—

#### Plan of Discourse.

*You may be great before men, you may also be great before God; yet you act foolishly if you are great in your own eyes and have a high opinion of yourself. Such is the whole subject of the present sermon.*

O most humble Saviour, who wast pleased that we should learn of Thee especially to be meek and humble of heart, open our eyes that we may see how foolish it is for us to have a high opinion of ourselves, so that we may always preserve true humility. This we ask of Thee through the merits of that Virgin whose humility brought Thee from Heaven down upon earth, and through the intercession of the holy angels, who keep such faithful watch over us, miserable mortals.

What it is  
that makes  
one great  
before God,  
and before  
men?

That which makes one great before men, consists mostly in the gifts and goods of nature which one has, such as a good understanding, prudence, knowledge, learning, skill, bravery, and the beauty and perfection of the body; or it may consist also in external advantages, such as riches, honors, dignities, nobility of birth, renown, praise, the love and good wishes of the people, etc. These and similar things appear great and noble in the eyes of the world, which generally judges by mere outward appearances: "They have called the people happy that hath these things,"<sup>1</sup> although such gifts and goods are to be valued, in themselves, only in so far as they help us to our last end, that is, to serve God and save our souls. On the other hand, that which makes one great before God is the possession of supernatural goods and the gifts of grace, especially sanctifying grace and the friendship of God, the Christian virtues, diligence in the practice of good works, the beauty of the soul and holiness of life. A poor beggar who possesses these things, although the world looks on him as an outcast, is worth far more, in the

<sup>1</sup> *Beatum dixerunt populum cui hæc sunt.*—Ps. cxliii. 15.

sight of God and His Saints, than princes, kings, or emperors who are deficient in them. Oh, my good God, give me only these gifts, and I willingly renounce everything else!

In order now, my dear brethren, that we may come at once to the root of the matter, imagine a man who has all that can make him very great before men, and before God also; and that he, on considering the gifts he is endowed with, thinks rather too much of himself, and looks on himself as greater and better than those who have less. But stop, I am contradicting myself; I am trying to bring two things together which mutually repel each other; for I suppose a man to be holy and virtuous and still to lack the very foundation of holiness and virtue. No, it is impossible for a man to be great before God, once he commences to be great in his own opinion. He cannot be holy unless he is little in his own eyes and humble of heart. St. Gregory says, and with him all the Holy Fathers: "No matter what virtues a man has, no matter what good works he performs, they are worth nothing, unless they be supported by humility."<sup>1</sup> Assuming, then, it were possible for my supposition to be realized, and that a man so holy, so fortunate, so highly esteemed, were to give way to pride and think himself great, and even greater than others, then, no matter how prudent, wise, and clever he may be, he acts in thought and imagination like a fool. Why so? Here is the reason:

Still, he who has all these things acts foolishly, if he gives way to self-esteem on account of them.

He who has nothing of his own, and who knows that at any moment that which is intrusted to him, but does not belong to him, may be demanded from him by the rightful owner, acts foolishly if he thinks himself great and gives way to pride. Is not that the case? Suppose that a groom, or scullion, by chance gets hold of the keys of his master, and that, during the latter's absence, he enters into the palace in order to sweep out the rooms, bringing with him a number of simple country youths, his acquaintances, who happen to be in town at the time. He shows them the whole house, opens one room after another, and lets them admire the rich hangings, the beautiful pictures and the magnificent furniture; see, he says, what a great and rich man I am; this is the house in which I live; so well have I prospered. The country youths, who never saw anything of the kind before, go about staring open-mouthed at everything; they cannot help wondering that their friend should have become such a great

For it is foolish for a poor man, who has nothing of his own, to be proud. Shown by a simile.

<sup>1</sup> Si quælibet bona opera adsint, nulla sunt nisi humilitate condiantur.

man; but they forget that he still has on his groom's jacket, and that if he invited them to his table, he could give them nothing better than a piece of bread and cheese. If a sensible man heard him boasting in that way, he would say to him: Oh, you foolish fellow, those things do not belong to you; the keys you have do not make you rich or noble; show us something that really belongs to you, the broom for instance, with which you sweep out the stable or the kitchen; and not even that belongs to you, for you did not get it till you came here.

Every man  
is poor and  
lowly in  
himself,  
with regard  
to natural  
gifts.

I have selected a simile of that kind, my dear brethren, because I should find it difficult to give you an idea of how little and how vile man is, in and by himself. All of us, great or small, are much poorer than the poor scullion; we need not go beyond ourselves to find reasons for being humble, and having a low opinion of ourselves; for, as God says by the prophet Micheas: "Thy humiliation shall be in the midst of thee."<sup>1</sup> Thou hast in thyself, O man, cause enough for humility and a low opinion of thyself. For, if we consider what we have from nature, we are nothing; it is from nothing that the Creator has drawn us; a hundred years ago all here present were nothing; can anything be viler or more worthless than nothing? Dust and ashes and corruption are the first materials of our being, so that each one of us can truly say, with holy Job: "I have said to rottenness: Thou art my father; to worms, My mother and my sister."<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, lest we should forget the vileness of our origin, and think ourselves greater than we are, the Catholic Church, in the beginning of Lent, when the ashes are sprinkled on our foreheads, reminds us of the words of God in Genesis: "Remember, man, that dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return."<sup>3</sup> If, says St. Bernard, you are tempted to self-complacency or pride, remember your origin, whence you are, and what you have of yourself, and the temptation will soon vanish: "Consider, O man, whence thou comest, and blush."<sup>4</sup>

And also  
with regard  
to the state  
of grace.

Let us consider, too, what we are in ourselves, with regard to the state of grace, and we shall find that we are not even as good as a lowly scullion, for we are born slaves of the devil; we are conceived in sin, and born in sin, and sin is the only inherit-

<sup>1</sup> Humillatio tua in medio tui.—Mich. vi. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Putredini dixi: Pater meus es: mater mea et soror mea, vermibus.—Job xvii. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Memento homo quia pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris.—Gen. iii. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Considera, homo, unde venis, et erubisce.

ance we bring into this world. Could there be a greater misery or misfortune than ours? Oh, how humble this thought compels me to be! I am a sinner, I am an object of the hatred and anger of God, I am a child of damnation, and therefore, worthy to be looked down upon and despised by all creatures.

But if we have something more than nothingness, and something better than sin, if we are in the state of grace, and are friends and co-heirs of Jesus Christ, if we possess, besides, a goodly share of natural gifts and temporal blessings, where do they come from, to whom do they all belong? Are they not pure benefits of the great King of Heaven, who has given them to us gratuitously? What am I saying? Given them to us? We have only the keys of them that we may look after them: at any moment, how and when it pleases Him, God can take them from us.

Everything he has belongs to God.

With regard to natural gifts and goods, who can doubt that the same is to be said of them, unless he who doubts the truth of the Word of God? "The Lord," says the Holy Scripture, in the 2d chapter of the First Book of Kings, "maketh poor and maketh rich; He humbleth and He exalteth. He raiseth up the needy from the dust, and lifteth up the poor from the dung-hill."<sup>1</sup> "He hath put down the mighty from their seat."<sup>2</sup> Even the goods we have gained, as we think, by our own labor and trouble, do not belong to us, but are the free gifts of God's goodness. We read in the Book of Daniel that King Nabuchodonosor carried off King Joakim captive, and with him a great part of the treasures that were in Jerusalem: "And the Lord delivered into his hands Joakim the king of Juda, and part of the vessels of the house of God."<sup>3</sup> In the Book of Leviticus it is said of the land that was promised to the Israelites: "When you shall have entered into the land which I will give you."<sup>4</sup> At first, on hearing those passages, one might think that Joakim was given over to Nabuchodonosor by an angel, or by some untoward accident, without any action on the part of the latter; and that the Israelites were to march into the promised land without trouble and take possession of it easily. But no, my dear brethren, neither of these exploits was so easy of accomplishment;

First, natural goods

<sup>1</sup> Dominus pauperem facit et ditat, humiliat et subleuat. Suscitavit de pulvere egenum, et de stercore elevavit pauperem.—1. Kings ii. 7, 8.

<sup>2</sup> Deposuit potentes de sede.—Luke i. 52.

<sup>3</sup> Et tradidit Dominus in manu ejus Joakim regem Juda, et partem vasorum domus Dei.—Dan. i. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Cum ingressi fueritis terram, quam ego dabo vobis.—Lev. xxiii. 10.

Nabuchodonosor had to take the field with a large army. he had to besiege Jerusalem for a long time, and at length take it by assault ; in that way he got possession of the Jewish king. The Israelites, too, had to fight for the promised land ; in a few years five hundred thousand of them conquered thirty-one kings ; they had to make their way into the country by force of arms, and take it away from the enemy bit by bit. And yet the Sacred Scriptures say : “The Lord delivered into his hands Joakim ;” “The land which I will give you.” How can these be called gifts of God, when they are acquired by conquest and force of arms? From this we must learn that everything we have, even if it has cost us much trouble to acquire it, comes from God alone, that nothing belongs to us absolutely, for all that we have is a pure gift of the Divine Goodness.

And then  
supernatu-  
ral.

With regard to supernatural goods, the Catholic Church sings : “God of strength, to whom belongs all that is good in us.”<sup>1</sup> Not only, says St. Paul, are we incapable of doing the least good of ourselves, but we cannot even say a single good word without the help and influence of the Holy Ghost : “No man can say, the Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Ghost.”<sup>2</sup> Nor is this enough ; we cannot even wish to do anything good of ourselves, as the same Apostle writes to the Philippians : “For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to accomplish, according to His good will.”<sup>3</sup> And what makes our incapacity still more evident, it is not in our power to form a good thought without the help of God. “Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves ; but our sufficiency is from God.”<sup>4</sup> So that everything natural and supernatural that we have in body or soul belongs to God alone. Such is the fact, Christians. St. Thomas of Cirella, and others also, relate how the Sicilian fishermen, who were engaged for the tunny-fish season, were once so unsuccessful that after long trial they did not capture a single fish. The poor men made a vow to St. Anne and called on her for help, and, wonderful to narrate, on the following day their boat was surrounded with fish, so that they

<sup>1</sup> Deus virtutum, ejus est totum quod est optimum.—Prayer of the sixth Sunday after Pentecost.

<sup>2</sup> Nemo potest dicere : Dominus Jesus, nisi in Spiritu Sancto.—I. Cor. xii. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Deus est enim, qui operatur in vobis et velle et perficere pro bona voluntate.—Philipp. ii. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Non quod sufficientes simus cogitare aliquid a nobis, quasi ex nobis : sed sufficientia nostra ex Deo est.—II. Cor. iii. 5.

caught as many as they pleased with their hands, as well as with their nets. But the most wonderful thing of all was, that each fish had the word "Anne" written in large letters on its back; large and small, they were all marked with the wonderful letters, as if they wished to say to their captors: Your success is not due to your labor, nor can you take praise to yourselves on account of it, for it comes as a present from the great St. Anne. If we had sharper eyes, my dear brethren, we should see on all the gifts and goods we possess no other name written but God, God; on our understanding we should find the name, God; on our worldly goods, on our houses and lands, on everything we should find that holy Name written, according to the words of Job: "The Lord gave,"<sup>1</sup> God has lent it, it does not belong to us, but to God.

Have we, then, any reason to be proud and haughty? to look upon ourselves as greater and better than others? to have a vain complacency in ourselves? to give way to self-conceit and despise others who have received less from God? Oh, that would indeed be folly and madness on our part! we should act like the servant who pretended he was the owner of his master's house, because he had the keys for a short time. Yet the foolish world, like the simple youths, stares with wonderment at the man who has more than others, and esteems him great, because it does not understand the reason of things and goes no deeper into them than the mere outside. But one who sees things in the right light could ask a man who is great in his own estimation: "Why dost thou glory?" as St. Paul says, poor worm of the earth, why dost thou give way to self-conceit? how long wilt thou plume thyself on thy possessions? "What hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received, why dost thou glory?"<sup>2</sup> Thou foolish man, show me something that is thine; thou canst not point to anything worth a straw; thou hast but the nothingness out of which God has drawn thee, and still worse, sin, which thou hast brought with thee into the world. Why dost thou glory? What cause hast thou to be proud?

Are you rich? Have you a large estate, much money and property? Can you lead a comfortable life? Does the world look upon you as happy? Still, "why dost thou glory?" Do you think a great deal of yourself? If so, are you better

Therefore the proud man is foolish.

He is foolish who prides himself on his riches.

<sup>1</sup> Dominus dedit.—Job i. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Quid habes, quod non accepisti? Si autem accepisti, quid gloriaris?—I. Cor. iv. 7.

and greater, on that account, than others who are not so rich as you? Why should you be? Where did you get your wealth from? To whom does it really belong? Is it not simply lent to you by the Almighty God? How, then, can you boast of it? Suppose, in order to make the matter clearer by a simile, that one is so reduced in circumstances by misfortune, that he has to be supported by alms privately given, but that, by the help of those alms, he can keep up appearances, and dress in a manner becoming his state. Ordinary people, who know nothing of his poverty, are as respectful to him as if he were still rich. Who is that man? they ask; to judge by his dress and appearance, he must be a man of position. If he were to hear what they say of him, what would he think? Would he give way to pride and vanity? Oh, if he did that, he would be a most intolerable fool. God help me, he would rather think, with shame in his heart and tears in his eyes, I a rich man, when I am living on alms given me for God's sake! What would I do without my benefactor? If he dies, what will become of me? I should have to beg, in spite of my grand clothes, or else starve with hunger. No, all the honor and respect shown such a man, only serve to shame and humble him. O man, no matter how rich you are, have you not the same cause for humility? Where do your riches come from? Are they not an alms given you by God, who in His mercy, and according to His wise decrees, sends them to you, as it were, privately? Whenever He wishes He can take them from you and reduce you to beggary. Why, then, do you glory and extol yourself above others?

Or on noble  
birth.

Are you descended from a noble family, or are you raised above the common herd by the authority or dignity you possess? Is that a reason for you to be proud and self-conceited? Are you on that account greater and better than others? Is it your act that you are descended from ancestors who, by their virtues and illustrious deeds, have made themselves great and renowned before the world? In my opinion there is nothing which furnishes less reason for pride than nobility of birth; for we cannot contribute the least share of our own to it. We gain knowledge by our own exertions; we learn the arts by giving our attention to them, we grow rich, by the will of God, through our industry, nay, we must even co-operate with grace in order to attain holiness and piety; but descent from a noble family is given to us without any work at all on our part. When a courtier, on one occasion, was praising King Alfonso of Arragon

for being himself a king, and having a king for his father, a king for his son, and a king for his brother, the monarch answered : “ There is nothing I esteem less than what you make so much of.”<sup>1</sup> Have you raised yourself to high honors and dignities by your cleverness and diligence ? Who have you to thank for that ? Is it not again an alms and a gift of the good God ? Why then do you glory ? Imagine that you see a picture of the god Jupiter, that it can speak and that it says to you : I am a god amongst pictures ; I have a crown on my head ; I sit on a throne with a thunderbolt in my hand, so that all must fear me ; what are other pictures in comparison to me ? Oh, you fool, could the painter say ; what are you talking about ? If you have a thunderbolt, I gave it to you ; if you sit on a throne, it is because I painted you there. Are you anything of yourself ? Do you not know that I imagined you and then painted you, and that, with one stroke of my brush, I can destroy you ? Such should be your thoughts too, you who are raised above the common people ; be not proud on that account ; you must not forget that it is God who placed you where you are ; whenever He wills, He may give a turn to the wheel of fortune and in a day bring you very low indeed. He is the Lord, who “ hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore you should and must seem small in your own eyes, and acknowledge the goodness of God, and say to yourself : In a few years, perhaps months, all my authority will be gone, my noble blood will rot in the grave, my titles and honor will become the property of others, and I shall have to present myself before the judgment-seat of God quite alone, without servants or attendants, and God will not ask me then how many noble ancestors I had, nor what titles I enjoyed when on earth, etc. The only question then will be whether I have served my God as a true and humble Christian.

Are you quick of understanding, so that you can learn several arts and sciences with little trouble ? Men admire and praise you on that account ; but are you, therefore, any greater or better than others ? To whom do your talents belong ? Are they not an alms that God has given you gratuitously ? Why, then, do you give way to proud thoughts ? Suppose that I am wandering about on a dark night in a forest ; I have lost my way and know not where to go. Suddenly, to my great delight, I

On account  
of under-  
standing  
and skill.

<sup>1</sup> Nihil ipse minoris in vita duco, quam quod tu tanti facis.

<sup>2</sup> Deposuit potentes de sede, et exaltavit humiles.—Luke i. 52.

see a man with a lantern a few yards off; he takes pity on me and guides my steps to the nearest village; with the help of his lantern I can see as well as if it were day. On the following morning other travellers arrive, who complain of having been compelled to remain in the forest all night, because it was so dark that they could not find their way. Oh, you stupid people, I say to them, how did that happen? It makes no matter to me whether it is dark or light, I can find my way in either case. What a clever man you must be, they think. What would you think of such conduct on my part, my dear brethren? Would it not be a foolish thing to boast in that way, and to seek the praise of others? Ah, I must think to myself, if that good man had not had the kindness to accompany me with his lantern, I too should have had to spend the night in the forest. In the same way, he who is gifted with more intelligence than others must say to himself with deep humility: If the Lord did not go before me with that light, "which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world,"<sup>1</sup> I should be as stupid and dull as the most uncultivated of men. The talent that God has given me He can take away from me, so that the praise and honor I receive do not belong to me. Not to me, O Lord, not to me, but to Thee and to Thy name be honor!

On account  
of prosper-  
ity in busi-  
ness.

You are prosperous in all your affairs; whatever you begin, you are enabled to finish; whatever you undertake, you are sure of carrying out successfully; you perform all your duties in a praiseworthy manner; but what if you do? Is that a reason why you should have a great opinion of yourself, or give way to self-complacency? Are you on that account greater or better than others, who do not always succeed, and who are not able to do what you can? It would be foolish for you to think that. For, why is it that you can do more than others? Is it not because God has given you a greater alms than He has given them? An experienced goldsmith works with his hammer, and makes beautiful gold and silver ornaments; if the hammer had the use of reason, and could talk, it would, perhaps, like self-conceited men, look down upon the tools of a smith or a shoemaker, and think them as of no account compared to itself. You can only give hard blows on iron or leather, it would say; see what fine work I can do. But, the others might answer, it is not you who do it; it is your master, who knows how to

<sup>1</sup> Quæ illuminat omnem hominem venientem in hunc mundum.—John 1. 9.

use you skillfully. Change places with us ; let your master take me, and mine will take you, and you will see that I shall then have to deal with gold and silver, while you must be satisfied to work on iron or leather. Therefore you have no reason to boast ; all the praise belongs to your skillful master. That answer would suit you admirably, O man. God is the skillful Master, who knows how to make use of His creatures as instruments for different purposes ; He it is who can of the stones raise up children to Abraham, nay, according to the teaching of theologians and philosophers, He can use each creature for any purpose He pleases ; so that He could give a fly the power of building up Heaven and earth. Now, if this Almighty Lord has chosen you, instead of others, to perform great exploits, or to exercise great skill in any art, that is not to your credit, but rather to that of the skillful Master who knows how to make use of you so well. If, instead of using you, He had preferred a most ignorant person, the latter would have been just as successful as you are now ; so that, as far as you are concerned, you are not a bit better than he is. Why are you, then, so foolish as to have a high opinion of yourself ?

Are you of commanding stature or beautiful person, so that you attract the eyes and hearts of all ? Do you therefore spend half the day before the looking-glass, admiring your beauty ? Do you trick yourself out as bravely as possible, and then show yourself off before the public, so as to court admiration ? What a senseless vanity is yours, if so ! It is just as if one picture wished to extol itself above another, because it is finished in clearer colors, although both depend on the will of the painter, who has only to give one touch with his brush, in order to change the likeness of a beautiful angel into that of a horrible demon. Or, to use a comparison more to the point, it is as if a chimney, blackened with smoke, were to boast of its appearance because in the winter-time it is covered with snow. How long will the snow last ? The first shower of rain, or a good fire kindled on the hearth underneath, will put an end to it at once, and the chimney will be as black and ugly as it was before. Vain worldling, why are you proud of your beauty ? What else is it but a color that the Great Artist has given to your body ? Can he not at once destroy it, if He wishes ? A festering sore, a cancer, a fever, is quite enough to put an end to it. Wait a few years : old age will bring its wrinkles, or else the soul, in its flight from the body, will leave it to worms and rottenness.

On account  
of beauty.

Think of the couch which awaits you after death, and there will soon be an end of your pride : “ Under thee shall the moth be strewed, and worms shall be thy covering.”<sup>1</sup>

It is foolish  
also to be  
proud of  
being pious,  
and of do-  
ing good.

Finally, and speaking of those goods which alone are worthy of praise, are you great in the sight of the Lord God, are you pious, holy, zealous in His service? do you know of no, or very few, sins to trouble your conscience? do you perform many acts of virtue and heap up merits daily? are you now doing great things for the glory of God? If so, I congratulate you, for you are far better off than all those who are in the state of sin. But, certainly you have least cause of all to be proud, and far the greatest cause to be humble and lowly in the grace and favor of God. For, where do your piety and holiness come from? Is it from yourself? Certainly your co-operation has been required, but your holiness first came from the special grace and assistance of God. If He abandoned you to your own weakness for a moment, what would become of you? A child may laugh and enjoy itself as long as its mother leads or carries it about; but it cannot be proud on that account, because if the mother leaves it alone for a moment, it falls down at once. You can rejoice and be glad in the Lord, O pious Christian, because you have a good conscience, and you can thank Him for the special graces He has given you; but to have a great opinion of yourself, and imagine that you are greater and better than others, would be folly indeed. There is no sin, says St. Augustine, which another commits, that I may not commit also, unless God helps me with extraordinary grace. Perhaps to-morrow you will be in the state of sin, while the sinner, whom you look down upon to-day, will do penance, be justified and save his soul, and you, on the contrary, persevering in sin, will be lost forever. St. Francis used to say: “ If robbers and murderers had received from God the knowledge, grace, and help that He has so liberally bestowed on me, they would be on fire with seraphic charity, whilst I should have to crawl on the earth like a worm.” But we will now examine the good and holy things you do every day, in order to see if you have reason to extol yourself on account of them. We shall consider merely your daily prayer. For you to be able to do that little good, it was necessary, first of all, for God to draw you out of nothing by creation; this one fact should suffice to show you that all the honor belongs to Him. Besides, you required the faculties of

<sup>1</sup> Subter te sternetur tinea, et operimentum tuum erunt vermes.—Isai. xlv. 11.

your soul, in order to pray ; now these are also creatures and gifts of God. Further, God, as the Author of all things, must help those faculties, for, without His help, a creature can no more work than if it had no existence. And, as prayer, and any dealing with God, is a supernatural work, the same God, as the Author of grace, must help your faculties by a supernatural assistance, so that they may be really raised above themselves. Finally, it is necessary that God should give you sanctifying grace, and preserve you in it, since it is that which makes our good works meritorious of eternal life. All this is required before you can perform a single good work. Tell me, now, is there a single thing in prayer alone that you can point to as being yours ? Certainly you have to co-operate with the grace and help that God gives you, and you have to use your faculties for that purpose ; but is not even that a benefit conferred on you by Him ? I do not mean to say that we do not do the good we perform ; if that were the case, no good works could be called ours ; there is no doubt of the good work being ours ; but, since we can neither desire nor perform any good without the help of God, we have no reason to extol ourselves, as if the good we do were all ours. “ Not that we neither wish nor perform,” says St. Augustine, “ but that without the help of God we can neither wish nor perform anything good.”<sup>1</sup> So that all our good works are God’s and ours too ; they are God’s for all the reasons that we have already seen ; they are ours solely on account of co-operation ; and, therefore, just as children, who are born of a noble father, but whose mother is of low birth, deserve honor on account of their father, and contempt on account of their mother ; so our good works that come from the help of God, and the co-operation of men, give praise to God and shame to us : “ To Thee, O Lord, justice,” says the Prophet Daniel, “ but to us confusion of face.”<sup>2</sup> If so little praise belongs to us when we, helped by divine grace, perform our good works perfectly and without fault, what have we to say, what must we think when we remember that we allow so many faults and imperfections to find their way into almost everything we do ? How many acts of negligence, how many wrong intentions, how many movements of vainglory and self-complacency accompany our good acts ? If we could see all these things clearly, it

<sup>1</sup> Non quia non volumus aut non agimus, sed quia sine ipsius adiutorio nec volumus aliquid boni, nec agimus.

<sup>2</sup> Tibi, Domine, iustitia, nobis autem confusio faciei.—Dan. ix. 7.

would make us shrink back with horror even from our good works, instead of extolling ourselves on account of them, and we should exclaim with Job : “I feared all my works,”<sup>1</sup> even those which seemed praiseworthy in the eyes of men.

Therefore,  
no one has  
reason to be  
proud.

You see now, my dear brethren, that no man, no matter how great he is before the world, or even in the sight of God, if he considers well his circumstances, can have the least cause for self-glorification ; but rather every cause to be humble, lowly, and meek before God and men. You see how true are the words that St. Paul writes to the Galatians : “For if any man think himself to be something, whereas he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.”<sup>2</sup> In a word, he who thinks much of himself, and desires the esteem of others, is not a wise man, but a fool.

How we  
must, then,  
always  
practise  
humility.

From all this it follows, first, that no matter what tokens of honor are paid us on account of our office or employment, or because we really do something that deserves the praise of men, or if they see in us proofs of remarkable talent, or if we are constantly praised and made much of, etc., we can always keep ourselves in Christian humility and not allow ourselves to be carried away by the praise we receive, nor take a vain pleasure in it, if we remember the words of St. Bernard : “Consider, O man, whence thou art, and blush.”<sup>3</sup> We must act like the wise king, who having formerly been a peasant, kept his peasant’s jacket always before him, after he was raised to the throne, that he might not forget his former lowly condition, nor give way to pride. In similar circumstances we must think sometimes of what we are of ourselves, and sometimes of Him who has lent us whatever we have that is any good. For instance, we might say to ourselves : To whom does that belong for which I am now praised or honored? I certainly have it not from myself ; my origin is nothingness, my first work is sin, all that I am, all that I have, all that I can do comes from God ; so that the honor shown me now does not belong to me but to God, for it is He who has performed the praiseworthy work, using me as an instrument.

As pious  
Christians  
do.

We wonder at the great humility of the Saints ; but have we not much greater cause for wonder that any one, who knows himself, can be puffed up with pride ? Father Bernard Colnago, who in his day was a miracle of learning, eloquence, and holiness,

<sup>1</sup> Verebar omnia opera mea.—Job ix. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Nam si quis existimat se aliquid esse, cum nihil sit, ipse se seduct.—Gal. vi. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Considera, homo, unde venis, et erubescet.

who performed many miracles, and lived on the most intimate terms with St. Anthony of Padua, St. Agatha and several other Saints, who was held in the greatest esteem and reverence by people of all classes, so that they looked upon him as an angel, was once asked by his general, Claude Aquaviva, what he thought of the great respect that the people had for him and of the extraordinary gifts that God had bestowed upon him, and whether he did not feel tempted to self-complacency. "Father," was his answer, "if you had in your room a treasure of great value, left in your charge by a prince, would you be tempted to pride when you looked at it? Or, if others came in, and seeing the treasure, began to admire it, would you, therefore, think highly of yourself, look upon yourself as rich and begin to give way to pride? Whatever good I have is not mine; it is lent me by God; if I do anything which shows forth the power and goodness of God, I look upon myself as one who represents a character on the stage, and who speaks and acts, not in his own name, but according to the part that has been assigned to him; nor do I forget that the honor and glory of God consist principally in this, that He is able to make use of a miserable creature like me for such great purposes. Besides, I look upon it as the greatest folly in the world to seek for empty honor, and to have a great opinion of self."

From this, too, we can see that we must never look down upon, much less despise or treat contemptuously any one, even the meanest beggar, or the greatest sinner; for he has just as much and just as little of his own as we have. Finally, in all the contradictions we meet with, whether they come from God in the shape of crosses and trials, or from men who insult and injure us, or put us to shame and humiliation, we must be always satisfied in all humility, and think: I am nothing of myself, I deserve nothing good, so that no injury is done me, if I do not get the praise, reputation, or pleasure I desire. I came into the world a sinner, deserving of hell; it is quite right, then, for me to suffer the punishment of sin; I have no reason to complain, if anything is done to cause me pain, for I deserve hell and all its torments.

Ah, Christians, if we only thought of this always! O humility, would that thou wert as common amongst us as the reasons we have for being humble are numerous! What a change there would be in us! But, humility, thou art wanting to us, because we have not a proper knowledge of ourselves! Therefore, O great God, we humbly ask of Thee, with St. Augustine: "Teach

We must never despise others and must practise contentment in all humility.

Conclusion and prayer for grace to know and despise ourselves.

me to know Thee and to know myself.”<sup>1</sup> Let me know how great Thou art, that I may give Thee the honor that belongs to Thee, by humbling myself! Teach me what a miserable and powerless creature I am, that I may place myself beneath every creature! Teach me that Thou art everything and that I am nothing; that every good I have comes from Thee, and belongs only to Thee, that I may give Thee all the honor, praise, and glory; that all the evil I have is my own, and therefore nothing belongs to me but shame and confusion! Grant that I may be always little and lowly in my own eyes, in order that, by the practice of this necessary humility, I may begin to be really great before Thee, my Lord! Amen.

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#### FIFTH SERMON.

#### ON THE CHARACTERISTICS OF PRIDE AND THE MEANS OF ATTAINING HUMILITY.

##### Subject.

1. How we may know whether we are proud or humble.
2. The means we must use in order to attain humility.—*Preached on the seventh Sunday after Pentecost.*

##### Text.

*A fructibus eorum cognoscetis eos.*—Matth. vii. 16.  
“By their fruits you shall know them.”

##### Introduction.

True metal, according to the proverb, is known by its ring, a bird by its song, a tree by its fruit, a man by his works. To begin without further delay, I will only remind you, my dear brethren, that I have already shown that the proud man, who seeks honor from the world, loses honor with God and man. I have also proved that it is great folly to give way to pride, and that we mortals have the most powerful reasons to be little and lowly in our own eyes. But, in what does pride consist? What constitutes humility?

<sup>1</sup> Noverim Te, noverim me.

Plan of Discourse.

*How am I to know whether I am proud or humble? I will answer that question in the first part. But if I see that I am not humble, since this virtue is so necessary for salvation, what means shall I use in order to attain humility? The answer to that I shall give in the second part.*

Most humble Virgin Mary, and you, holy guardian angels, help me to speak in a humble manner of humility, so that the grace which is always given to the humble may have the greater influence on our minds.

It is a great and difficult art to know whether we are proud, or really humble of heart. There are some diseases of the body which are difficult to detect, but once detected, they are easy to be cured; such, for instance, are certain kinds of fevers, for which there is no difficulty in prescribing once they show themselves; although a rare skill is required to find them out in the beginning. Other maladies are quite different; they can be detected easily enough, but it is difficult to cure them; such are, for instance, certain other kinds of fevers, and consumption, when the patient has been suffering from them for a considerable time. Pride has both these difficulties; it is hard for us to see that we are suffering from it, and very hard to use the proper remedies, when we are forced to confess that we are laboring under that vice. So well does pride know how to conceal and cloak itself, that often God alone, from whom nothing is hidden, can detect it.

It is difficult to see whether one is proud or humble.

And this arises in the first place from the nature and characteristics of pride, for it does not seem to have anything that would cause one to fear it and fight against it. Other vices we can see at once, such as theft, injustice, impurity, drunkenness, enmity, cursing, detraction, and so forth. Why? Because they excite shame and disgust, so that any one can see that he should not be guilty of them. It is a shameful and disgraceful thing for a respectable man to commit a theft, and take what does not belong to him; shameful, disgraceful, and brutish to indulge in impurity, for it a vice that one is careful to conceal from the eyes of others, so that sometimes people are ashamed to mention it in confession; it is a shameful thing to deprive one's self of reason by drunkenness; a shameful thing to have one's mouth filled with profanity, like the demons and lost souls; shameful to laugh at and make known the faults and failings of our neighbor, which

This arises from the nature of pride.

we should rather try to hide. Nothing of that kind is to be found in the vice of pride; its end is to gain honor, fame, praise, esteem and authority before men, which is a laudable thing in itself; nay, God even commands that one man should honor another, and He has conferred great honor on His holy servants in the world. It is no wonder, then, that we should find it hard to detect this vice in ourselves, and to have a proper horror of it.

From the  
character  
of the  
proud man.

In the second place, this arises from the character of the proud man, because he refuses to believe that he seeks more honor than is due to him. If he considered his own faults and failings, he could learn to have a humble opinion of himself; but he sees them only imperfectly, and at a great distance, so that they appear quite small in his eyes; while he looks at his virtues, his rare gifts, and the great things he does, which really deserve praise, through a magnifying glass, so that they seem twenty times as great as they are in reality. "Every one thinks his own the best," says the proverb. A mother is proud of her little son, and thinks him the finest child in the world, and imagines that every one ought to be delighted to see him, although in reality he is often a very naughty boy. In the same way, the proud man thinks that because his own actions are pleasing to himself, he is much greater than he really is, so that he will not acknowledge himself to be proud.

From the  
matter of  
pride.

This difficulty arises, in the third place, from the matter of pride and of humility, which changes so much, according to different circumstances, that one cannot always know whether to attribute an act to pride or to humility. For instance, a torn, ragged garment would serve a rich man as matter for humility, but not so a beggar; if the latter were to beg a crust for God's sake, while clad in a rich mantle, he would feel very much ashamed, because his ragged coat suits him far better. It would be matter for humility and shame to a man of the world to go through the streets in a gray woolen habit, but that very same habit is the honor and glory of the poor Religious, who is accustomed to wear it always, and who is respected on account of it, because it is a sign that he has given up the pomps and vanities of the world in order to follow Christ, by observing the vows of religion; it would be a great shame for him, and he would deserve to be despised by men, if he went about dressed in grand style. Father Pallavicini, after he was made Cardinal, says that he was once engaged in the kitchen, while still a simple Jesuit,

cleaning up the dishes, and girt with a white apron, when one of his relatives came to see him ; he sent word to his visitor that he could not come to the door, as he was occupied in the kitchen ; and he acknowledges that he felt more tempted to pride, on that occasion, than he did afterwards when raised to the cardinalate. So that virtuous deeds, and even those that tend to humiliate one, can also furnish material for pride and vanity, because they are worthy of admiration and praise. From all this we see how hard it is to say with certainty whether one is proud or humble.

Still there are many signs and effects by means of which, if we study them, we shall be able to see whether we have true or false humility ; but it will always be easier to detect false than true humility, since the former is much more common than the latter, as St. Ambrose writes : “ Many have the appearance of humility, but not the virtue itself ; many pretend to have it ;”<sup>1</sup> they speak slightingly of themselves through politeness, but inwardly they are full of pride ; many, too, acknowledge their weakness and vileness in their own hearts, but they are careful to hide every appearance of humility from others, lest they should not be thought enough of.

Of course all this is only sham humility, but real pride. Let us take an example : there are men who profess to be full of faults and failings, but they do not believe what they say, and they think it easy for others, too, to see that they are not subject to those faults. This is false humility and real pride ; people act like that in order to be looked upon as humble, or else to give others an opportunity of singling out their virtues in detail, that they may thereby get the praise they are ashamed to give themselves, for, as the old saying has it, self-praise is no praise. No, says St. Augustine, humility must not run counter to truth ; but must be always founded on truth. “ In Thy truth Thou hast humbled me,”<sup>2</sup> says David to God. No man, who wishes to humble himself, need have recourse to invented faults and imaginary failings ; he need only dive into the depths of his own conscience, examine his own thoughts of himself, and he will find matter enough for humility, without any hypocrisy or dissimulation. Others acknowledge faults of which they are really guilty ; but if he to whom they make the ac-

Signs of  
false humil-  
ity, and se-  
cret pride.

<sup>1</sup> Multi habent humilitatis speciem, virtutem non habentes ; multi eam foris prætendunt, et intus impugnant.

<sup>2</sup> In veritate tua humiliasti me.—Ps. cxviii. 75.

knowledge is hardy enough to reprove and admonish them, they will soon let him see that they do not want his correction, and thereby they will convict themselves of false humility and real pride. In the same way, many a one knows in his heart that he must amend his conduct in several things in order to be like the humble Saviour, but he cannot bear to have those faults spoken of in terms of reprobation; nay, he cannot make up his mind to amend or get rid of them, lest he should seem to confess that he had been in the wrong; a certain sign of secret pride. Another trick, too, is to speak of the faults and shortcomings which you are known to have, so that others may not be beforehand with you in condemning them, or in ridiculing you on account of them; that is a false humility, which seeks to avoid humiliation. Again, you may bear patiently and meekly enough whatever is said in your blame by one who seems to be your superior, but you cannot bear a word from an equal, not to speak of an inferior; a sure sign that true humility is wanting. You may even have a real good intention and an earnest desire to please God alone, and not to seek the praise of men, and yet you are annoyed and secretly dissatisfied if men do not approve of what you do; much greater, too, will be your annoyance if they openly condemn your acts. Here also true humility is wanting.

Other signs  
of pride.

There are other signs, too, by which we may distinguish between false and true humility; for instance, I perform my good works, or whatever business I have to do, much more earnestly and zealously when others are looking on, than when God alone sees me; a sure proof of secret pride. I do not mean, my dear brethren, that we must conceal all our good works from the eyes of men. No, if I said that, I should be contradicting our Lord Himself, who expressly tells us that we must give a good example to our neighbor. These are His words in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in Heaven."<sup>1</sup> My meaning is, that I must be just as zealous and diligent in performing my good works in secret, as if I had the whole world looking on. If I do not do so, then, says Pallavicini, I am like those women who dress more carefully when they have to appear before strangers, than when they are alone with their husbands; a proof that they do

<sup>1</sup> Sic luceat lux vestra coram hominibus, ut videant opera vestra bona, et glorificent Patrem vestrum, qui in caelis est.—Matth. v. 16.

not seek to please only their husbands by dressing magnificently. I must say the same of myself if I pray on bended knees, with down-cast eyes and uplifted hands, when I am alone before God, but dare not do so when in the public church, lest others should see me ; as is unfortunately the custom with many Christians, who are ashamed to fold their hands and kneel down to pray. That is a sign of a detestable pride, which prevents us, through human respect, from showing proper honor to the Almighty. Again ; I might wish to omit this or that action, which I know to be displeasing to God, if only others like me would do the same ; I do not wish to be alone, or to be the first in a thing of the kind ; the same difficulty I find when there is question of doing any act that I know to be pleasing to God ; for instance, I would willingly accompany the Blessed Sacrament, when It is carried publicly to the sick ; I know that that honor is due to the great God ; if I saw people of the same condition as myself accompanying It, I should do the same ; but I do not wish to be alone, or to be the first in doing it. See what false humility that is. A sure sign of secret pride. In what, then, does true Christian humility consist, and how are we to recognize it ? St.

Bernard, following St. Thomas, and all the holy Fathers, answers this question : “ Humility is a virtue by which man,

Signs and effects of true humility.

knowing himself thoroughly, becomes vile in his own eyes.” From this, as the signs of this virtue, come the following fruits and effects. First a great reverence for God, by which the humble man is moved always and in every circumstance, publicly and privately, without any regard for human respect, to give to God that perfect honor and service which are His due ; thus, in all his words and actions, his first and only intention is to please and honor God, since humility teaches him that he belongs completely to God, body and soul. Secondly, the humble man shows a ready submission to those who are placed over him by divine will ; this should be found in subjects towards their spiritual and temporal superiors, in children towards their parents, in servants towards their masters and mistresses ; and it must be shown in everything that is not contrary to the law of God ; because the humble man sees God in the person of his superiors, and obeys them for God’s sake, according to the exhortation of St. Paul. Thirdly, humility causes one to have a good opinion of his neighbor, and to be always ready and willing to help him, when necessary ; so that he has not a bad

1 Humilitas est virtus, qua homo verissima sui agnitione, sibi ipsi vilescit.

opinion of any one, even of the most abject beggar, or the lowest clown, or even of the greatest sinner, nor does he think him less than himself, much less despise, or treat him contemptuously; nor does he obstinately defend his own opinion, but readily gives way, and defers to the opinion of another; neither does he offend others in word or deed, and when he himself is offended, he bears the offence meekly and patiently. Fourthly, true humility causes one to have a low opinion of himself; yet the spirit of humility does not altogether consist therein. It is not enough for us to confess our misery; if it were, the demons and lost souls would be the most humble of creatures, because they know and feel their misery most keenly. No, along with this acknowledgment of our misery, true humility creates in us a desire and a longing for contempt and humiliations. In all the contradictions that a man has to endure, whether they come from God in the shape of crosses and trials, or from men in the shape of insult and injury, or from different circumstances that here and there occur to put him to shame and humiliate him, true humility makes him always satisfied, because he knows that he deserves it all, and that he is worth nothing better. Besides, it causes him to feel a hearty contempt for all worldly grandeur and vanity, so that if he is praised, he does not give way to self-conceit, but refers everything that is good in himself to the divine liberality, and thanks God for it.

They must appear in our outward conduct.

Finally, from this inward contempt of one's self comes the desire of being humbled before others; for, although outward signs alone do not constitute true humility, since many of them may be used for purposes of pride, while, on the other hand, a real Christian humility may lie hidden under the costly clothing that one's rank or station requires, yet it would be great folly for those who at heart have a low opinion of themselves, and are ashamed of their own nothingness, to give themselves up outwardly to worldly vanities and show. A truly humble man shows by his behavior that he has a lowly opinion of himself, so that one can see, in his conversation and in his silence, in his gait, in his dress, and in all his actions, that he does not esteem himself, and that he adores a humble, crucified God.

This virtue is as rare as it is necessary to salvation.

There you have, my dear brethren, a few marks of true humility. But, alas, says St. Bernard, "Humility, virtue of Christ,"<sup>1</sup> and of His Saints, how rare thou art in the world!

<sup>1</sup> O humilitas virtus Christi!

There is nothing harder than to convince a man that he must humble himself, and yet, there is nothing more necessary for salvation than to enter on the narrow way after the example of Christ. My dear friend, writes St. Augustine to Dioscorus, you ask me what you must do to live in a Christian manner and to please God and save your soul. "Of the ways that lead to God, the first is humility, the second humility, the third humility,"<sup>1</sup> and if you ask me still farther I shall again answer, humility. "Unless you be converted, and become as little children," such are the words of the humble Saviour, "you shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven."<sup>2</sup> What are we to do, then, Christians? What plan shall we adopt? What means must we use in order to attain this virtue, which is so necessary for salvation? This question I mean to answer partly in the latter half of my instruction.

### Second Part.

Since humility must exist in the heart and show itself in our outward behavior, there are two means by which we can attain and preserve that virtue. The first is in the heart of man, and consists in often and deeply meditating on what and who he is of himself. God will give him an answer interiorly, as the Emperor John answered the Patriarch of Constantinople, when the latter refused to obey him; the Emperor had raised him to that dignity, and he was incensed at the idea of being contradicted by him: "You worthless oven, I have made something of you, I have given you an honorable position, you must know that I can reduce you to beggary if I wish."<sup>3</sup> In the same way, when we are assailed by self-conceit and secret vanity, we can imagine that we hear God saying to us: You poor creature, why are you puffed up? It is to Me alone, who drew you out of nothingness, that you owe your existence; whatever you are and have is from Me; I can deprive you of everything in a moment, and let you fall back into nothingness. Why do you glory and fill yourself with proud thoughts?

If I am reasonable, such a thought as that will necessarily drive me to the conclusion that not the least particle of praise, honor, or glory is due to me on account of anything I may have;

Means of attaining humility; the consideration of one's self.

From which contempt of one's self must come.

<sup>1</sup> Ea est autem prima humilitas, secunda humilitas, tertia humilitas.

<sup>2</sup> Nisi conversi fueritis et efficiamini sicut parvuli, non intrabitis in regnum caelorum.

Matth. xviii. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ego te furne condidi, ego te furne destruum.

because it all belongs to God and not to me. Neither can I complain or think that an injustice is done me if men show me no honor or respect. All the praise that I may get from men is not mine but God's, and if I tried to arrogate it to myself, I should act as foolishly as a barber's wig-block, if it tried to set itself up on account of the beautiful curls and well-arranged locks that are placed upon it. How now, you stupid block? its owner could say, what you are wearing is not yours, it is mine, for I made it; leave off boasting at once, or else I will take it off and leave you bald-headed again. There was a famous saying amongst the ancient Greeks, "An ass carrying the mystic offering."<sup>1</sup> It was the custom amongst the heathens to place on the back of an ass the sacrifice destined for the goddess Isis; as the animal carried its burden along the streets, the people came out of their houses, fell upon their knees and struck their breasts in sign of adoration of their divinity. The ass, on one occasion, thinking that this was done in his honor, raised his head, pricked up his ears and began to walk with a slow, majestic gait, bowing first on one side and then on the other, as if to show that he was pleased with the respectful behavior of the people, until at last his driver gave him a blow of the whip over the ears and said: "The honor is not meant for you, but for Isis."<sup>2</sup> The ass then let his ears droop, and saw what a lamentable mistake he had made. My dear brethren, whatever excellent natural gifts or supernatural virtues we possess, whatever praiseworthy qualities we may have, all, as I have said already, belong to God, they are His gifts, which we can wear for a time in the sight of men. Whenever, therefore, I receive marks of esteem, or honor, or praise from others, and I feel myself tempted to vanity, I need only remember these words in order to humble myself: I am only a wretched ass carrying a mystic offering; this praise, this honor is not for me, but for God, who has bestowed His gifts on me; it cannot be for me, because, as St. Catharine of Genoa used to say, it is just as impossible for me to do good works without God, as it is for the devil to do them.

The consideration of the sins one has committed, of the forgiveness of which, one

When considering what I am of myself, my faith will help me to the answer that I was conceived and born in original sin, an enemy of God; while my own conscience will remind me of the sins I have actually committed during my life. If I am reasonable, this thought will again force me to the con-

<sup>1</sup> *Asinus portans mysteria.*

<sup>2</sup> *Non tibi, sed Isidi.*

clusion, that not only have I no right to praise or honor, but rather every right to shame and confusion ; so that I cannot complain, if I am treated with contempt and looked down upon, because it serves me perfectly right. I have sinned and merited the eternal fires of hell. With what humility that thought should inspire me ! If a minister were employed by the head of his government in some important matter, and neglected to discharge his duty properly, he would be ashamed to appear again in public, lest people should point at him and say : There is the man who was so careless of his duty. If a general were to retreat through cowardice, although he might easily conquer the enemy, he would be so ashamed when called upon to give an account of his conduct, that his worst enemies might pity him. A treacherous friend, caught in the act of perjury or treason, an unfaithful wife convicted of adultery with a servant, have they not both reason to be filled with shame and confusion ? O eyes of faith, open yourselves wide, that you may see that all these shameful acts are included in one mortal sin ! I am a minister and servant of the great King of Heaven and earth ; He has sent me into this world to look after His rights and His honor ; I am a soldier, who, as holy Job says, must fight for an eternal kingdom ; I am a friend of God by sanctifying grace, and must be always faithful to Him ; my soul is the spouse of the Holy Ghost and has sworn Him perpetual fidelity in baptism. If I have committed but one mortal sin, I have been unfaithful to my Sovereign Lord, I have disgraced myself by flying from, nay, by going over to the side of His enemy, I have been guilty of treachery to the best of Friends, who has never injured me, and always done me good. I have defiled my soul by spiritual adultery with the devil, in the sight of my heavenly Spouse. Can I dare to present myself again before God ? Must I not die of shame ? Have I not reason enough to humble myself, and cast myself under every one's feet ? But, you may say, I have done penance, I am cleansed from my sin, and am again a friend of God. Ah, my dear brethren, we must be careful of what we say. St. Peter, St. Mary Magdalen, and a few others whom Christ assured of pardon, could believe in their forgiveness as in an article of faith ; they could well say : My sins are forgiven, I am in the grace of God ; but we poor sinners, where shall we find the assurance that our sorrow has been really supernatural and that therefore our sins are taken away ? St. Paul himself, that great vessel

cannot be  
certain.

of election, cries out with fear and trembling : “ For I am not conscious to myself of anything, yet am I not hereby justified ; but He that judgeth me is the Lord.”<sup>1</sup> Alas, I must think, where shall I find an infallible certainty that, after having committed so many grievous sins, I am now justified before God ? I have sinned, that much I can say with truth ; but that my sins are forgiven, I cannot say for certain.

Even if one were certain of having been forgiven, he would still have cause for humility.

Suppose, even, that I were certain of having been forgiven (oh, what a happiness that would be !), should I then have less cause for humility ? A robber or murderer, although he is pardoned by his sovereign, and set free by his judge, is still looked upon for the rest of his life as a social outcast, according to the axiom of jurists : “ Once a man’s character is gone, it is gone forever ; ”<sup>2</sup> therefore, a man of that kind goes away, as soon as he can, into some foreign land, where he is unknown, and takes a false name to avoid the disgrace that always dogs his footsteps. If he tried to become great in the estimation of those who know him, he would only incur deeper disgrace, for every one would point to him as the man who had escaped prison, or the gallows. Just souls, who have been sinners, it is a great mercy for you and me, since we cannot be perfectly certain of forgiveness, that we have to deal with a God of infinite goodness. For, if He wished to act with us according to the rigors of His justice, should we not now be amongst the lost souls in hell, the objects of His just vengeance ? That we are not now in that place of weeping and gnashing of teeth, is no work of ours. We were in the power of our Judge, fully convicted of crimes that deserve eternal death ; we were under the gallows, in that miserable state in which thousands have been judged already, and sent to hell for fewer mortal sins than we, perhaps, have committed ; the place appointed for us in hell might still be shown to us, and perhaps there are thousands of the reprobate who are now cursing God because He has spared us, and given us grace that we have by no means deserved. Have we not, then, just reason for shame and confusion ? This, my dear brethren, is the thought which kept the most fervent penitents in the deepest humility ; no matter how holy they became after their conversion, they still looked upon themselves as deserving only of hell, and of being made a laughing-stock

<sup>1</sup> Nihil enim mihi conscius sum, sed non in hoc justificatus sum ; qui autem judicat me, Dominus est.—1. Cor. iv. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Insania semel imposita perpetuo durat.

to demons, so that they deemed themselves fit objects of the scorn and contempt of all men.

And suppose that I have never committed a mortal sin (how many grown-up people can say that with truth?), even in that case, the consideration of myself will remind me that I may sin, that I may die in sin. I am now good and holy, but who has assured me that I shall remain so to the end, and that my name shall be written in the Book of Life? This is a mystery known only to God. As long as I live I am never out of the danger of falling into sin. He who suffers from epilepsy does not always fall down in a fit; many days, nay, weeks, may pass by without his having an attack; still he is not freed from his infirmity, and must expect to be surprised by it at any moment, because he has the root and cause of the disease in his limbs and in his blood. It is the same with me; although I may not fall into sin now, nor for many months, or even years, by the help of divine grace, yet I have in me the material of sin, my flesh and my corrupt nature, which are capable of leading me into the greatest crimes, unless God gives me special helps of His grace, and preserves me from my own weakness and malice; so that, with St. Augustine, I may thank God most humbly on account of the sins he has kept me from in the past, and will keep me from in the future: "It is by Thy grace, O Lord, that I have been preserved from the evil that I have not done,"<sup>1</sup> says this humble Saint. If I think that I have already attained a high degree of virtue, still I cannot say that I am safe from the danger of a disgraceful fall. He who climbs a high mountain, gets farther away from the valley beneath, the nearer he approaches the summit; but is he on that account more secure against the danger of a fall? One of the results of his having gained such a height, is this, that, if he does fall, he will be more likely to be killed. The nearer the slater is to the top of the roof, says St. John Chrysostom, the more reason he has to fear a fall; in the same way, continues the Saint, a pious, holy man has no greater certainty of his salvation, as long as he lives, than another; but as he is always in danger of sin, he has more reason to dread a shameful fall from the height of virtue to the abyss of hell. It may, perhaps, be the case, my dear brethren, that many a one feels a secret satisfaction at hearing that others of the same condition as himself are leading a bad, irreligious life; and that he thinks, oh, I am not so bad as that; I am

Still more so when he remembers that he can sin still, and perhaps be lost.

<sup>1</sup> *Gratiæ tuæ deputo, quæcunque non feci mala.*—S. Aug. 1. 2. Conf. c. 7.

more certain of my salvation than those people. Alas, if I consider the matter rightly, I shall see that nothing ought to humble my pride so much as the miserable fall of so many into sin. And why? If I am travelling along the same narrow path with many others, and it is so slippery that I see many of my companions fall down on the way, have I any reason to think much of myself because as yet I have been able to keep my feet? No, I should rather be more afraid, thinking that since so many have fallen already, it may be my turn next. Now we are travelling along the road to eternity, we have all the same weak nature, and are exposed to the same danger of eternal ruin; if I see that many, nay, the greater number of men, are led into sin through their weakness, must I not be in continual fear lest the same should happen to me? I read in history of martyrs who were half roasted, or boiled, or frozen, and yet with the life barely in their bodies, they renounced the true Faith, for which they had already suffered so much. I read of hermits leading a holy life for twenty, thirty, and forty years, until their bodies were almost worn out by long fasting, vigils, prayers and austerities, and yet yielding to temptations to impurity, and sinning most shamefully; nay, some of them died in sin and were lost forever. Can I then think anything of myself, even if I really believe myself to lead a holy life? Alas! I have sinned, I have deserved hell; I know not for certain whether my sins are forgiven; it is possible for me to sin again, whether I shall do so or not, I cannot say; this much I know, that if I am not humble of heart, God will abandon me, I shall have no claim to Heaven, and I shall be lost of a certainty. This thought, if I reflect on it properly, should take away from me all pride and vanity. It should make me humble myself before all men, and as the humble Gospel of Christ teaches, make me meek and lowly in all circumstances. Ah, hear the warning that St. Paul addresses to us: "Be not high-minded, but fear."<sup>1</sup> O man, whoever thou art, do not think much of thyself, be humble, keep thyself in fear; to do so thou hast only to remember what thou art.

*Outward actions, after the example of holy men, also help to attain humility.*

Another means of external humiliation is to accustom one's self frequently to perform abject duties which men are generally in the habit of despising. "If you really desire to be humble, you must not avoid humiliations,"<sup>2</sup> says St. Bernard. The great King David often went barefoot, with downcast eyes and

<sup>1</sup> *Noli altum sapere, sed time.*—Rom. xi. 20.

<sup>2</sup> *Si virtutem appetis humilitatis, viam non fugias humilitatis.*

his head strewn with ashes ; he was not ashamed to throw off his mantle and dance before the ark in the sight of all the people ; and when his wife, who felt ashamed, reproached him for acting in that manner, like a buffoon—" Michol, the daughter of Saul, coming out to meet David, said : How glorious was the king of Israel to-day, uncovering himself before the handmaids of his servants, and was naked as if one of the vain fellows should strip himself"—David answered : " Before the Lord who chose me . . . . I will both play and make myself meaner than I have done, and I will be little in my own eyes," no matter what you say to me. St. Louis, king of France, following the example of many kings and queens who preceded him on the throne, and who was himself imitated in this particular by many of his successors, used to keep twenty-six poor people at his court, as his most valued dependents, and every Saturday he knelt before them to wash their feet, which having washed, he kissed with the utmost reverence. At every mid-day and evening repast he had three beggars at table with him, and with his own hands he poured them out to drink and gave them of the best food, while he himself was satisfied with what was left. He used to visit the most revolting cases in the hospitals, and attend upon them with as little repugnance as if he were the meanest of beggars. St. Paulinus, syndic of Rome, a real oracle of learning, became a gardener, in order to humble himself, and appear contemptible in the eyes of the world. St. Alexander, at first a heathen philosopher, but afterwards a Christian, when he learned the humility of the Gospel went to live among charcoal burners, in order to be unknown to men. King Charlemagne, tired of the honor that was paid him, went into a monastery, and there herded the cattle. Father Colnago, in order to put himself to shame and practise humility, decked himself out with a fool's cap and went through the streets of the town in which his reputation as a preacher was so great, dragging a dead dog after him, so that the children began to hoot and throw stones at him. Read the Lives of the Saints, and you will find examples enough of the voluntary humiliations and self-abasement of the greatest men. I dare not, nor do I wish to exhort you, my dear brethren, to follow their example exactly ; but, if we really mean to practise humil-

<sup>1</sup> Et egressa Michol filia Saul in occursum David, ait : Quam gloriosus fuit hodie rex Israel discooperiens se ante ancillas servorum suorum, et nudatus est, quasi si nudetur unus de scurris. . . Ante Dominum, qui elegit me. . . et ludam et vilior flam plus quam factus sum, et ero humilis in oculis meis.—11. Kings vi. 20-22.

ity, there are other humiliations enough which we may embrace every day of our lives; such as, silence when anything is said against us, a humble acknowledgment of the faults we commit, yielding to those with whom we could and would willingly contend, asking pardon of those whom we offend, greeting in a friendly manner, visiting and showing respect to those whom we do not like, dressing and otherwise behaving outwardly in a manner suited to Christian humility, and especially avoiding everything that might give scandal, and that, consequently, is forbidden by the law of God, although by doing so we may give occasion to talk and unkind remarks; bearing crosses and trials with patience, humbly acknowledging that we deserve nothing better than to be punished for our sins. Many occasions of this kind will be presented to us daily.

Lastly,  
humble  
prayer to  
God.

Finally, if all this does not help to subdue the pride of my heart, the last means must be humble prayer to Thee, O God, which I will offer to Thee daily with Thy servant Augustine: Grant, O Lord, that I may know Thee and know myself, <sup>1</sup> in order that I may give Thee all the honor and praise and keep all the shame and confusion for myself. Keep far from me all pride and vanity. O most humble Saviour, let me learn from Thee now, at least, to be zealous in the practice of that humility of heart, to which Thou exhortest me so earnestly, and without which I can have no part in Thee. Give me, then, a powerful grace, that I may enter on the narrow path of humility and persevere in it; for by that means alone shall I be able to come into the society of those humble souls who are now with Thee in the glory of Heaven. Amen.

*Another Introduction of the same Sermon for the Feast of the Apostle St. James:*

Text.

*Dic ut sedeant hi duo filii mei, unus ad dexteram tuam, et unus ad sinistram in regno tuo.—Matth. xx. 21.*

“Say that these my two sons may sit, the one on Thy right hand, and the other on Thy left, in Thy kingdom.”

What a strange request: that one of her sons should sit on our Lord's right hand, and the other on His left! Evidently the mother thought that Christ was about to establish a kingdom on earth, in which He would reign over Israel as a great

<sup>1</sup> Noverim Te, noverim me.

king ; and therefore she was anxious to get the first place, next to Him, for her sons, because, as St. Cyril remarks, they wished to be greater than the other Apostles. Thus pride and ambition found their way even amongst the Apostles of Christ, although, from His teaching and example, they could learn nothing but humility. And what did they gain ? Nothing except a reproof from Christ on account of their foolish request : “ You know not what you ask ; ”<sup>1</sup> and the displeasure of the other Apostles, as the Gospel says immediately after : “ And the ten hearing it were moved with indignation against the two brethren.”<sup>2</sup> And so it is, my dear brethren, with all proud and ambitious people who strive for the esteem and applause of men ; they gain nothing but hatred from God and man. Therefore I have already proved that there is nothing more foolish than to give way to pride, and that we, mortals, have the greatest reason to be lowly and little in our own eyes, etc.—*continues as before.*

<sup>1</sup> Nescitis quid petatis.—Matth. xx. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Et audientes decem, indignati sunt de duobus fratribus.—Ibid. 24.

# ON AVARICE AND INJUSTICE.

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## SIXTH SERMON.

### ON THE VAIN LABOR OF THE AVARICIOUS.

#### Subject.

The avaricious man who seeks money and property, 1. Gains nothing in time. 2. Gains nothing in eternity.—*Preached on the eighth Sunday after Pentecost.*

#### Text.

*Homo quidam erat dives.*—Luke xvi. 1.  
“There was a certain rich man.”

#### Introduction.

Even rich people may be deceived and robbed, as happened to the rich man described in to-day's Gospel, who was so unjustly treated by his own steward ; for the latter not only robbed him of his goods, but also tried to make an unjust profit out of his debtors. Therefore, money and riches are not able to make one happy. No, because, like the wise Solomon, men find nothing in them but vanity. We have hitherto treated, my dear brethren, of the first class of worldly goods, namely, of honor and authority amongst men, and I have proved that an ambitious man gains nothing, either from God or from men, but the very contrary of what he seeks. Now I come to the second class of people, namely, those who strive for wealth and riches ; and I say—

#### Plan of Discourse.

*An avaricious man, who seeks money and property, gains nothing. Such is the subject of the present sermon. He gains nothing in time. The first and longer part. He gains nothing in eternity. The second part.*

O God of infinite riches, who for love of us became poor, that we might be rich in Heaven, withdraw our hearts from the empty goods of this world, that we may seek only Thee, and gain everything with Thee! This we ask of Thee through the intercession of Thy Mother, and of the holy angels guardian.

A young prince, who was once out hunting on horseback, came to a cave in a forest, where he found the celebrated hermit Macedonius, who had spent over sixty years in this solitude, unknown to the world. The prince, surprised at the appearance of the old man, asked him what he was doing in that solitude, and how he lived in a cave without chair, or bench, or fireplace, and how he passed the day? Sir, answered the hermit, I believe we are both of the same profession; for when I look at your dress, at the weapon in your hand, and the horn at your side, I see that you are a hunter; now you must know that I am a hunter also. How, you a hunter? said the prince; and what do you hunt? In this quiet solitude, answered the hermit, I hunt after and seek my God; my hunting horn are the psalms that I sing, by which I call out after Him, my dog is the constant prayer and meditation with which I cry to Him. "I hunt for God, and I will not cease until I have caught him." Happy the hunting of that pious hermit, who sought and desired nothing but God! We read these words of St. Cajetan in the Divine Office: "He labored most assiduously for the salvation of his neighbor, so that he was called a hunter of souls." Again a happy hunting, by which one catches precious souls redeemed by the Blood of Christ, and drives them into Heaven. We read of the Emperor Domitian that he used to spend many hours of the summer's days in doing nothing but catching flies; and he would laugh with pleasure when he succeeded in spitting a fly on a needle, or in killing it with his hand. What a difference between these huntsmen! Macedonius hunts God, Cajetan hunts souls, and Domitian hunts flies; a useless, childish, and foolish hunt, this last is surely.

There are many kinds of hunters, some of whom pursue vain and useless things.

My dear brethren, we are all hunters in this life; daily we go a-hunting; but what kind of game do we seek? Pious souls, whose first thought in the morning is directed to Heaven; whose desires and longings, words and actions during the day are directed to the fulfilment of the divine will with a real, supernatural intention, and a constant recollection of the presence of

We are all hunters in this life.

<sup>1</sup> Vener Deum meum, et nunquam cessabo donec comprehendam.

<sup>2</sup> Proximorum salutis assidua cura incumbere, dictus propterea venator animarum.

God; who seek to please God alone by Christian humility, meekness, patience, purity, mercy, and the constant practice of good works; oh, what happy hunters you are! Like that holy hermit, you go out in search of your God. Continue your search with courage and perseverance; you will certainly find what you desire, and your God will say to you: "I will be thy reward exceeding great."<sup>1</sup> Zealous servants of God, who by your edifying lives and virtuous example, by bringing up your children in a holy manner, by avoiding scandal, by fraternal correction and exhortation of the wicked, by visiting the sick and helping the poor, seek to bring others to Heaven with you, happy hunters are ye! You hunt souls, like Cajetan; go on as you have begun; you will find what you desire, and your glory in Heaven will be increased by the souls you convert. Vain worldlings, who are busied every day with a hundred cares for the sake of some temporal gain, or some passing breath of praise, or some momentary pleasure, meanwhile forgetting your souls as completely as if you had none, what do you hunt? Ah, how foolish you are! Like Domitian, you hunt flies, which escape out of your hands in hundreds, and even when you have caught one, you have nothing but a worthless insect.

Those who seek riches gain nothing.

I will speak now only of those who are engaged in the pursuit of temporal riches. There are three classes of them; for they can be either prodigal with their money, or avaricious, or moderate, so that they make a good and sensible use of their wealth. None of the three classes catch anything but worthless flies, especially when money is the end and object of their labor. It is clear enough that the prodigal gain nothing, for they squander away on dress or luxurious living, or in some other foolish way, the money they made by their labor. Their motto is, lightly got, lightly gone.

Not even those who make a moderate use of wealth.

With regard to the best class of those who seek worldly wealth, namely, they who use their riches in moderation, what do they gain? Besides their gold, which after all is only a piece of metal, they gain many cares and anxieties, much disquiet and trouble, much labor and fatigue, for they have to run hither and thither, either to get riches, or to keep them, or to increase them. A bad season, a failure in the crops, an unforeseen misfortune, a sudden depreciation in the value of goods, the bankruptcy of a debtor, lawsuits that sometimes make enmities among brothers and sisters, for the sake of that wretched mine and thine, etc., all these things fill them with fears, anxieties, and trouble.

<sup>1</sup> Ego et merces tua magna nimis.—Gen. xv. 1.

Therefore our Lord compared riches to thorns: he who wishes to pluck the rose, must not be astonished if the thorns prick him. What, then, is the result of all your cares and trouble, oh, rich man? Although you are rolling in wealth, you have gained nothing but food and clothing; a few times a day you can eat and drink your fill, that is all; the remainder of your wealth you must employ, whether you wish it or no, for the good of others, at least for that of the members of your own household. You have a grand house, you may have three or four of them; now, tell me the truth, are you, therefore, able to take up more room than before? Certainly not; you are not able to fill up even one room in your house; so for the time being, whatever you have beyond that is superfluous, even as much so as the wide world is for the poor beggar who wanders hither and thither over it. Your coffers are filled with gold, your barns with grain, your cellars with wine; are you, then, in need of more food and drink than before? Certainly not; and this is in accordance with a wise arrangement of Providence, which has not fixed the size of the body by the amount of superfluous food or clothing that one has, as if a rich man should be bigger than a poor man. "What doth it profit the owner," says the Wise Ecclesiastes, "but that he seeth the riches with his eyes?"<sup>1</sup> for it is only the least part of his gold that he can make use of; the greater part he can only look at and admire. And so it is, my dear brethren, that even the richest kings and princes, with all their pomp and wealth, can have nothing more than food, clothing, and lodging; and therefore an ordinary citizen, who has only food, clothing, and lodging, and who, according to the advice of St. Paul, desires nothing else, is far happier and more contented than the greatest monarch on earth. We learn from the Holy Scriptures that "the provision of Solomon," as to food alone, "for each day, was thirty measures of fine flour, and threescore measures of meal, ten fat oxen, and twenty out of the pastures, and a hundred rams, besides venison of harts, roes, buffaloes, and fatted fowls."<sup>2</sup> And how much of this great quantity of food was Solomon able to enjoy? The very smallest portion; for when he was satisfied, he had to stop eating, and thus the remainder of the food was of no good to him. Why, then, should we have such an inordinate desire to increase our wealth, if our nature is con-

<sup>1</sup> Quid prodest possessori, nisi quod cernit divitias oculis suis?—Eccles. v. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Erat cibus Salomonis per dies singulos triginta cori similæ, et sexaginta cori farinæ, decem boves pingues, et viginti boves pascuales, et centum arietes, excepta venatione cervorum, caprearum, atque bubalorum, et avium affillium.—III. Kings iv. 22.

tent with so little? Why should I trouble myself about things that I can never use nor enjoy? In truth, if there is any difference between the rich man and the poor man, it is this, that the latter has not the cares and anxieties of the former, nor has he so much to leave behind. So that the best of those who seek for money catch nothing but worthless flies.

Who are  
misers, and  
how the  
vice of avarice  
grows.

Let us now consider the third class, namely the avaricious; that is, those who seek money, and live parsimoniously, and do all they can to increase their stock, not because they intend to make use of it, but solely that they may become rich; they are those who love money for its own sake. This blind love of money does not spring up all at once in the heart, it grows gradually. In the beginning a man desires and works for money, because he can thereby provide himself with what he wants; after a while, since men are apt to look rather far forward, he thinks that he might rise to a certain position in which he would require considerable wealth; an uneasy desire impels him to accumulate more and more, so that he may have quite enough to supply all his probable needs; meanwhile he begins to grow fond of money, as a fruit of his labor, and it pleases him to think that he is becoming a rich man. At last he gets fonder and fonder of money every day, for its own sake, until he becomes so infatuated with it, that he would rather suffer the pangs of hunger, or allow himself to be beaten almost to death, than part with it.

These are  
the most  
foolish of  
all.

This greed of gain is the most foolish of passions, because it brings no advantage or profit to him who is subject to it. St. Paul calls it, "a serving of idols."<sup>1</sup> And why? There is nothing more foolish than to adore false gods, and pray to images of wood, stone, or copper, which are not merely unworthy of being loved or adored, but also are without life and reason, so that they are gods only in the imagination of him who looks upon them as gods, and they can neither help nor hurt their adorers. The same folly is committed by the avaricious man, who loves his money and keeps it for its own sake; for he loves a thing that is not worthy of love, and profits him nothing. Other goods, such as health, knowledge, beauty, comfort, and convenience, praise, honor, and authority before men, have charms which attract the human heart, so that people are easily induced to seek them; but money, as the avaricious look upon it, is neither useful nor injurious, except in the imagination of the avaricious man himself.

For the  
whole value

For, is it not true, my dear brethren, that the whole value

<sup>1</sup> *Idolorum servitus.*—Ephes. v. 5.

and charm of money consists only in the use of it, in the fact that I can give it in exchange for food, clothing, lodging, and other necessaries or pleasures of life? In former times, as we learn from history, money was coined out of the hides of oxen, through want of metals, or the skill required to work them. Were people any worse off then than we are now? Not by any means; we are neither better off nor richer because we have gold and silver coin to buy the necessaries of life with; the same things might have been had formerly for copper money. We pay three cents or more now, for what would then have cost but one cent, and where I must now spend three dollars, I should have had then to spend but one. Money is like food: if I cannot enjoy the food, what good is it to me? What good is money to me, if I cannot or will not make use of it? I certainly cannot eat it. Still there is this difference between money and food, that by the use and enjoyment of the latter, I increase my bodily health and strength, while the good of money consists in my giving it away to others. If I had a bag full of gold in my room, and were lawful owner of it, but were forbidden to give any of it away, of what use would it be to me, unless merely to look at? As far as my own profit is concerned, it would be even better for me if the bag were filled with hay or straw; for then, at least, I might make a cushion of it, which I could not do with the gold.

There is no one who makes less use of money than the miser; he will not and can not part with it; there is no one who eats, drinks, and lives more miserably; he would rather starve than spend a penny of his hidden treasures; he would rather cut off his hand than give away any of his gold for a lawful pleasure or enjoyment; his only care is how to increase his store. The Wise Ecclesiasticus says: "The eye of the covetous man is insatiable, he will not be satisfied till he consume his own soul, drying it up." The more he has, the more he desires; the greater his wealth becomes, the less can he bear to part with any of it. In the other desires of the senses, one can easily find sufficient satisfaction; when I have looked at a beautiful picture for an hour or so, I get tired of it and go away. No matter how fine music may be, if we hear too much of it, our ears grow wearied. Food and drink, no matter how good they are, cause disgust when we have had our fill of them. But the insatiable miser

of money  
is in its  
use.

The miser  
makes no  
use of it.

<sup>1</sup> *Insatiabilis oculus cupidī, non satiabitur donec consumat arefaciens animam suam.—*  
*Ecl. xiv. 9.*

is never satisfied ; so that he is sometimes compared to one who suffers from dropsy, who grows thirstier the more he drinks ; and sometimes to the sea, which never overflows, although all the rivers in the world empty themselves into it : “ All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea doth not overflow,”<sup>1</sup> says the Wise Preacher. Experience generally teaches that the less one’s income is, the more ready he is in giving, and the more willing to procure for himself lawful pleasures : a thing that a rich miser would not dream of doing. A beggar can never grow rich, says the proverb. And why ? Because, since he has no hope of ever amassing money, he spends the little he has, without care for the morrow, trusting either to getting some work to do, or to the charity of others.

Shown by an example.

Martial describes a man named Calenus, as a moderately rich and good-hearted man, who was very generous ; he used to give his children, brothers, sisters, friends, neighbors, nay, even his servants, the best of everything he had. What a pity, thought his friends, that Calenus is not a richer man. And they began to pray that he who knew how to make such good use of the little he had, might become very rich. Their prayer was heard ; in a short time Calenus inherited four large properties, one after the other, and a large sum of money as well, so that he became much richer, but, at the same time, much poorer than before. His only care now was to hide his gold away in his coffers, and to bury it in his cellars ; no friend or neighbor was invited to share his hospitality. Instead of increasing his household, as he might have done, he endeavored to cut down expenses as much as possible, and sent away his servants. It takes too much, he thought, to feed so many mouths daily ; it is better to avoid that useless expense. Formerly, he used to enjoy himself with his friends, but now he would rather suffer hunger than spend any money. Martial then describes his friends as thus addressing him : Calenus, we have made you rich by our prayers and good wishes ; shall we continue to pray for you ? Yes, answered Calenus, pray by all means. For what, then, shall we pray ? that you may return to your former condition ? No, said he, pray that I may get more money. Very well then, “ We wish you a thousand times more, Calenus ;”<sup>2</sup> since you inherited such a large property, you have hardly eaten enough, while we have not had the least share of your wealth ; if you become

<sup>1</sup> Omnia flumina intrant in mare, et mare non redundant.—Eccles. 1. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Optamus tibi millies, Calene ; hoc si contigerit, fame peribis.

richer still, as we earnestly desire, you will starve yourself to death through sheer avarice, and then we shall have all your riches. So true is it, my dear brethren, "The miser wants what he has, just as much as what he has not." The one is as useless to him as the other; he is as poor as a beggar in the midst of his wealth.

Nay, he is worse off than a beggar; for the latter, when he gets a little money, spends it with joy to purchase what he is in need of; but the miser, when he is forced to spend a trifle for the bare necessities of life, does it as unwillingly as if it was his heart's blood he was depriving himself of. Thus the use of his riches causes him more trouble and anxiety than pleasure and satisfaction; he possesses wealth, but has nothing from it; he is frightened at the bare idea of having to spend money to keep himself from starving. The Holy Scriptures give us an example of this in the friends who came to visit Job in order to console him in his affliction; as soon as they saw him, they were frightened, and Job said these words to them: "Now you are come, and now seeing my affliction, you are afraid."<sup>1</sup> What were they afraid of? They were rich misers, says de Lyra; they saw that he was in great poverty, lying naked on a dung-hill, and they felt, not pity for his misfortune, for they reproached him bitterly, but feared lest they should be obliged to help him: "They were afraid that Job would ask them for help,"<sup>2</sup> are the words of de Lyra. The patient man seems to have seen what was in their minds, for he reproached them thus: "Did I say: Bring to me and give me of your substance?"<sup>3</sup> There you have a true picture of the miser; he is annoyed at seeing any one come into his house, lest he should have to spend anything on him; if he sees a beggar in the street, he shuts the door at once, for fear of having to give a penny in charity. If a tradesman knocks at his door, he trembles with fear, lest he should have to pay for the coat, or the pair of shoes he had made. At the end of the year he tries to avoid his servants, and grows pale at the idea of paying them their wages. If his clothes show signs of old age, he shudders at the thought of having to get new ones. If his wife, or if one of his children get sick, he is almost beside himself, not with pity, but through fear of having to pay

Avarice entails only trouble and anxiety.

<sup>1</sup> Tam deest avaro quod habet, quam quod non habet.

<sup>2</sup> Nunc venistis, et modo videntes plagam meam timetis.—Job vi. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Timebant ne aliquid stipis a Jobo pro sublevatione sua peteretur.

<sup>4</sup> Numquid dixi: Afferte mihi, et de substantia vestra donate mihi.—Job vi. 22.

for medicines. In that way he torments himself on account of that wealth in which others find their comfort and pleasure.

And also  
the hatred  
and scorn  
of all.

Besides that, he draws down on himself the hatred and scorn of others. Generally speaking, no one is more looked down upon than a miser. Wherever he goes, whenever he is spoken of, he is always ridiculed; his neighbors dislike him, his friends are ashamed of him, and avoid him; the poor and needy curse him, because they cannot hope for anything from him; tradesmen and laborers are unwilling to work for him, because they have just reason for suspecting that he will not pay them, or that he will keep them waiting a long time for payment; his servants cannot bear him, because he feeds them so badly; nay, he is even hateful sometimes to his own wife and children, because they do not get enough from him to be able to dress according to their position. In nearly all comedies a miser is brought on the stage to excite the laughter of the audience; no one pities his misfortunes, they are rather a source of enjoyment. Thieves hardly think it a sin to steal from him; and sometimes they do so, not for the sake of what they can carry off, but to vex the miser. He is generally compared to a swine, that is of no good to any one till it is dead. See, my dear brethren, how vain and foolish is the labor of him who is influenced by greed of gain. After hard work he succeeds in getting what he so much longed for, and yet what has he but a lot of flies that buzz around his head and drive him nearly frantic. But if the avaricious man gains nothing in time, he gains far less for his soul in eternity; as I shall show in the

### Second Part.

All men,  
when they  
die, must  
leave what  
they possess  
to others.

This truth seems to me so evident, that it will not take long to prove it. The richest and most foolish miser knows well that he will not be able to take a single penny with him into the next world; he must acknowledge with St. Paul: "For we brought nothing into this world; and certainly we can carry nothing out."<sup>1</sup> What happened to St. Paul in his conversion, namely, that as he was on his way to persecute the Christians, a brilliant light from Heaven suddenly shone round about him, and he was struck with blindness, "and when his eyes were opened, he saw nothing,"<sup>2</sup> the same, according to the Holy

<sup>1</sup> *Nihil enim intulimus in hunc mundum: haud dubium, quod nec auferre quid possumus.*—1. Tim. vi. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Apertisque oculis nihil videbat.*—Acts ix. 8.

Scriptures, will happen to all rich men after their death : “ They have slept their sleep, and all the men of riches have found nothing in their hands.”<sup>1</sup> To keep to my original simile, my dear brethren, what happens in a hunt ? The huntsmen go out with their dogs ; some are on foot, others on horseback ; they all look around for game most eagerly, and if they see a hare jumping out of a bush, what a noise they make ! They run here and there, and set the dogs after the hare with loud cries ; but when the dogs have caught it, they take it from them at once. The same thing happens to the worldly-minded and avaricious. Some chance of gain or profit offers itself to their notice, they rush at it at once, and work with all their might to make the most of it ; but when they have got what they want, very often death comes, and cries out to them to leave it. What a sad thing for the dying man that is ! Where is my money ? he asks. You must leave it, answers death. Where are my hidden treasures ? You must leave them. Where are my lands and vineyards, and my costly furniture ? You must leave them. Away with you at once, poor and naked, into eternity ! Everything you have you must leave to others, whether you wish it or not ; to others, who will perhaps squander it away most recklessly. What time, trouble, and labor you have devoted to amassing wealth ! Now you must leave it to those who will not even thank you for it, nor say an Our Father for your soul, because you gave them nothing during your life. If we can believe what is written on the subject, it appears that in India there are ants of enormous size, that live in caves, and collect together all the gold and other metals they can find ; but they never can derive any profit from their treasures, because the people of the country come and take them all away ; so that they lose in an hour what they spent many months in putting together.<sup>2</sup> The same thing happens to the rich man on his death-bed : he has toiled and labored during life to heap up gold and silver, and add treasure to treasure ; but to what end ? Hardly is his toil finished, and the wealth he desired accumulated, when death comes, and forces him to leave all he has to be divided amongst others, who very often get rid in a short time of that which it took him many years’ labor to amass.

It is true that pious servants of God, as well as misers, must **It will be**

<sup>1</sup> Dormierunt somnum suum, et nihil invenerunt omnes viri divitiarum in manibus suis.—Ps. lxxv. 6

<sup>2</sup> Cæsius, de mineral. Ex Plin. l. 3, c. 10.

especially  
hard for the  
avaricious  
to do so.

leave their riches behind them at the hour of death, and that they can bring nothing with them into eternity; but as there is a great difference in the manner of using and possessing riches, so also there is a great difference in the manner of leaving those riches. The pious Christian, who has never set his heart on them, puts them off as he would a garment, which he lays aside in the evening without the least regret. The avaricious man, on the other hand, looks upon riches as a part of himself, as if they were hair, or feathers, so that he finds it as hard to part with them as a fowl does to be plucked alive. St. John Chrysostom, explaining the words of our Lord, in which He compares riches to thorns, says that we can have thorns in the hand in two ways: if we hold them in the open hand, they will not hurt us, but if we close the hand on them, they sink into the flesh, and we cannot free ourselves from them without pain and loss of blood. So it is with riches: the pious hold them in the open hand; they employ them in the service and to the glory of God; they share them with Jesus Christ in the persons of the poor and needy; and they are resigned to the will of God, if it should please Him to lessen their wealth or to take it away altogether. They say, with holy Job: "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away. . . . blessed be the name of the Lord."<sup>1</sup> They feel no pain when those thorns are taken out of their hands, because, when the time comes for them to go into eternity, they have, so to speak, only to turn the hand over, and the thorns fall off, without pain, or sorrow. "Not so the wicked, not so;"<sup>2</sup> not so the avaricious, who, during their lives, held fast to those thorns with closed hands; many a pang and torment they will feel when the thorns are taken out of their hands by force. "O death, how bitter is the recollection of thee to a man that hath peace in his possessions!"<sup>3</sup>

How foolish  
most men  
are to  
strive so  
eagerly for  
money, and  
neglect  
eternal  
goods.

Ah, Christians, is it possible that we should plague and torment ourselves about those perishable goods, which are only worthless flies in time, pricking thorns in the hour of death, and nothing at all in eternity? And yet nearly every one is most eager in pursuit of them. If people employed for God and Heaven the fourth, nay, even the tenth part of the labor and trouble they give themselves to amass worldly wealth, then would they become great Saints in Heaven. St. Francis Xav-

<sup>1</sup> Dominus dedit, Dominus abstulit . . . sit nomen Domini benedictum.— Job i. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Non sic impii, non sic.—Ps. i. 4.

<sup>3</sup> O mors, quam amara est memoria tua homini pacem habenti in substantiis suis.— Eccl. xii. 1.

ier could not see without pain so many merchants leaving Portugal and other countries of Europe, and crossing the wide and dangerous ocean, to make money in the distant Indies; while he found so few who were willing to accompany him to the same countries to save souls. Zealous servants of God, reason, indeed, have you to complain, when you see and experience how much is done and suffered daily for the sake of money, and how little is done in a whole year for God and Heaven! Shout from the pulpit until you are hoarse, exhort the people to come to church on Sundays and holydays, to hear the word of God and do something for their souls, and you will see that many Christians can find a hundred excuses: some will say that the church is too far away, others that the weather is too severe, others again have something to do at home; nay, you will find some who do not hesitate to stand in their shops and wait upon customers on those days consecrated to the service of God. Preach to them of fasting, alms-giving, mortification of the senses, Christian meekness and humility, to which the law of Christ binds every one, and they will find a hundred excuses to dispense themselves: fasting is bad for their health, alms-giving they cannot afford, they are too delicate to practise mortification, the dignity of their position does not allow them to humble themselves. So that it is too difficult and almost impossible to do anything for God and one's soul. Gold! Oh, what a far greater power thou hast over the hearts of men, than even the Almighty God Himself, with His kingdom of Heaven and its eternal joys, which He has promised to His faithful servants! No mortification is too great, no labor too heavy, no humiliation too degrading, no way too rough, no weather too severe, no time too precious, nothing so troublesome as to frighten away one who has a hope of gaining thee! Dost thou ask one to expose himself to a thousand dangers, either on the stormy sea, or on land amongst robbers and murderers? Oh, thou wilt find enough who are only too willing to do so! The most violent desires and inclinations are easily restrained, when there is question of money. It is often to no purpose that preachers endeavor to persuade people to do away with scandalous abuses, or to be reconciled to their enemies; to no purpose do they hold up for imitation the example of the meek and humble Jesus, who prayed on the cross for His enemies and murderers, who has threatened not to forgive us, unless we forgive others, and who has pronounced eternal woe against those by whom scandal

comes ; useless, I say, it is to allude to our Lord's examples. But if a few bags of gold were brought and placed in the hands of the audience, there would be plenty of them who would at once lay aside their enmity and grasp each other's hands in token of friendship ! If there was a fine imposed for indulging in this or that abuse, how quickly we should see an improvement ! Thus, what cannot be done by reason, or honesty, or conscience, or by the example and Gospel of Christ, or for the sake of saving one's soul and going to Heaven, or of avoiding the eternal torments of hell ; what cannot be done by the Almighty God and His law, is accomplished by avarice and the inordinate desire of temporal goods. To this avarice, says Tertullian, are sacrificed all the cares and thoughts of a restless mind. But that is not enough. To it are sacrificed all a man's cleverness and prudence. Not yet enough ! To it is given all the sweat of one's brow. Still more ! a much greater victim is slaughtered in its honor, the soul's salvation.<sup>1</sup>

Conclusion  
and resolution  
to seek  
God and  
heavenly  
goods alone.

O foolish world, thus to seek what thou knowest will be taken from thee in a short time ! Hear my dear brethren, how much more prudently King Ezechias acted. It was announced to him in the name of God : " Behold the days shall come, that all that is in thy house, and that thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon : nothing shall be left, saith the Lord."<sup>2</sup> Now, I ask, was everything that Ezechias might accumulate after this threat, to be saved from plunder ? For, certainly Jerusalem was not taken at once, nor for some years after. No, we must answer, even that will not be saved, according to the Prophet's words : " Nothing shall be left." But if that is the case, and if everything that the fathers of Ezechias had laid up, " unto this day," was also to be taken away, why does not the Prophet add that whatever the king himself might accumulate, after the warning, would meet the same fate ? The answer is easy. The Chaldeans took away everything they found in the royal palace, so that as the Prophet said, nothing was left ; but they found only the treasures that had been brought together up to the day of the warning, because when Ezechias heard that the Chaldeans were to take all he had, he was not so foolish as to waste his time lay-

<sup>1</sup> Illi ingenium suum immolat ; illi prudentiam suam accendit ; illi sudorem suum hbat ; majorem hostiam cædit, salutem suam.

<sup>2</sup> Ecce dies venient, et auferentur omnia, quæ sunt in domo tua, et quæ considerunt patres tui usque in diem hanc, in Babylonem : non remanebit quidquam, ait Dominus.—IV. Kings xx. 17.

ing up more treasure ; for, he thought, would it not be a senseless thing for me to trouble myself and distress my subjects with taxation in order to fill my treasury, when I know that in a short time the Chaldeans will be masters of it ? Therefore, from that day forward he put aside every idea of increasing his wealth. How unwisely then, do not we Christians act, although the day is appointed for us too ; behold the day and the hour will come when death will take away all thou hast in thy house ; how unwise to strain every power of soul and body to heap up riches, while we forget altogether the interests of the soul ! If we were only eager in the pursuit of eternal riches, of incorruptible goods, of God Himself, we should be infallibly certain of gaining what we seek. Is it not foolish to plague ourselves so much in the pursuit of that which cannot content us when we have it, and meanwhile to neglect the only good that is able to satisfy us fully ? Poor ye are, oh rich, if you have lost your God. “Woe to you that are rich,”<sup>1</sup> says Christ, if your hearts are fixed on riches and temporal goods. Rich are ye, oh poor, if in your poverty you have gained God alone. “Behold,” said St. Peter to our Lord in the name of all the Apostles and the contented poor, “behold we have left all things,” we desire nothing but Thee alone, “and have followed Thee.” “What therefore shall we have?”<sup>2</sup> “You shall receive an hundred-fold, and shall possess life everlasting.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore my first, greatest, and only care shall be to say with the pious hermit, “I am hunting for my God and I will not cease until I have fast hold of Him.”<sup>4</sup> If I have Him alone, I shall be rich enough for time and eternity. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> *Vae vobis divitibus.*—Luke vi. 24.

<sup>2</sup> *Ecce, nos reliquimus omnia, et secuti sumus te : quid ergo erit nobis ?*—Matth. xix. 27

<sup>3</sup> *Centuplum accipietis et vitam æternam possidetis.*

<sup>4</sup> *Venor Deum meum, et nunquam cessabo donec comprehendam.*

## SEVENTH SERMON.

ON THE CARELESSNESS OF THE AVARICIOUS IN NEGLECTING  
GOD DURING LIFE.

## Subject.

The avaricious man neglects God during life. 1. By omitting the good that he ought to do. 2. By doing the evil to which his desires lead him.—*Preached on the ninth Sunday after Pentecost.*

## Text.

*Ingressus in templum, cepit ejicere vendentes in illo et ementes.*  
Luke xix. 45.

“And entering into the temple, He began to cast out them that sold therein and them that bought.”

## Introduction.

So far are men carried away by the desire of money and temporal riches, that they do not hesitate to place the honor of God in the back-ground, and profane the buildings consecrated to Him; as we read in to-day's Gospel of the buyers and sellers who turned the temple of the Lord into a public market-place, so that even the meek Jesus was forced to be wroth with them and to drive them away with scourges. In my last sermon, my dear brethren, we have seen that the avaricious man, with all his labor and trouble, gains nothing either in time or eternity. But I have not said near enough, for he loses everything in time and in eternity, inasmuch as he neglects God and all that belongs to God, as I shall now show.

## Plan of Discourse.

*The avaricious man neglects God during life by omitting the good that he ought to do. The first part. He neglects God by doing the evil to which his desires lead him. The second part.*

Therefore, O Lord, give us Thy powerful grace, that our hearts may not be led captive by this greed of gain; but that we may always raise them to heavenly goods, through the intercession of Mary and the holy angels guardian.

What is  
necessary to  
please God.

To possess God, it is indispensably necessary for us to acknowledge him as our last end, and only true and highest happi-

ness, who alone can fully and perfectly satisfy all the desires of our hearts ; necessary to fly and avoid everything that could keep us away from Him, and on the other hand, to undertake and fulfil exactly all that can lead us to Him ; necessary for us to love Him constantly with all our heart and soul, with all our mind and strength, so that every thought, desire, word and work of ours must be directed to Him. That is the only business that we have to perform in this short and uncertain life here below ; whatever cannot be directed to this business by a good intention, is not only useless, but culpable and unlawful.

Now, an avaricious man who works for temporal goods with inordinate desire and care, does none of those things, and it is, humanly speaking, impossible for him to fulfil properly the duties which Jesus Christ Himself has imposed upon us ; not merely because, generally speaking, it is impossible to serve two masters, but also because the love of money is utterly incompatible with the service of God ; “ you cannot serve God and mammon.”<sup>1</sup> Besides, on what does the avaricious man fix his heart and his affections ? “ For where thy treasure is,” says Christ, “ there is thy heart also.”<sup>2</sup> Now, money and property are a treasure. What is the end of all his actions ? His money and property. In what does he place his happiness ? Where does he seek his rest and pleasure ? In his money and property. Of what does he think most ? What does he watch most carefully ? What is the most frequent subject of his thoughts ? What injury does he most dread, what loss does he most fear ? All these things are referred by him to his money and property. Amongst the many inclinations and propensities that lead men to evil, there are some that are violent and impetuous enough, but they are of short duration ; such is, for instance, anger ; a man gets angry in a moment, but in a moment his anger is over. On the other hand, there are passions that last a long time, but they are not violent ; such as the feeling of dislike that we entertain for many years against another, on account of his bad temper, or ill manners ; a feeling of that kind may become very deep-seated in the heart, so that everything that man does is displeasing to us ; yet we carefully refrain from showing this feeling to others, nor do we allow it to lead us to deeds of rashness or violence. But avarice has both these evil qualities ; it is

An avaricious man cannot do this, because all his thoughts run on money.

<sup>1</sup> Nemo servus potest duobus dominis servire . . . non potestis Deo servire, et mammonæ.—Luke xvi. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Ubi enim est thesaurus vester, ibi et cor vestrum erit.—Matth. vi. 21.

a violent and at the same time, a long-lived passion ; it is an unceasing craving which lasts night and day, it is an insatiable greed that keeps all a man's thoughts in a continual ferment.

Explained  
by a simile.

I might compare it to a restless, fidgetty, hard-hearted woman, who can hardly give herself a few hours' sleep, and makes her servants rise at day-break every morning, keeping them at work the whole day, scolding and abusing them, never giving them a moment's peace, while she herself is on foot the whole day, bustling about in every corner of the house. Avarice is just the same ; it keeps all one's thoughts busy, and all the powers of soul and body constantly on the rack in order to gain wealth, to increase it, or to preserve it. Either a business has to be established, or a loss has to be made good, or a lawsuit to be continued, a journey to be undertaken, a property to be looked at, or else money has to be laid out at interest, or yearly income and rents to be collected, and payment of debts to be demanded, etc. In a word, one's head is always full of uneasy thoughts, cares and speculations, from which one is never free ; they are the last thing at night, and the first thing in the morning, and the only thing during the whole day.

Therefore  
he cannot  
attend to  
God and to  
his soul.

How is it possible to give the heart, and the whole heart, to God, under such circumstances ? It is impossible. To hear Mass devoutly several times a week, to hear the word of God in sermons on Sundays and holydays, so that one may be encouraged to love heavenly things and to despise earthly goods by the inward working of the Holy Ghost, to go to Confession and Holy Communion, every month, or oftener, to make once a year a more careful examination of conscience, so as to keep one's account with God in good order, now and then, to read a spiritual book, or the lives of the Saints, to make a daily examen of conscience every evening before retiring to rest ; these and similar exercises of a Christian life are unknown to the avaricious man. They do not suit his fancy, he cannot afford to practice them either at home or in his place of business. They will not help me to earn my bread, he says.

He has  
neither  
strength  
nor inclina-  
tion to do  
good.

Greed of gain has taken from him all desire for God and the things of eternity, and all strength to work for the salvation of his soul. It is to people of this kind, that Christ threatens woe. Samson, as we read in the Holy Scriptures, often allowed himself to be taken by the Philistines and bound, while he was asleep. At last, he told the false and avaricious Delilah, that all his strength was in his hair, and once while he was asleep, she cut

off all his hair. Thus deprived of his strength, he fell an easy victim to the Philistines, who put out his eyes and condemned him to turn a mill for their sport. Now I ask, what was Samson's greatest fault and the occasion of his misfortunes? Was it his falling asleep and allowing himself to be bound with ropes and chains? No, for he knew well that he could break his bonds as easily as if they were silken threads. His whole misfortune is to be attributed to his having disclosed the secret of his strength, and having allowed his hair to be cut; when that was done, he was no longer the same man. My dear brethren, the father or mother of a family who has to look after many children and servants, the merchant, the official, the lawyer, the tradesman, and many others of the kind, whom Divine Providence has placed in the world for the good of mankind in general, are bound fast with a hundred bonds; that is to say, they are busied every day with countless thoughts, cares and speculations as to how they are to support themselves and those belonging to them, in a manner suitable to their state. Is it perhaps in this, that the misfortune of the avaricious man consists, which makes him neglect and lose God? Oh no! one must do that in order to maintain the position in which God has placed him, as I have proved elsewhere. It is, in fact, by properly performing one's duties and directing all the cares and occupations of one's state to the right end, that is to God, that Christian perfection is attained. Avarice shows itself generally, by the fact that people who are infected with it lose their spiritual strength through their inordinate greed of gain, and become blind to the true good.

I will explain myself: a man of business has, as I have said, a hundred different thoughts in his head about buying, selling, answering letters, paying out and receiving money, and other matters of the same kind. Still, if he hears the bell ring at the usual time for Mass in the morning, he thinks at once: oh, my business can wait a while, I must go to Mass, and do my duty to my God. On Sundays and holydays, he says to himself: this is no day for business, I shall begin a new week at it tomorrow; to-day, I must attend to God and to my salvation. A poor laborer, who happens to be in town on Sunday, and who cannot come on another day to make his necessary purchases, waits until the afternoon and meanwhile hears Mass and the sermon and performs his usual devotions, fully impressed with the idea, that if he had made his purchases instead of doing his duty as a Catholic, he would deserve to lose all he has. The

He might  
work for  
money, and  
still serve  
God.

first or some other Sunday in the month comes on ; at once he thinks, oh, good bye to all business for to-day. I must prepare for Confession and Communion. He sees the Blessed Sacrament carried through the streets to a sick person ; my business must now wait a little, he says to himself, I must show proper respect to my God and publicly accompany Him. A poor beggar comes to his door ; I have a great many children, he thinks. and house-keeping is expensive, still, I must not on that account, refuse to help Christ in the person of His poor. He never rises in the morning, or goes to bed at night, without saying his prayers devoutly. See, my dear brethren, this man is a Samson who is bound with many cords, but he is not shorn of his hair ; that is, he has many temporal cares, but he still preserves his spiritual strength by which he can tear asunder those bonds, and free himself from the slavery of worldly anxieties whenever his duty to God or the good of his soul requires ; he takes care of his temporal affairs and works to make money, but he is not on that account avaricious.

But his  
avarice  
does not  
permit him.

But, mark the difference ; if any one of you is so much taken up with business cares, that he does not attend to God and to his soul in the manner described, then should I say of him : alas, poor, unfortunate Samson, thou art shorn of thy locks and bound fast ; thou hast lost all thy strength to do good ; thou art a slave to greed of gain and an inordinate desire of earthly things ! Even though thou seekest no unjust profit, thy very mode of life is not justified before God ; thou art subject to a disgraceful avarice which will treat thee as the Philistines treated Samson, after they had shorn him of his locks and deprived him of his strength ; it will put out thy eyes and make thee blind, that is, it will take away from thee all supernatural light and all thoughts and desires of heavenly things ; it will put thee to grind in a mill, wearing out thy life with constant cares and anxieties, until, at last, as happened to Samson, when thou art tired of the unceasing toil, the house will fall upon thee and thou shalt hear the words : “ Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee, and whose shall those things be which thou hast provided ? ” <sup>1</sup>

Because it  
blinds him,  
so that he  
works for

Whose shall they be ? I ask. They shall be for my children and heirs, you think. Is that the case, says St. Augustine, do you then work for others and forget your soul ? And it is so in

<sup>1</sup> Stulte, hac nocte animam tuam repetunt a te : quae autem parasti ; cujus erunt ? Luke xii. 20.

reality. Ask some gray-haired old grandfather, for whom does he labor ? For my children he will say.<sup>1</sup> And for whom does his married son labor ?<sup>2</sup> The latter will answer, for his children.<sup>3</sup> And for whom do they work ?<sup>4</sup> For their children in turn.<sup>5</sup> Alas, concludes St. Augustine, what folly and blindness ! no one works for himself and his soul.<sup>6</sup> Naturalists tell us of a certain kind of bird that lives but a short time, yet it is always flying about looking for food, not indeed that it eats much, for it is content with very little, but simply to make provision for the future ; the result is that by dint of sparing, it dies of hunger while other birds come and eat the food it has heaped up. The avaricious act in the same foolish manner ; they wear away their lives in constant efforts to make money, which they will not be able to make use of themselves ; but when they die, exhausted by unceasing toil, others come and carry off their hoards. They are like Domitian, of whom Suetonius narrates that he dreamt one night that he had on his shoulders a heavy, but at the same time, an agreeable burden ; he thought that a hump of gold had grown on his back, whereat he was greatly rejoiced. A foolish joy in my opinion, for he had much more reason to grieve at a deformity that would make him contemptible in the sight of men. If he could have really had such a hump, he would have been obliged to carry it about with infinite labor, without ever deriving the least advantage from it. How many there are who make a golden hump for themselves. They heap up riches, but on their backs ; not for themselves, but for their children and descendants. With reason, does St. Augustine complain that no one works for God and for Heaven. No ; avarice will not tolerate labor of that kind, when it once gets hold of the heart. As Salvianus says : “ The mind follows its treasure, and becomes changed into an earthly substance.”<sup>7</sup> Heaven is nothing more to an avaricious man, than it is to a dumb beast, which can see it as long as there is light ; his soul is no more to him than to a dumb beast, he neglects it as if it were to perish with the body.

His God is money, and therefore St. Paul compares avarice to idolatry. As the Prophet Osee, during the Babylonian captivity, was preaching to the Jews and exhorting them to adore the true God, Ephraim said to him : “ I will not adore the God of

others, but  
not for his  
soul.

At last he  
looks upon  
money as  
his God.

<sup>1</sup> Filiiis inquit.

<sup>2</sup> Et ipse cui ?

<sup>3</sup> Filiiis suis.

<sup>4</sup> Et ipsi quibus ?

<sup>5</sup> Filiiis suis.

<sup>6</sup> Nemo ergo sibi.

<sup>7</sup> Mens thesaurizantis thesaurum suum sequitur, et quasi in naturam terrestris substantiæ demutatur.

whom you speak." And why? "But yet I am become rich, I have found me an idol."<sup>1</sup> The avaricious man says the same thing by his acts: I have found me an idol; what is God to me? I have neither time nor inclination to serve Him; I have my God at home in my coffers. If now and then, he does something to serve the true God, he does it only for the sake of money and temporal gain. Prayer, visiting the church, processions and pilgrimages are all directed by him to his own selfish ends; he wishes to have a good harvest, or to succeed in his enterprises, or to avert misfortune from his household, or to gain a lawsuit; these and such things as these, are the only ends that he proposes to himself in his devotions. If he had nothing to fear or to hope from Heaven, he would never think of God. Thus, says St. Augustine, he places his highest happiness in riches, and looks on God only as a helper in the pursuit of wealth. "He does not seek money for God's sake, but he seeks God for money's sake."<sup>2</sup>

And besides  
loses all  
pity for the  
poor.

God, as the common Father of all, has given to some an abundance of worldly wealth, that they may help the poor and needy; that is the last thing the avaricious man thinks of; it is easier to get blood from a stone than an alms from a miser, although he has more money than he knows what to do with. Divine Providence has given to some a large share of temporal goods, to others a lesser share, and to others none at all, so that men might stand in need of each other, and by helping each other, all go to Heaven; the poor man by his patience and resignation to the will of God; the rich man by alms-deeds and the works of Christian charity. Now, if there is no doubt that the rich are bound under pain of sin to help the poor out of their superfluous wealth, how much greater is not the obligation of a rich man who is a miser? For, since he spends less than he might, his store increases daily, and with it the obligation of alms-giving. But there is little use in reminding him of his duty; greed of gain has tied his hands, and taken all charity out of his heart. On account of their transitory nature, and because they generally pass from one hand to another, riches are compared to flowing water; but there is a great difference between a gently flowing stream and the stormy sea. The stream with its clear waters is useful to all; the traveller slakes his thirst at it, the maid-servant comes to it for water to cook

<sup>1</sup> Verumtamen dives effectus sum, inveni idolum mihi.—Osee xii. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Non nummum propter Deum, sed Deum propter nummum.

with, it can be used for washing, etc. On the other hand, the water of the sea is too salt to serve for any purpose but one, and that is, to carry merchandise. A miser's riches are like the sea water; as long as they are in his possession, they are of no good to any one; no poor man, nor any one else need hope to profit by them. The poor who knock at a miser's door, seem to me to resemble the lean cattle on the mountain of Fiesole in Italy; I have been told by people who have been there that this is a very high and precipitous mountain, and at its foot is a most beautiful plain, full of green meadows, and well watered. The cattle on the mountain look down upon the plain, stretch out their necks and lick their lips at the sight of the fine grass; but all in vain, they are just as hungry as before, because the grass is beyond their reach. Such it seems to me is the state of those unfortunate poor who ask alms of a miser. They see the rich pastures, the superfluous wealth, the heaps of money; their mouths water at the sight, they bow their heads humbly and ask an alms for God's sake. Alas, all in vain! There is nothing for you here, away with you, I will not give you a single crust! Avarice has taken from the miser's heart all human feeling and natural pity, and much more than that, it has taken away all supernatural virtue, all Christian charity and mercy. Thus my dear brethren, the avaricious man neglects God during life by omitting the good he is bound to do. But he incurs a still greater responsibility before God, by doing the evil to which his avarice leads him; as we shall see in the

### Second Part.

I need only appeal to the infallible testimony of the Holy Ghost, in the Book of Ecclesiasticus: "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."<sup>1</sup> But, O Holy Spirit, Spirit of infallible truth, is avarice then the worst of all vices? Is the miser the most unjust and the most impious of all? That is the meaning of the words quoted; for, as students of grammar say, there is no difference of meaning between the two sentences: no one in the school is more learned than Peter, and Peter is the most learned boy in

From avarice spring nearly all other great vices.

<sup>1</sup> *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.—Eccel. x. 9. 10.*

school. Therefore, there is no difference between saying: no one is more unjust and impious than an avaricious man, and the avaricious man is the most unjust and impious of all. It is true then, that nothing is more wicked than the covetous man. Because nearly all the worst vices and sins come from avarice. Let us consider it from its origin up to the present time, and we shall see how true that is.

Proved by  
examples  
from the  
Old Testa-  
ment.

I find that it was in the world already in the time of our forefather Adam, for the first vice that showed itself in Cain was greed, and the love of worldly goods, since he kept the best fruits for himself and offered the worst to God. Was that the only fault that Cain committed? Yes, it was the only one. What? The envy, jealousy and hatred with which he regarded his innocent brother Abel, the treacherous friendliness with which he invited him to go with him into the fields, the fearful fratricide he committed, the sulky, rebellious answer he gave to God: "Am I my brother's keeper?"<sup>1</sup> his despair when he lost all hope of pardon and mercy from God: "My iniquity is greater than that I may deserve pardon;"<sup>2</sup> the madness that drove him to spend his life wandering over the world among wild beasts, were not these greater sins than the first? Yes they were, but they all came from the first; they were all children of avarice. See what harm has since been done by the same vice amongst the common people, the judges, high-priests and kings of the Old Testament. You will find in the Holy Scriptures that treason, incest, murder and assassination have sprung from avarice. It was through avarice that King Jeroboam introduced idolatry into the kingdom of Israel; it was the cause of the rebellion and murmuring against God of the Israelites in the desert, for they clamored for meat to eat; "Who shall give us flesh to eat?"<sup>3</sup> Although, as De Lyra says, they had sheep and cattle in abundance, which they were unwilling to slaughter through avarice.<sup>4</sup> The same people often disobeyed the express command of God, and refused to destroy their enemies, through greed of gold, as Theodoret says. As we read in the first chapter of the Book of Judges; "Manasses did not destroy Bethsan; Ephraim did not slay the Chanaanite; Zabulon spared the inhabitants of Cedron, and Aser those of

<sup>1</sup> Num custos fratris mei sum ego?—Gen. iv. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Major est iniquitas mea, quam ut veniam merear.—Gen. iv. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Quis dabit nobis ad vescendum carnes?—Num. xi. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Propter suam avaritiam parcebant suis animalibus.

Accho,"<sup>1</sup> but they kept all these hostile tribes as tributaries. Avarice led King Saul into a similar act of disobedience, when he spared Agag and the best of his flocks and herds.<sup>2</sup>

St. Paul says of avarice: "The desire of money is the root of all evil; which some coveting, have erred from the faith."<sup>3</sup>

From the  
New Testa-  
ment.

In fact, there is no sin so great and horrible which an avaricious man is not ready to commit for the sake of money. You, Scribes and Pharisees, wanted some one to deliver Jesus Christ into your hands; you had only to promise a sum of money, without saying at once how much, and the traitor Judas immediately offered himself; he was blinded and corrupted by a few pieces of silver. You, high-priests, who wish to nail the Son of God to a cross, be ready to spend your money, and you will find soldiers and Jews enough who are willing to do the work of the executioner! You, Jews, hear in your Synagogue that the soldiers have come back from the grave of Christ, filled with dread. They have seen that He whom you crucified has really risen from the dead, and as eye-witnesses, they can publish the fact throughout the whole city of Jerusalem, to your great shame and confusion; what are you to do? Out with your money at once; there is nothing better! Bribe the soldiers, and they will not only hold their tongues, but they will even spread a false report, that the disciples of Christ came and took away His body during the night while they were asleep. So great is the power of money. The evil spirit himself, after having vainly tempted Our Lord to gluttony and ambition, at last tried to seduce Him by love of gold; if He is a mere man, thought the tempter, He will have to succumb to this; and so he took our Blessed Lord to the top of a mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the earth, and their glory, and said to Him: "All these will I give Thee, if falling down Thou wilt adore me!"<sup>4</sup> Clearly the devil did not yet know that he had to do with God, otherwise he would not have made such a promise, nor would he have dared to try a temptation of the kind.

If he were to show a purse of gold nowadays to many Christians, and offer it to them, oh, how many knees would bend in

From daily  
experience  
of all kinds  
of people.

<sup>1</sup> Manasses non delevit Bethsan, etc.; Ephraim non interfecit Chananeum, etc.; Zabulon non interfecit habitatores Cetron, etc.; Aser quoque non delevit habitatores Accho, etc.;—Judges i. 27-31.

<sup>2</sup> Pepercit Saul et populus Agag, et optimis gregibus ovium et armentorum.—I. Kings xv. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Radix omnium malorum est cupiditas, quam quidem appetentis erraverunt a fide.—I. Tim. vi. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Hæc omnia tibi dabo, si cadens adoraveris me.—Matth. iv. 9.

adoration of him ! Faith, honor, fidelity, conscience, soul, Heaven, God Himself, all are too light when weighed against a sum of money. The desire of money is the root of all evil, nay, it is the means that the most vicious make use of to accomplish their sinful and wicked undertakings. The proud man uses it to make himself great in the eyes of the world and to oppress others ; the sensual and unchaste man to satisfy his brutal lusts and his sensuality ; the vindictive man to destroy his enemy ; the glutton to satisfy his appetite ; all of them require money to carry out their wicked intentions. What fearful sins are caused by avarice in private families ! That secret joy and satisfaction, so contrary to every instinct of nature, which many a brother feels at his sister's death, because his own portion will be increased thereby ; which many a husband feels at the death of his wife, because he is then sure of her dowry ; which many a son feels at the death of his parents, because he will thereby become master of all they leave behind them ; those interminable law-suits, which cause enmity between brother and sister, friend and relative for years, on account of some legacy ; what are all those things but the unhappy fruits, the children of avarice ? Jesus Christ, the Eternal Truth, when exhorting us to bear with each other in kindness and charity, says : " And if a man will contend with thee in judgment, and take away thy coat, let go thy cloak also to him." <sup>1</sup> That is to say, if a man will go to law with you, to try to take the very clothes off your back, give him what he wants, so as to satisfy him, and make a present to him of your cloak also, that you may avoid contention. But, O Lord, why should I give away what belongs to me by right ? And why should I give him my cloak, which he has not asked for ? An interpreter of the Holy Scriptures gives the following beautiful answer : " If we wish to go to law for the sake of our coat, we shall have to spend more money than both coat and cloak are worth." <sup>2</sup> And so it is in reality ; at the end of a long law-suit, even the successful party finds that he has had to pay his lawyers more than he gained by the suit. But avarice so blinds a man, that he is ready to risk his two eyes for the sake of saving a trifle, rather than keep what he has with the loss of one eye. And meanwhile, what a number of sins, and great ones too, are committed by both sides, during the progress of

<sup>1</sup> Et ei qui vult tecum iudicio contendere, et tunicam tuam tollere, dimitte ei et pallium.—Matth. v. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Si velimus litigare pro tunica, multa oportebit expendere, quæ pluris valent, quam tunica et pallium.

such a suit. Constant hatred and anger against each other, vindictiveness, contumely, calumny, detraction, cursing, blaspheming, unlawfully bribing the lawyers of the opposite part, etc., are generally the effects which spring from avarice alone. Go into the stores and taverns and you will see and hear what lies and cheating and perjury people are guilty of for the sake of a penny; the tongue lies in buying and selling; the hand lies in weighing and measuring; the heart lies by false promises; money itself lies when false coin is passed off as if it were genuine. In a word, nothing is spared in the way of injustice and cheating in order to make a small profit. I dare not say anything of public offices and courts of justice; how many acts of injustice would I not find practised in them, of which avarice alone is the cause.

Even in the houses of the poor, God is forgotten for the sake of gaining money, by committing crimes that one may not name. The demon of avarice says to many, what he said formerly to Christ: "Command that these stones be made bread."<sup>1</sup> What, can stones be turned into bread? Alas, yes, my dear brethren, it is done only too often! Is there beauty and poverty in the house together? oh, what a dangerous thing that is! For then, very often, people are not ashamed to sin, that they may spare themselves the shame of begging, command that these stones be made bread they say; maidenly modesty, innocence, conjugal fidelity, away with you, that we may earn our bread! Why, says the abandoned woman, in the Book of Osee, should I not do the will of my lovers, without whom I cannot live? "I will go after my lovers that give me my bread, and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink."<sup>2</sup> I should never come to an end if I were to reckon up all the sins and vices that greed of gold causes even in those who have temporal riches and goods in abundance. How many tricks and artifices, how much impoverishment and secret oppression of the poor, how many open deeds of violence, how many usurious contracts, how many simonies are committed for the sake of money! In a word, there is no sin too great for an avaricious man to commit, provided he can make something by it. Therefore, the words of Ecclesiasticus are true, there is nothing more wicked than an inordinate love of money.<sup>3</sup> And consequently, it is true that the avaricious

Of the poor  
as well as of  
the rich.

<sup>1</sup> Dic ut lapides isti panes fiant.—Matth. iv. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Vadam post amatores meos, qui dant panes mihi, et aquas meas, lanam meam et lnum meum, oleum meum et potum meum.—Osee ii. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Nihil est iniquius quam amare pecuniam.—Eecl. x. 10.

man neglects God by omitting good, and committing evil during his life. And the words of Christ, too, are verified: "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!"<sup>1</sup>

Conclusion  
and exhortation  
to  
the rich.

I will conclude with the words of the Psalmist: "If riches abound, set not your heart upon them."<sup>2</sup> You, to whom God has given abundant blessings and fortune, place not your affection in temporal goods. I do not say that you must throw away your wealth; but that you must not fix your heart and desires on it. It is not an evil thing in itself to possess riches; many of the greatest friends of God have been rich in this life; the whole evil consists in the bad use, and inordinate love of it. It is one thing to keep poison in a closed vessel, and another to take it into one's mouth and swallow it. Every apothecary has in his shop different sorts of deadly poisons, which are used in preparing wholesome medicines for the sick; but woe to them if a single drop should touch their hearts. In the same way, "Woe to you that are rich,"<sup>3</sup> not because you possess money and lands, but woe to you if you allow them to take possession of your hearts. You must use them with true humility and gratitude to God and His service alone. Be careful above all that you never lose God for the sake of worldly goods. Tell me, you who are so eager for money; there is a chance for you to make ten dollars, but in another place and at the same time, you can make a thousand dollars; the thing must be done at once; now which of those chances will you take? Oh, you think, there is little need of hesitation, of course I will go after the thousand dollars at once. But, wait a little; will you give up your chance of the ten dollars? It is a pity to let them slip. Do you think I am a fool, you would say? A thousand dollars are worth far more than ten dollars. Well, I believe you are right; but, listen; why are you not as prudent in other and far more important affairs? Here on earth, you have a chance of gaining a few perishable things that you can keep only for a very short and uncertain time; while in Heaven, you may have an immortal, immense and infinite good, the Great God Himself. If you are not foolish then, do your very best not to let this latter good escape you. In the words of St. Bernard, "I beseech you, since you are so prudent in looking after the straw, not to forget the

<sup>1</sup> *Quam difficile, qui pecunias habent, in regnum Dei introibunt!*—Mark x. 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Divitiæ si affluant, nolite cor apponere.*—Ps. lxi. 11.

<sup>3</sup> *Væ vobis divitibus.*—Luke vi. 24.

barn,"<sup>1</sup> in which all your crops are preserved. If you are so careful and provident with regard to earthly riches, you ought not to forget that your first and greatest care should be to preserve your soul, your Heaven, your God. Pray then daily with the Prophet David : "Incline my heart unto Thy testimonies and not to covetousness. Turn away my eyes that they may not behold vanity ; quicken me in Thy way ;"<sup>2</sup> that I may desire and seek nothing but Thee, my greatest Good.

You, who are moderately rich, remember the words of St. Paul : "But having food and wherewith to be covered, with these we are content."<sup>3</sup> If we have enough to procure daily bread for ourselves and those belonging to us, let us be content therewith, and not desire great riches. Finally, you who are poor, remember that Divine Providence has so ordained for you, and that the Eternal Father gave the same portion on earth to His Incarnate Son, who came into this world poor, lived poor, and died poor, that He might make us rich in Heaven. Say often with the patient Job : "The Lord gave" me the little I had ; "He hath taken away" what He had given ; He has reduced me to poverty ; "blessed be the name of the Lord."<sup>4</sup> Thanks be to Him for taking from me that which might have been to me the occasion of many grievous sins, and might have caused me to lose my soul forever ! I will try to serve him henceforth, not as a hireling, for the sake of mere temporal wages, but as an adopted child, and out of pure love for my heavenly Father. Far from me the folly and madness of trying to remedy my poverty by unlawful and unjust means, which would leave me poor in this life and poor in the next. If I have no consolation here on earth, I will try all the more to become rich in Heaven, for on that all depends. Amen.

To the moderately rich, and to the poor.

<sup>1</sup> Quaeso te, si tam prudenter serves paleas tuas, etiam horreum servare memento.

<sup>2</sup> Inclina cor meum in testimonia tua, et non in avaritiam. Averte oculos meos, ne vident vanitatem : in via tua vivifica me. Ps. cxviii. 36, 37.

<sup>3</sup> Habentes autem alimenta, et quibus tegamur, his contenti sumus.—I. Tim. vi. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Dominus dedit, Dominus abstulit. . . . sit nomen Domini benedictum.—Job. i. 21.

## EIGHTH SERMON.

## ON THE UNHAPPY DEATH OF THE AVARICIOUS.

## Subject.

The avaricious man 1. generally dies without true repentance. 2. And if he has been guilty of injustice, he generally dies without restitution.—*Preached on the tenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

## Text.

*Deus gratias ago tibi quia non sum sicut cæteri hominum, raptores, injusti.*—Luke xviii. 11.

“O God, I give Thee thanks that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust.”

## Introduction.

Good reason had the Pharisee to thank God, that he was not addicted to extortion and injustice ; if he had only done so with real, humble gratitude to God. My dear brethren, what a great thing it would be for us, if we could all say of ourselves with truth and Christian humility : Thank God, I am not given to extortion and injustice. Avarice and injustice are not many degrees removed from each other ; for the former is generally the root of the latter, as I have explained in the last sermon, in which I showed how the avaricious man neglects God during life by omitting good and doing evil, and committing all kinds of sin. But I have now to add something far more terrible.

## Plan of Discourse.

*The avaricious man neglects God also in the hour of death ; for generally speaking, he dies without true repentance, as I shall prove in the first part ; and also, because, if he has been guilty of injustice, he generally dies without restitution, as I shall prove in the second part. Therefore, we must be careful not to allow our hearts to be attached to temporal things ; such shall be the conclusion.*

May God give us the grace to carry it out, through the intercession of Mary and the holy guardian angels.

Other vices  
generally  
decrease  
with age.

Generally speaking, as we live, so shall we die ; a good life is followed by a happy death ; a bad life by an unhappy death ; therefore, since, as I have shown already, the avaricious man

neglects God during life, he will also neglect Him at the hour of death. It is true that such is the case with all wicked men who live badly, and put off repentance till the hour of death, for as a general rule, they die without true sorrow for their sins; still, it is especially the case with the avaricious. There are certain diseases which, when they once take deep root, cannot be cured by any medicine, such as consumption for instance; the only remedy for it is to wait patiently until the end comes. Avarice or greed of gain is a similar malady of the soul. Other vicious habits disappear with age; for one either loses all taste for them since he has found that they cannot content him, or else the bodily strength required to indulge in them is wanting. For example, a proud, haughty, insolent manner, and vanity in dress, are generally the faults of young people; but when those young people come to mature age, they say to themselves; oh! when I was young I used to conform to the fashions of the world; I am too old for that now, and must not think of it. If one is addicted to impurity, it is, as experience unfortunately teaches, generally during youth; it is a passion that lasts a long time, and when it becomes inveterate, it is almost impossible to get entirely rid of it, without an exceptionally powerful grace; still it often happens that failing strength and old age diminish or destroy it, like taking fuel from the fire. The same may be said of gluttony and drunkenness and similar vices, which time destroys or lessens.

Avarice alone, does not yield to the influence of years or old age; on the contrary, it increases more and more, and as years go on, it strikes deeper root. St. Thomas attributes this to the fact that the other passions, which affect the exterior senses, lose their strength when the sensitive powers become weakened, as is the case when old age weakens the body; while avarice or greed of gold, being a spiritual sin, and being seated in the soul, gives rise to more vehement desires, the older it gets. And as a matter of experience, we see that old people are the most avaricious; many a one who was a spendthrift in his youth, becomes miserly in old age, and eager in the pursuit of worldly goods. Although such a man knows that he has already one foot in the grave, yet there is nothing that gives him so much pleasure as to see his coffers full of money. No matter how wicked a man may be who is given to other vices, when he sees his last hour approaching, he tries to make his peace with God by doing penance; when on his death bed, the unchaste man gives up his

Avarice in-  
creases with  
age.

sinful indulgence ; the vindictive man forgives his enemy ; the hitherto careless Christian raises his thoughts to God ; all of them wish they had not sinned, and incurred the danger of eternal damnation ; all of them wish they had done good works, that they might receive a great reward in Heaven. But it would be a miracle if a miser, whose God was money, had such thoughts.

Therefore true repentance is difficult for the avaricious man.

No doubt he will confess his other sins and receive Holy Communion ; but what devotion can he have, or love of God, whom he still loves less than his money ? What kind of sorrow can he have for his inordinate and sinful greed of riches, when his greatest and only grief is that he must now leave his beloved money for ever ? No use in speaking to him of the eternal treasures and joys of Heaven ; that is a happiness that is strange to him, one for which he never had any desire, and which he would now willingly renounce if he could only remain on earth with his treasures. No use in speaking to him of the eternal pains of hell ; his heart has no room for any such salutary thought, because it is filled with the love of gold, and is insensible to all supernatural ideas. Not without reason, does St. Paul say that avarice is the root of all evil. Why ? Because while there is no difficulty in breaking, or cutting a branch off a tree, it takes a great deal of labor to pull up the root, and it is nearly impossible to bring away the whole root without leaving some of it behind. Other vices and evil inclinations are like the branches, but avarice is like the root ; if it is difficult to overcome the former by true penance, how much more difficult will it not be to conquer the latter ? St. John Chrysostom says of this : when God wishes to cure by His grace a malady of the soul, He finds no obstacle to grace but the vice He wishes to cure by planting the opposite virtue, except in the case of avarice ; for instance, if He wishes to give the grace of humility, He has pride alone to contend against ; if He wishes to make a man chaste, He has no obstacle in His way but carnal lust ; if He desires to make a man meek, He has only to destroy anger, and so on for the other virtues. But when He wishes to cure the avaricious man, and to inspire him with a contempt for worldly goods, then He is opposed not only by a greed of gain and love of money, but also by all the passions and appetites, and all the vices to which the man is inclined, for they all take up arms in defence of avarice, since they look to it for the means of carrying out their designs.

We have an example in

In order to show us how hard it is for an avaricious man to be truly converted, Our Lord and Saviour is not satisfied with

merely bringing forward that terrible comparison of His, in which He says "it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of Heaven,"<sup>1</sup> that is for one who has set his heart on riches; He also teaches us the same truth in His Gospel by the conduct of the traitor Judas. What means had not Jesus, who is the Master of hearts, employed to turn that perjured man from his wicked design. Frequently, in the presence of His other Apostles, He had had recourse both to exhortation and example to inspire him with contempt for earthly things; He promised Heaven to him: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for their's is the kingdom of Heaven;"<sup>2</sup> He spoke of the exceeding great reward which shall be given to those who leave all things for His sake: "And every one that hath left house or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, . . . or lands . . . shall receive a hundred-fold and shall possess life everlasting."<sup>3</sup> He told him of hell and its eternal misery, when He warned him at the Last Supper: "Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man shall be betrayed; it were better for him if that man had not been born."<sup>4</sup> How did He not humble Himself before him at the same Supper? He went down on His knees, washed and dried his feet, and, according to the opinion of the holy Fathers, kissed them; certainly a heart of stone might have been softened then. But Judas remained as obdurate as ever; the thirty pieces of silver which had been promised him, had taken possession of his heart, and for their sake he was quite willing to renounce his apostleship, and to deliver Jesus, whom he knew to be the Son of God, in whose name he had cast out devils, to His enemies and murderers. What a terrible passion avarice must be, since Christ Himself, with all his exhortations, caresses and threats, could not eradicate it from the heart of one of His Apostles!

the traitor  
Judas.

With a few words He humbled the pride of James and John, when they asked for the highest place in His kingdom: "You know not what you ask."<sup>5</sup> A single look was enough to fill Peter with sorrow and contrition for having denied Him: "And

Christ converted  
other sinners with  
little  
trouble, but  
not Judas.

<sup>1</sup> Facilius est camelum per foramen acus transire, quam divitem intrare in regnum cœlorum.—Matth. xix. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Beati pauperes spiritu, quoniam ipsorum est regnum cœlorum.—Ibid. v. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Et omnis, qui reliquerit domum, vel fratres aut sorores, aut patrem aut matrem . . . aut agros . . . centuplum accipiet, et vitam æternam possidebit.—Ibid. xix. 29.

<sup>4</sup> Væ homini illi, per quem Filius hominis tradetur: bonum erat ei, si natus non fuisset homo ille.—Ibid. xxvi. 24.

<sup>5</sup> Nescitis quid petatis.—Ibid. xx. 22.

the Lord turning looked on Peter," who at once was sorry for what he had done, and "going out wept bitterly."<sup>1</sup> To cure the obstinacy and unbelief of Thomas, He merely allowed him to touch His wounds, when full of repentance and love, Thomas cried out: "My Lord and my God."<sup>2</sup> The Samaritan woman was living in impurity, but a short conversation with Christ converted her, into a zealous Apostle, so to speak. Magdalen was a public sinner, possessed by seven devils, but her heart was touched by a few words of the Saviour, and she was converted. Avarice alone was the obstinate vice that He could not cure, in spite of all the means He adopted; when all the people who heard Him preach, believed in Him and followed Him, the covetous Pharisees alone stood aloof, and jeered at Him: "Now the Pharisees, who were covetous, heard all these things and they derided Him."<sup>3</sup> For the same reason He failed to touch the heart of Judas, and could not bring him to repentance, no matter what means He adopted. Even while the act of treachery was being accomplished, He took pity on the traitor, and said to him, in order to encourage him to repent: "Friend, whereto art thou come?"<sup>4</sup> But all in vain. Avarice brought the traitor so far that at last he hanged himself in despair. I see clearly now, O Lord, how fruitless it is to preach penance to the avaricious, for even Thou hast not succeeded in converting them!

The same is true of the avaricious man at the point of death. Shown by examples.

Oh, woe to those unhappy men whose hearts are possessed by this vice. "All avaricious people suffer from the dangerous malady of Judas," says St. John Chrysostom;<sup>5</sup> there is hardly any hope of their conversion; they neglect God even in the hour of death, although they know they are about to die, and to leave all their treasures behind. There are several examples which prove that such was the case not only with Judas, but also with many avaricious Christians. We read of dying people who, instead of turning their thoughts to God, examining their consciences, repenting of their sins and preparing for the long journey into eternity, spent their last moments looking at their money, which they had brought into the room and laid on the pillow. We read of dying people who calculated how much their funeral expenses would amount to, and who were sorely distressed at the

<sup>1</sup> Et conversus Dominus respexit Petrum . . . Et egressus flevit amare.—Luke **xxii.** 61, 62.

<sup>2</sup> Dominus meus et Deus meus.—John **xx.** 28.

<sup>3</sup> Audiebant autem omnia hæc Pharisei, qui erant avari, et deridebant illum.—Luke **xvi.** 11.

<sup>4</sup> Amice, ad quid venisti?—Matth. **xxvi.** 50.

<sup>5</sup> Avari omnes gravissimi Judæ morbo laborant.

thought of so much money being spent. We read of dying people who, when a silver crucifix was placed in their hands, looked only at the silver of which it was made and asked how much it cost. We read of dying people who had a bag of money placed on their beds, which they asked their friends to bury with them. That is related by Cæsarius of a certain rich man, who lived in a town that I will not name, as it is too well known here, who never could be accused of any injustice, but whose time was so exclusively occupied in making money, that he had no leisure to look after his soul; he was always either travelling, or busy in his shop, or writing, or looking over his accounts. Poor man, to be so careful of the present life, and so negligent of the future! Hear how he died. In his last moments, he was much troubled, but could find consolation nowhere; he could find none in God, whom he had neglected; none in Mary the Mother of God, whom he had little honored; none in his good works, because they were so few in number that he could not expect them to help him to save his soul. Alas! he cried, since neither God nor any of the Saints will give me any comfort, bring a bag of gold dollars and lay them on my troubled heart. His request was granted, and he was asked if he was any better. Better, he cried; how can I be better when I am tortured by the thought of having to leave all my money behind! Alas! I can take nothing with me; still I shall try to do so; tie this bag of gold over my heart, and bury me with it. The foolish heirs fulfilled his desire. A few days afterwards, one of his former friends thought that there was no sense in leaving so much money buried in the ground; so he went one night with a lantern to the grave, opened the coffin and found a horrible-looking toad making its way through the bag of gold into the breast of the dead man, so that the pieces of money rolled into his heart. From this you may see, adds Cæsarius, how the soul of the avaricious man is tortured in the next world, since God allowed the heart of the dead man to be so tortured by his own money.

Remarkable are the words in which St. John describes the wickedness of the traitor Judas: "The devil having now put into the heart of Judas to betray Him." Why does not the Evangelist say, *cum diabolus misisset in cor Judæ*? Because, as St. Gregory explains, Judas had no longer a heart of his own, it was completely absorbed by the demon of gold, who could do with it what he wished. According to the words of the Holy

How the avaricious have no heart for God any longer.

<sup>1</sup> *Cum diabolus jam misisset in cor, ut traderet eum Judas.*—John xiii. 2.

Pope: "The wicked have lost their hearts, and the devil possesses them, and it is to this that the Evangelist alludes, when speaking of the traitor Judas."<sup>1</sup> And so it is in reality; the avaricious have no heart either for themselves or God. You have heard, doubtless, of that rich miser who died suddenly; when his body was opened, he was found to be without a heart; the bystanders were astonished, and wondered what sort of an illness it was that had thus eaten away his heart; but the mystery was soon cleared up. When the heir opened the chest in which the dead man used to keep his money, he saw the heart of the unhappy man in the claws of a devil, who, in the appearance of a small, but terrible dragon, sat on the heap of gold, and uttered the following words: "This gold and silver is the price of the heart which your friend sold me, so that it is mine by right."<sup>2</sup> Having frequently repeated the words, "the heart is mine, the heart is mine," the dragon flew away taking the heart with him to hell. Thus the avaricious man neglects God in the hour of death, since, generally speaking, he dies without true sorrow for his sins, even if he has not been guilty of any injustice. How much more is he not apt to neglect God, after having committed many acts of injustice to which he was impelled by greed of gain? Oh, surely in such a case there is no hope of a true conversion, since he dies without making restitution; as we shall see in the

### Second Part.

It is a difficult and rare thing to restore ill-gotten goods.

It is absolutely necessary to restore what one possesses unjustly, when one can restore it to its lawful owner, no matter how one has come by it; and without such restitution, there is no pardon for sin, no hope of Heaven. But what a difficult and unusual thing it is for men to make restitution. In the Holy Scriptures we find hardly any example of restitution having been actually made, except in the case of Judas, who, as the Evangelist says, "brought back the thirty pieces of silver;"<sup>3</sup> but even this restitution did not come from a love of justice; it was an act of despair on the part of one who had made up his mind to hang himself, and not to try to save his soul. The elder Tobias wished to give back the kid that he erroneously thought to be

<sup>1</sup> *Reprobi quidem, corda sua non habent, diabolus ea possidet; unde et de proditore dicitur, cum diabolus misisset in cor, ut traderet eum Judas.*—Prosper, de dono Tim. l. 3, in *Theatr.*

<sup>2</sup> *Hoc aurum et argentum pretium est cordis, quod mihi vendidit amicus vester, ideoque jure meum est.*      <sup>3</sup> *Retulit triginta argenteos.*—Matth. xxvii. 3.

stolen. Zaccheus said to Christ : “ If I have wronged any man of anything I restore him fourfold.”<sup>1</sup> But the Gospel does not say that he wronged any one. St. Augustine relates as a great wonder, a circumstance that occurred in Milan, when he was in that city. A poor, but pious man, named Proscholus, had found a purse full of money, and as he knew that he should give it to the owner, if he could find him, he scattered about in different parts of the city, small slips of parchment containing an account of what he had found ; the owner of the purse appeared and received his property. He wished to give the poor man a present, as a mark of his gratitude : “ No,” said Proscholus, “ I will not touch what does not belong to me ; keep what is your own.” He tried again and again, but Proscholus remained firm and would not accept anything. At last, the man got vexed and threw down the bag of money on the ground and said to Proscholus: “ If you will not take anything from me, then I have not lost anything.”<sup>2</sup> “ What a contest, my brethren,” cries out St. Augustine, “ that was for the world to wonder at, and for God to behold !”<sup>3</sup> Proscholus was thus forced to take the present, but he could not make up his mind to keep it, so he gave it to the poor.

What do you think, my dear brethren, if it is a rare thing to find even a pious, good man, who has never wronged any one, restoring the property of another, how rare must it not be to find an unjust man, who loves money, ready to restore what he has got wrongfully ? Is not that, humanly speaking, impossible for an unjust and avaricious man who is at the point of death ? For, at a time like that, how can he remember all the unjust tricks he has had recourse to in his business, and how, when, where, and whom he has wronged ? Can he say how much he has unjustly taken from others ? Is that an easy task for a weak dying man, who has enough to trouble him already, and whose greatest anxiety is that he must leave his wealth behind ? Well, then, try what the priest can do ; let him exhort the dying man to give up a large share of his riches before he dies, in order to save his soul. And what good will that do ? Will the sick man agree to do what the priest says ? What, he will answer, give up the money that cost me so much hard work ? But, the priest will insist, you did not get it honestly ; you must make

Especially  
for an avaricious man  
who has acted unjustly.

<sup>1</sup> Si quid aliquem defraudavi, reddo quadruplum.—Luke xix. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Si non vis aliquid a me accipere, nec ego aliquid perdidit.

<sup>3</sup> Quale certamen, fratres, quale certamen, theatrum mundus, spectator Deus!—S. Aug. Sermon. 19, de verb.—A post.

restitution. Restitution? And what are my children to do? They have no more right to it than you; if they keep it they will be lost as well as you. But I cannot ruin my family. You must do so in order to save them from eternal ruin. And my reputation and good name, if the thing is known? No matter about them; God wishes you to do it. But I cannot. Then you will lose your soul. Alas, I cannot! Then you will not go to Heaven. Alas, it is impossible! Then you will have to go to hell for ever with the demons. Well, at least give me a little time to consider. Time? And death already in your face? Let me rest a while first. Yes, rest, and while you are looking for idle excuses, and considering whether you will yield to the influence of grace, if, indeed, it is possible for an avaricious heart to yield to it, time is flying rapidly, the last moment is approaching, death comes, the unjustly acquired wealth is not restored, what will become of the poor soul?

Nay, it is almost impossible for him.

“The men of riches,” says the Psalmist, “have found nothing in their hands.”<sup>1</sup> Another interpretation, according to St. Jerome, has “they have not found their hands.”<sup>2</sup> Both versions are true of the avaricious. Whenever there is question of keeping or receiving, they find their hands easily enough; but they have no hands to give back or to make restitution. Ill-gotten goods, says St. Gregory, are like the bait which conceals the hook; a hungry fish swallows the bait, and loses its life in consequence, for either it is hauled into the boat, or else it breaks the line, and goes off with the hook in its mouth, from which it will never be able to free itself. The avaricious man who has ill-gotten goods, suffers from a similar misfortune: he has swallowed, with the bait, a hook which will cause him eternal death. He is exhorted to give back what he has wrongfully acquired, to reject what he has swallowed; but that is what he refuses to do, until the Almighty God takes it from him violently by death. The Holy Scriptures represents Sophor, a friend of Job’s, as speaking in that manner: “The riches which he hath swallowed, he shall vomit up, and God shall draw them out of his belly.”<sup>3</sup> Brennus, the king of the Galatians, once allowed a young girl of Ephesus to take away as much gold as she could carry on her back; the greedy girl took such a load, that the weight of it killed her before she got home. Aribert, king of

<sup>1</sup> Nihil invenerunt omnes viri divitiarum in manibus suis.—Ps. lxxv. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Non invenerunt manus suas.

<sup>3</sup> Divitias quas devoravit, evomet, et de ventre illius extrahet eas Deus.—Job. xx. 15.

Lombardy, was once swimming across a river, and he took such a quantity of gold with him, that he sank to the bottom. What foolish people these were. They might easily have seen that the load was too much for them, and have thrown it away. True, but they were too much infatuated with the greed of gold to see it. Such is the case with all the avaricious; they will not throw off the burden they place on their own shoulders, until they sink under it, and lose their souls as well as their ill-gotten wealth.

But, it may be objected, restitution cannot be such a difficult thing for one who stands face to face with death. Why should he desire to keep what he cannot use? True, my dear brethren, there is a good deal in that remark; but it does not apply to deep-seated avarice. If the avaricious man cannot enjoy his wealth himself, he still clings to the idea of leaving it to his heirs, in whose persons he imagines he can continue to live. This is the extreme of folly and desperation, into which a man is hurried by love of money. Salvianus says to an avaricious man at the point of death: "You take great care that others should live well after you are gone; but you do not think of the unhappy death that is in store for yourself."<sup>1</sup> Forgive me, O dearest Lord, if I seem to contradict what Thou hast said: "Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends!"<sup>2</sup> Does it not seem that the avaricious man has a still greater love, or rather madness, since he gives up for his friends, not the life of the body, but that of the immortal soul, by being ready to sacrifice his hopes of Heaven and to condemn himself to hell, rather than impoverish them by making restitution of what he has unjustly acquired? Can there be greater madness than this? Yet a man may be brought to it by avarice.

Although he cannot use it himself, he does not wish to deprive his heirs of it.

In the annals of the Cistercian order, we read of a well-known rich man, who, a few hours before his death, sent for a notary to make his will. When the notary arrived, he said to him: Sit down and write as I shall dictate to you; this is my last will; after my death I bequeath my body to the earth from which it came, but my soul I give to the devil, to whom it belongs. All the by-standers were horror-stricken at this. Go on, said the dying man, write as I tell you; I give my soul to the devil; and

Shown by an example.

<sup>1</sup> Cogitas quam bene alii post te vivant; nec cogitas quam male ipse moriaris.

<sup>2</sup> Majorem hac dilectionem nemo habet, ut animam suam ponat quis pro amicis suis.—John xv. 13.

also, as far as I can, I give him the souls of my wife and children. My soul I give him, because I have made a good deal here and there in my business, that does not of right belong to me ; my wife's soul, because she has made me commit many acts of injustice, in order to support her extravagance ; and the souls of my children, because I neither can, nor will make restitution, so as not to leave them poor. Having said these words, he breathed his last.

Therefore, the avaricious are the most unhappy of all.

Oh, accursed greed of gold, to what depths of despair dost thou not drive men! Thou forcest them to sacrifice Heaven, their souls and their God for all eternity. Now I understand that terrible woe that the meek Saviour threatens to those rich men whose hearts are attached to their wealth : "Woe to you that are rich." The vain world thinks you fortunate ; men, blinded by the glitter of your wealth, look upon you with envy, and wish they were like you ; but, woe to you. And why ? Not only because it costs you so much labor and trouble to gain wealth, so much care to preserve it, so much fear and anxiety, lest the least accident should deprive you of it ; so that with all your riches your lives are full of torment and uneasiness. Woe to you. And why ? Not only because your gold cannot make you contented and happy, since the desire of it increases every day, and so keeps you constantly on the rack, without ever giving you time to enjoy it. Woe to you. And why ? Not merely because your avarice prevents you from using and enjoying your wealth, so that you live as miserably as if you had nothing. Woe to you. And why ? Not only because death will compel you to relinquish your treasures, as the hunter compels the dog to give up the game it has seized ; so that you must go into eternity without being able to bring with you a single farthing of the money you loved so much. Woe to you ; not only because you neglect God during life by not doing the good you ought to do, and by committing many sins through greed of gain ; for, all that might be amended and atoned for. But, woe to you, especially, on account of the darkening of your understanding and the hardening of your heart which makes you neglect God at the hour of death, and refuse to make due restitution, or else so fills you with fear and despair that you die without true repentance, and thus are lost for ever ! Woe to you !

On the contrary, hap-

Happy indeed is he, who, according to the words of the Holy Ghost in the Book of Ecclesiasticus, has kept his heart free

from the affection to worldly goods : “ Blessed is the rich man that is found without blemish, and that hath not gone after gold, nor put his trust in money nor in treasures.”<sup>1</sup> Happy is he, since he thus saves himself from a thousand cares and anxieties during life ; still happier, because he always walks in the way of justice, and minds his soul ; happiest of all, when at the approach of death, he can look round him without seeing anything that he has acquired unjustly, anything that he will be sorry to leave, anything for which he is not prepared to give an account to his Judge. But, “ who is he, and we will praise him ? For he hath done wonderful things in his life.”<sup>2</sup> Who can say that he is like this ? Let him come forward, and we shall look on him with admiration.

by they who  
are not  
given to  
avarice.

I am afraid, my dear brethren, that there are very few who will derive any profit from this sermon ; because people either refuse to acknowledge that they are avaricious, although they are in reality infected with that vice, or else they maintain that very few are addicted to it. Would to God that this latter assertion were true. The poor, and those of the middle class, will not see much in this sermon to apply to themselves, although it suits them better than they imagine. They will think that what I have said is for the rich alone. We have not much money, they will say, we have no large revenues, and therefore we have not the chance of being avaricious. Oh, Christians, you make a mistake ; I have not said that avarice consists in possessing much wealth, but in an inordinate desire and love of money and worldly goods ; a love which the poorest as well as the richest may have. When Christ said in the Gospel : “ How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God ; ”<sup>3</sup> the disciples were surprised, and asked Him : “ Who then can be saved ? ”<sup>4</sup> But, the Saviour might have answered them, how does that affect you ? I am alluding only to the rich ; you are poor like Me, and you have left the little you possessed ; besides, there are as many, nay, more poor than rich in the world ; so that if Heaven is closed to the rich, it still remains open to the greater number, who are the poor. But no, our Lord did not answer in that way ; He rather sanctioned the fear and astonishment of his disciples. The latter understood His meaning very

Of whom  
there are  
few, since  
avarice is to  
be found  
even  
amongst the  
poor.

<sup>1</sup> *Beatus dives, qui inventus est sine macula, et qui post aurum non abiit, nec speravit in pecunia et thesauris.*—Ecl. xxxi. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Quis est hic, et laudabimus eum ? Fecit enim mirabilia in vita sua.*—*ibid.* 9.

<sup>3</sup> *Quam difficile, qui pecunias habent, in regnum Dei introibunt.*—Mark. x. 23.

<sup>4</sup> *Et quis potest salvus fieri ?*—*ibid.* 26.

well ; they knew that He spoke, not merely of those who were really rich, but also of those who wished to become so. The world is full of rich people of the latter class ; the love of money is so general, that it may be found in the midst of poverty and want ; while, on the other hand, the grace of God is so powerful, that poverty of spirit is to be seen in the midst of wealth. St. Augustine asks the poor man : “ What better are you for being poor outwardly, if you are inwardly consumed with a thirst for money ? ”<sup>1</sup> If, in your poverty, or mediocrity, you are dissatisfied with the will of God and murmur because He has not given you more of the goods of this world ; if you are always busy with plans and contrivances to become rich ; if you envy others because they have more than you ; if you are as covetous of your earthen-ware pot and wooden platter, as the rich man is of his gold and silver plate ; if you are as ready to lie and swear falsely for a few pence, as another is for ten pounds ; if you are always on the watch to seize hold of everything you can find, whether you have a right to it or not ? How will your poverty help you to Heaven, in that case ? You are rich in spirit, although poor in reality ; you are avaricious at heart, although you have no money.

And  
amongst  
people of all  
classes.

A likely thing, indeed, that avarice is a rare vice ! Hear what the Prophet Jeremias says : “ From the least of them even to the greatest all are given to covetousness.”<sup>2</sup> What a terrible thing you say, O holy Prophet ; are, then, all men avaricious ? Yes, all are infected with greed of gold. All from the smallest to the greatest ? even little children and women who must sit in the house all day, and who cannot take any part in business ? All are given to covetousness. His meaning is, my dear brethren, that hardly anyone, no matter what his state or condition may be, is so free from this passion as not to be sometimes assailed by the thirst for money. We can see that in little children, almost as soon as they are able to crawl ; show them a piece of money, and they will stretch out both hands for it, and not stop crying until they get it ; pretend that you are going to take it from them and they will put it in the mouth at once. A wonderful, and at the same time, a terrible thing happened once in our own days ; a little girl, of about six years of age, acknowledged to one of our Fathers that she had killed her little brother. The Father, astonished, asked her how she did it. “ I thrust a

<sup>1</sup> Quid tibi prodest, si egeas facultate, et ardeas cupiditate ?

<sup>2</sup> A minore quippe usque ad majorem omnes avaritiæ student.—Jerem. vi. 13.

needle through his head," answered the child. The Father, still more horrified, said to her: "And did you know that what you did would kill him?" "Of course I did," replied the child. "But why did you do it?" (Hear, my dear brethren, how a little child can become possessed by avarice). "When my brother was born," said she, "people began to make fun of me, and to say that since I was no longer the only child, I should not inherit all my parents' property; therefore I put an end to him, that I might have all." Great God, who could have expected to find such greed of gold in one so young. It is seen in grown-up people too, whose chief care is how to grow richer; who are afflicted and troubled at the least loss. It is shown especially, as I have said already, by the old, although they know that death is near. It is shown by those who are wealthy enough, but who desire to become wealthier still. It is shown by those who have little or nothing, but who commit theft or impurity for the sake of money. All love money; and if one does not check this passion in the beginning, it will increase more and more, until the heart is filled with it, and God and the soul are forgotten.

Therefore, my dear brethren, we must remember the warning of Our Lord in the Gospel of St. Luke: "Beware of all covetousness;"<sup>1</sup> do not allow yourselves to be possessed by greed of gold. You, who are rich, make friends to yourselves with your riches, that they may hereafter receive you into eternal tabernacles; remember that God has lent much to you, that you may share it with His poor servants; nor can you make a better use of your money, than to place it in their hands, that they may forward it on to eternity for you. You, who are poor, console yourselves with the words of the Wise Man: "Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasures without content,"<sup>2</sup> which cannot bring happiness. "Better is a dry morsel with joy, than a house full of victims with strife;"<sup>3</sup> it is better to have but a dry crust, and to be at peace with God, than to sit at a well supplied table with a heart filled with care. I know then what to do. I thank Thee, O good God, for all Thy decrees regarding me; I desire nothing more than what Thou hast given me, be it much or little, now or in the future; I shall always be satisfied with Thy will; I shall so work for temporal goods, that I may not

Conclusion and exhortation to all to avoid avarice.

<sup>1</sup> Cavete ab omni avaritia.—Luke xii. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Melius est parum cum timore Domini, quam thesauri magni et insatiabiles.—Prov. xv. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Melior est buccella secca cum gaudio, quam domus plena victimis cum jurgio.—Ibid. xvii. 1.

lose eternal riches. My first and greatest care shall be to keep Thee, my God, as my Friend during life, by doing good and persevering therein until death, so that I may gain in Thee my greatest treasure in Heaven. Amen.

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NINTH SERMON.

ON INJUSTICE AS AN EFFECT OF AVARICE.

Subject.

1. There are many who take what belongs to others. 2. Many who keep what belongs to others. 3. Many who injure what belongs to others.—*Preached on the twelfth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

*Quodcumque supererogaveris, ego, cum rediero, reddam tibi.*—Luke x. 35.

“Whatsoever thou shalt spend over and above, I, at my return, will repay thee.”

Introduction.

And quite right too. Whatever is given out by a third person for the good of another, ought to be given back again. If the Samaritan, of whom we read in to-day’s Gospel, had not performed his promise, and repaid the host for looking after the wounded traveller, he would indeed have done a work of mercy and charity to one, but he would have been guilty of injustice to the other. Injustice is of very frequent occurrence nowadays, my dear brethren. I will still continue to speak of avarice, or the inordinate desire of worldly goods. I have shown that this vice is the cause of many different kinds of sin, but especially of injustice; since men, blinded by love of money, seek to gain it by unjust means. In my last sermon, I have briefly alluded to the fact that avarice is a common vice, from which few men are quite free; I shall now prove that unjust avarice is also a very common vice. In order to make matters clearer, I shall divide the unjust into three classes, namely:

Plan of Discourse.

*Those who take unjustly what belongs to others, those who keep what belongs to others, and those who injure the property of others. There are many who take what belongs to others.—The*

*first part. Many who keep what belongs to others.—The second part. Many who injure what belongs to others.—The third part, which will assume the form of a catechetical instruction, since many grown-up people do not attend catechism in the parish churches on Sundays, although they may be as much in need of it as children are.*

I begin, then, trusting in the help of the Holy Ghost, and in the intercession of Mary the Mother of God, and that of the holy angels guardian, to the end, that if ever we love money, we may at least be careful not to possess anything unjustly.

The first kind of injustice is committed by those who take what does not belong to them. I am not speaking now of thieves and highway robbers who attack and rob travellers, or break into houses at night; for, it is evident that such people commit grievous sin, and violate the laws of justice most flagrantly. The very name of thief is detested by every one; and imprisonment or hard labor is looked upon as meek punishment for those who thus outrage the law. But how true it is that great thieves are let off, while petty ones are imprisoned. How many there are who, under some plausible pretext or other, actually steal more than would be required to condemn them to prison!

There are many kinds of secret thieves, who take what does not belong to them.

Amongst the number of such thieves (to begin with the head of the family), are those husbands and fathers who rob their own children, by sharing with the children of a second marriage that which belongs by right only to the children of the first; or by wronging their other children out of the inheritance that justly belongs to them, for the sake of favoring unduly the child they love most. Injustice of that kind gives rise very often to hatred and contention between brothers and sisters. Of the same class also are those husbands who rob their wives, by squandering away their marriage portions with dissolute companions, in feasting and carousing, while their poor wives and children are half starved. It is a sin that cries to Heaven, for a man thus to wrong those who have every right to look up to him for help and support.

Such as unjust heads of families.

To the same class belong those wives and mothers who rob their husbands; by spending, for instance, without their husbands' knowledge and consent, a considerable sum out of the common fund; by concealing and hoarding up for themselves, that they may be richer when their husbands die,

And mothers.

money that should go to the children or other lawful heirs ; by giving considerable sums to their parents and relations ; by giving alms profusely, or being too lavish in supporting any pious work, not to speak of spending money for other purposes. All these acts are thefts and injustices, which bind to restitution. Remember, however, that I have said, without their husbands' knowledge and consent ; because, if the latter know what is being done and say nothing, or if they give their wives permission to act as they please in money matters relating to household expenses, then there is no theft committed. Again, I have said, if they spend a considerable sum ; because it is not unlawful for them to incur the ordinary expenses suitable to their station, or to give alms reasonably and according to their means, (and, if their parents are poor, they must give to them in preference to others), even without the knowledge and consent of their husbands, for in such cases the latter would have no reasonable grounds for objecting.

Sons and daughters.

To this class also belong children who rob their parents, by stealing money from them ; or, as sons who are away in foreign countries frequently do, by pretending to be in want of money, and then spending what their parents send them, in drinking, gambling and similar ways ; or when they marry, by taking out of their father's house whatever they can secretly lay hands on, a thing which is done sometimes without the least scruple ; oh, they think what belongs to my parents will be mine after their death, it is all the same if I take it now. But they are grievously mistaken ; hear what the Holy Ghost says in the book of Proverbs : " He that stealeth anything from his father, or from his mother ; and saith : ' This is no sin, ' is the partner of a murderer." Why of a murderer ? Because he treats his parents as if they were already dead, by taking possession of that which should not belong to him until after their death. Besides, who has given them a right to dispose of what must be divided equally between their brothers and sisters after their parents' death ? If they were not guilty of robbing their parents, they could certainly be accused of theft towards their brothers and sisters, and of course they are bound to make restitution.

Servants.

The same kind of theft is committed by servants who rob their masters and mistresses ; this, they do by often taking small things without permission, either for themselves, or to give them

<sup>1</sup> Qui subtrahit aliquid a patre suo, et a matre, et dicit, hoc non esse peccatum, particeps homicidæ est.—Prov. xxviii. 24.

to others, so that in time the things thus taken, amount to considerable value. The same guilt is incurred by all those who receive such stolen things from servants or children, or who buy them, although they have a reasonable suspicion that they have been taken without the consent of masters or parents. Sometimes servants and laborers, under the pretext of occult compensation, take away secretly from their employers more than they agreed upon as payment for their work ; whether they pretend that their wages are too small, or that they have done something over and above what was agreed upon, for which, as they think, they ought to be paid, although they promised to do it freely and for nothing when making the agreement. Ah, my dear people, that is not right ; for amongst the propositions condemned by Innocent XI., there is the 37th, which reads as follows : “ Men and maid-servants may secretly take from their employers whatever is necessary to compensate them for the work they do, for which they think their salary is not sufficient.”<sup>1</sup> This proposition, I say, is condemned by the Church as erroneous. You say that you do not take much ; but if every servant were to take as much as you imagine you have a right to, the masters would be at a considerable loss. What you take each time is small, but it accumulates and forms, at last, matter of a grievous theft, which binds you under pain of mortal sin to restitution ; as I have elsewhere explained, more at length, when I was speaking of the duties of servants to their employers.

Those workmen also are guilty of theft, who, when they are supplied with the material for the work they undertake, such as silver, silk, wollen stuffs, cloth, leather, timber, and so forth, keep for themselves, besides the wages agreed on, the pieces of the material which are over, and which might still be useful to the lawful owner. There are many who continue acting in that manner for years and years, so that they gain considerable thereby, which they have no right to.

Gamblers, who cheat at play and win money thereby, are also guilty of theft, unless it is free for their opponents in the game to make use of the same tricks as a means of passing the time ; but if the latter are playing seriously and fairly, he who cheats is bound, in conscience, to restore what he has won. Thefts, and grievous ones too, are committed also by those merchants and storekeepers who use short weights and measures ; even if the

<sup>1</sup> Famuli et famulæ domesticæ possunt occulte heris suis surripere, ad compensandam operam suam, quam majorem judicant salario, quod recipiunt.

measure is only a straw's breadth too short, or the weight only an ounce too light ; and if such people continue and mean to continue that mode of action for a long time, they are in a constant state of mortal sin, which they commit every time they sell in that way ; because they have constantly the intention of making an unjust profit, which will amount in the end to grievous matter. They also sin against justice, who sell old, damaged goods as if they were new, and for the same price ; who induce simple, inexperienced people to pay a higher price than the thing is worth ; and who, when they see that a customer is in a hurry for a thing, and that he cannot have it elsewhere, charge him much higher for it.

**Inn-keepers.** With these may be classed inn-keepers, who make rich people pay more for accommodation than others, on the pretext that they can afford it better, or that such an opportunity of making a trifle does not often occur. Thefts, and grievous ones too, are committed also by those who take wood from forests, or vegetables and fruit from gardens, or grapes from vineyards, or fish from ponds without the owner's permission ; as well as by those who encroach little by little on their neighbors' land, so as to increase their own ; or who remove their land-marks on the foolish pretext that others deceive them in that way. That is no excuse at all ; no matter what is stolen from me, I have no right to steal from others. Theft is never allowed.

Other  
thieves  
who, by all  
sorts of  
tricks, ruin  
entire fam-  
ilies.

These and similar thefts, my dear brethren, generally remain undetected, so that the injured person is not aware that he has been wronged. But there are other thefts which do not long remain unnoticed, on account of their disastrous effects. Sometimes the wolves get into a vineyard, when the grapes are beginning to ripen ; the birds, too, come and eat the grapes ; but what a difference between the two. One wolf opens his jaws and tears down a whole vine, so that he leaves proof enough of his presence behind him ; while ten birds pecking here and there, do so little damage that it is hardly noticed. Alas, how many families there are in the world who were once in a good position, but are now reduced to poverty by the unjust tricks and artifices of the rich and powerful, who deceived and oppressed them ! Tell me, you poor and oppressed ones, was it wolves or birds that thus made away with your property ? But your present poverty is answer enough, and shows how you were plundered ! You merchants, whose account-books are full of bad debts, contracted dishonestly, of which you will never receive a farthing ;

you, who have suffered from lawsuits that the lawyers spun out longer than necessary, although the case might be finished in a day, so clear was your right ; you, who were forced by the bribery, or influence employed by your antagonist, or by the ignorance or culpable negligence of those who undertook to plead your cause, to suffer from an unjust sentence and to pay heavy law expenses besides ; you, who have been compelled to satisfy unjust claims ; you poor widows and orphans, who have lost all you had through the chicanery of designing people, tell me, what sort of plunderers have got into your vineyard ? Had they four legs, or two ? Were they wolves or birds ? It is easy to tell ; for they have left proof enough of their presence. According to the words of the Holy Ghost: "The wild ass is the lion's prey in the desert ; so also the poor are devoured by the rich."<sup>1</sup> Just as a weak animal cannot defend itself against the attack of the lion, so the poor and weak are unable to protect their property from the machinations of the rich, who seize it and batten on it.

In the Bollandist life of St. Rictuda, for the 12th of May, there is an account of a rich man who was having his corn brought in from the field ; on the way he passed by another field in which the corn was much better than his ; he immediately told the man who was driving the wagon to hold still, and take some of the good sheaves with him, and meanwhile, he himself, who was on horseback, would keep a good look-out, so that no one might be witness of the theft. The man did as he was ordered, and came back laden with sheaves ; he put them on the wagon and made ready to start again, but the oxen which were drawing it refused to move a step ; no beating or whipping was of any use. The rich man seeing this, harnessed his own horse in front of the oxen to help them, but all in vain ; they would not move until the stolen sheaves were returned to their owner. Ah, my dear brethren, if I had those oxen I could give you ocular proof of many acts of injustice. I could bring them to the gates of many cities in the world, and yoke them on to the wagons that are laden with grain and wine to sell in the city ; I believe that very often they would stand stock still, and not move an inch, because the grain and wine are the property of poor people, who, in times of dearth or scarcity, were forced to buy on credit, trusting to the next harvest for the means of paying, and when the harvest came round, had to sell their crops to their creditors

And grow  
rich unjust-  
ly.

<sup>1</sup> Venatio leonis onager in eremo, sic et pascua divitum sunt pauperes.—EccI. xlii. 23.

at a shamefully low price. They would stand still and refuse to draw many a chest full of money, because it is money extorted from the poor by usurers, who take advantage of the necessities of others to make them pay six, seven, eight, nine or ten per cent, for money lent, and who, sometimes, when the debtors are unable to pay, force them to sell everything they have at a loss. They would refuse to draw many a load of silver plate, because it belonged to poor citizens, who, in times of scarcity, were forced to pledge it for a very small sum, and, since they were unable to redeem it, had to leave it in the hands of strangers, without getting any more for it. My good people was it wolves or birds that robbed you? But you need not answer; the thing is clear enough!

Who take  
unjust  
bribes.

There are other wolves who will not even take the trouble to go into the vineyard in order to plunder it; they compel those whom they mean to rob, to bring the booty to their houses. Of this kind are avaricious officials, who will not stir hand or foot to help others, unless they are paid for it; whence it is that many a poor man cannot get justice done him, before he has secured their help by the sacrifice of his little savings. A certain judge who was very pious, and at the same time, of a pleasant disposition, had a cat which used to run away whenever a plate of food was given her, but if the least bit was thrown on the floor, she devoured it eagerly. He had also a big dog which would never take a whole loaf or a large piece of meat, but would willingly accept a small piece of bread or meat. Their owner used to say that he kept those two animals for the sake of the lesson they taught him. "They refuse," he said, "a great quantity of food, because they think it is not for them, but for their master; they take little bits, because they know that they do not injure him thereby. It is said that we judges have claws and teeth, with which we seize upon and devour everything. My claws are like the claws of my cat, my teeth are like those of my dog. He who offers me a valuable present, even out of gratitude, must go away with it again; but a small present I willingly accept, so as not to put the giver to shame, and even that I do not take until I have helped him, according to my duty, to secure his rights." Oh, if all who hold similar offices were in those dispositions, how many acts of injustice would be avoided, how many poor people would be saved from loss! But, unfortunately, the contrary is more frequently the case, and men in office resemble thievish cats and hungry dogs, that are

not content with small bits, but always grasp at as much as they can lay hold of. If their clients bring them presents of trifling value, they are turned off without the least hope of getting what is their due. Of such thieves the Psalmist says: "In whose hands are iniquities, their right hand is filled with gifts."<sup>1</sup> But, they say, I do no one any wrong by taking what is freely offered me; people are quite free to give or not, just as they like. That is a likely thing indeed, and a novel kind of free will! They have the same kind of free will as those unfortunates who get into the claws of usurers, and are forced by dire necessity to pay back twice as much as they have received. They have the same kind of free will as those who fall into the hands of highway robbers, and can save their lives only by giving up all their money. What a scene there will be when all those thieves will hear the words: "Pay what thou owest."<sup>2</sup> Give up thy ill-gotten wealth. Herewith, I leave them the responsibility of their own acts, and I will go on to speak of the second kind of injustice, which is committed by those who keep what does not belong to them. This will be the

### Second Part.

I must again commence with masters and mistresses who do not pay their servants, tradesmen, or laborers, the proper wages, or who without just cause, retain something out of their wages, or make them wait a long time before paying them. It sometimes happens that the servant-maid breaks a ewer, or other valuable thing; the price of it is at once deducted from her wages. That is an injustice. And why? Because, in order that I may have a claim to justice to withhold what belongs to another, it is required that he should have taken away something of mine, or have done me some injury through culpable negligence or malice, or if such is not the case, it would be required that he should still have the stolen or injured article in his possession, or at least that he should have drawn some profit from the damage done. Now it is certain that a servant has a right to the wages agreed upon at the expiration of the appointed time; it is equally certain that whatever injury was caused by breaking things, was not caused through any sinful negligence or malice, but through sheer accident; and it is certain, too, that no profit has accrued

Masters and mistresses, who deduct anything from, or retain the wages of their servants and laborers, act unjustly.

<sup>1</sup> In quorum manibus iniquitates sunt: dextera eorum repleta est muneribus.—Ps. xxv. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Redde quod debes.—Matth. xviii. 28.

to the servant thereby, and that the broken article is not in her possession ; therefore no one has any right to deprive her of what is justly due to her. It is true that in law, they who injure the property of another are bound to make good the loss, whether they committed a sin or not ; because men cannot see what passes in the conscience, nor can they judge of another's intention, so that they can consider only the outward act. Masters and mistresses, however, are not judges in their own case, and of course they must look upon their servants as not guilty in conscience. There is a remarkable saying of the Holy Ghost on this subject in the Book of Ecclesiasticus : " He that sheddeth blood, and he that defraudeth the laborer of his hire, are brothers. He that taketh away the bread gotten by sweat, is like him that killeth his neighbor." <sup>1</sup> But how can that be ? Is not the life of a human being of more account than the wages of a servant, or a piece of bread ? Does not he who commits a murder incur far greater guilt than he who defrauds a laborer of his hire ? If so, why are they both classed together as brothers ? I find the reason of that in the same chapter : " The bread of the needy is the life of the poor ; he that defraudeth them thereof is a man of blood ;" <sup>2</sup> for he takes away their livelihood. It is an injustice to deduct anything from, or to retain a legacy belonging to a rich man, although he can bear the loss very well ; but to take away or retain even a few cents from a poor laborer, who has nothing except what he can earn by the sweat of his brow, is a far greater injustice. Therefore, in the Book of Deuteronomy, God gives the express command : " Thou shalt not refuse the hire of the needy, and the poor . . . ; but thou shalt pay him the price of his labor the same day, before the going down of the sun." <sup>3</sup> Why before the going down of the sun ? Why to-day and not to-morrow ? " Because he is poor, and with it maintaineth his life, lest he cry against thee to the Lord and it be reputed to thee for a sin." <sup>4</sup>

And those  
who do not  
pay their  
lawful  
debts.

This kind of injustice is also committed by those who do not pay their debts when they can ; or who borrow money or make purchases, foreseeing that they will not be able to pay, thus injuring others and retaining what belongs to them. St. Francis

<sup>1</sup> Qui effundit sanguinem, et qui fraudem facit mercenario, fratres sunt. Qui aufert in sudore panem, quasi qui occidit proximum suum.—Ecc. xxxiv. 26, 27.

<sup>2</sup> Panis egentium vita pauperum est ; qui defraudat illum, homo sanguinis est.—Ibid. 25.

<sup>3</sup> Non negabis mercendam indigentis et pauperis . . . sed eadem die reddes et pretium laboris sui ante solis occasum.—Deut. xxiv. 14, 15.

<sup>4</sup> Quia pauper est, et ex eo sustentat animam suam : ne clamat contra te ad Dominum, et reputetur tibi in peccatum.—Ibid.

of Paula was once brought into the treasury of the king of Naples, in which there were great heaps of money ; he put his hand into one of them, and filling it with money, pressed the pieces together, until the blood ran out of it between his fingers. If this saint could come down from Heaven, and seize in his hand certain hidden treasures, magnificent houses, fine clothes, costly furniture, silver plate, etc., do you not think, my dear brethren, that in many cases, blood would run out between his fingers, the blood of poor creditors, store-keepers and laborers, who have not been paid for their goods or their work ? But state and splendor must be kept up, while the store-keepers can write down the bad debts in their books, and the poor laborers must carefully refrain from even asking what is due to them, or else they will get nothing but hard words and harsh treatment. It is to no purpose that some say they are unable to pay just now what they owe, because they continue their usual extravagant style of living, although they are bound in conscience in their present circumstances to curtail their expenses.

Read the 18th chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew, and you will find one of those unjust debtors, in the parable of the king who demanded an account of his servants. Amongst others, there came to him one who owed him ten thousand talents : “ And as he had not wherewith to pay it, his lord commanded that he should be sold . . . and all that he had, and payment to be made.”<sup>1</sup> You may notice in this passage two expressions that seem to contradict each other, namely, “ as he had not wherewith to pay,” and “ his lord commanded that he should be sold, and all that he had, and payment to be made.” How are these to be reconciled ? If the servant had nothing, how could everything he had be sold ? There is no doubt that the servant had enough, but not enough to pay his debts ; he could gratify his sinful desires, his vanity, his gluttony, but he could not pay his debts. In fact, it turned out afterwards that he was rich enough ; for when he was on the point of being sold, he besought his master saying : “ Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.” It is just the same with those rich people who refuse to pay what they owe : if you look at the state they keep up, the number of servants they have, the magnificent dresses they wear, the sumptuous repasts they indulge in, it will certainly appear that they have enough. Their granaries are filled with corn,

Although they are bound to pay them

<sup>1</sup> Cum autem non haberet, unde redderet, jussit eum Dominus ejus venundari . . . et omnia quæ habebat et reddi.—*Matth. xviii. 25.*

their cellars with wine, their coffers with gold, their yearly revenues are considerable, in a word, there is no doubt that they have enough ; but when there is question of paying their debts, they are as poor as possible ; they have not wherewith to pay. I might compare them to a hedge-hog ; that animal has a body, legs and feet like other animals, but if you go too near him, he curls himself up, and you see nothing but a prickly ball. These people say : I cannot pay my debts now. In other words, they roll themselves up like the hedge-hog. They have enough for themselves, but if anyone who has waited years perhaps for his money, ventures to ask them for it, they have nothing but hard words for him. What will those people do when they appear before the judge who searches the hearts of men, and who judges justice itself ?

Others who  
in different  
ways, keep  
what is not  
theirs.

They also are guilty of injustice who, when they have anything to share with others, or an account to square with them, and see that the latter are wronging themselves through error, either by not taking enough, or by giving too much, say nothing about it, and keep all they can. In the same way, if a certain portion of crops, for instance, has to be shared with another, such as the third, sixth or tenth part, it is wrong not to give him exactly what is his due. How many injustices are committed in this way ; especially by heirs, who refuse the proper share to their co-legatees, on the pretence that the latter have not appeared to claim it, or who do not devote to pious purposes the amount specified in the will. Ah, ye dead, rise from your graves, and see what is done with the property you so piously willed to churches and to alms-houses ! Perhaps you will still find it in the hands of those whom you have enriched. God knows what sort of consciences such people have ! Injustice is also committed by all who receive and purchase stolen goods ; or who appropriate things they find, without making diligent efforts to discover the owner. If I find a thing, and, as good Christians always do, advertise it publicly without loss of time, and if no owner appears to claim it after a considerable interval, I can then keep it with a good conscience. But if I fail to give public notice of the matter, or put off doing so for a long time, I can never become a lawful possessor of the thing, on account of my culpable negligence in looking for the owner, but must give it to the poor, in case the lawful proprietor does not appear. The same holds good of those who do not at once drive away strange animals that have strayed into their yards ; I mean animals such as

cows, pigs, poultry, etc., which are apt to find their way home again, if driven away at once, while if they are kept in a strange place a few days, they grow accustomed to it. Many a one says to himself ; oh, that sheep came to my flock of its own accord ; that pig came to my sty ; that hen to my poultry-yard : I did not drive it in nor did I shut the gate on it ; it can go back if it likes, or else the owner can come for it. No, Christians, that will not do ; if you see an animal of the kind straying into your yard, and do not drive it away immediately, it is the same as if you kept it, because the owner cannot know whether it has gone to you, or to some one else. In all these cases, the rule is: Give back everything you acquire unjustly. The third and last class of injustice is committed by those who, although they neither take away, nor keep the property of others, yet injure it deliberately. As we shall see in the

### Third Part.

The chief of these are judges, lawyers, officials and others of the kind, who undertake the duties of their profession, knowing that they have not the knowledge, learning or ability necessary to fulfil them ; or if they have the ability, are careless and dilatory in performing their duty, or take more upon themselves than they can properly attend to. These act unjustly, because they are the cause of all the injury that others suffer on account of their ignorance, negligence, or the number of unnecessary things they have taken on themselves, by which suits are prolonged, or concluded too hurriedly ; an injury that they are bound in conscience to make good. The same is to be said of those who knowingly intrust such offices to incompetent persons. What a fearful responsibility is thus incurred, although generally men make light of it ! To this class belong notaries who sign invalid, usurious, or unjust contracts ; witnesses who give false testimony in a civil case ; those who are sent to examine into an affair, and who spin out the examination as long as possible, in order to make more money by it ; pettifoggers who although they know a case to be unjust, undertake to defend it, and urge an appeal against a judgment unfavorable to them, although they know that the appeal will be fruitless and that it will uselessly increase the expenses of their opponents.

With these mischievous thieves must be classed guardians who are careless of the property of their wards ; housekeepers, servants and others who do not look after what is intrusted to

Judges etc.,  
injure the  
property of  
others.

And other  
people of all  
classes.

their care, or allow others to take it, when they can prevent them from doing so ; drivers who in order to make a short cut, drive over cultivated land and injure the crops ; boatmen who drink out of the casks of wine they have in their boat, belonging to other people and then fill up the cask with water, thereby doing great injury to others and receiving very small profit themselves ; all, of whatever condition they may be, who utter base coin, even if they themselves were already deceived by having the same coin passed on them ; all who harbor thieves ; all who by command, counsel, approval, or hindrance, are the cause of injury to others ; all who take or give away a part of a thing, without which part the thing is useless to its owner. These latter act like a hungry dog, which sees a piece of bread and butter in a child's hand ; it makes a spring at it open-mouthed, and missing the bread, snaps at the child's finger. Such are they who, for instance, destroy a whole coat for the sake of getting a small piece of cloth, or pull down a whole branch in order to get a few apples, etc. The day would be too short, my dear brethren, for me to speak of all the different ways in which injustice is practised.

All who act thus unjustly, must expect a severe judgment.

Oh, if all the injustice that is daily committed in the world were to meet its due, where would prisons enough be found ? But what escapes the eyes and ears of earthly justice, will one day be exposed to the whole world, examined, and condemned by the justice of God, and unless true penance has been done, and restitution made, it will be severely punished. St. Augustine, considering the sentence that will be pronounced against the wicked on the day of judgment, because they did not feed the hungry, nor give drink to the thirsty, nor clothe the naked, nor visit the sick and those in prison, cries out : “ If he who did not give of his own, is to be cast into the fire, what will become of him who stole the property of others ? ”<sup>1</sup> If he is to be sent to hell to whom Christ can say : I was naked and you have not clothed Me ; what sort of a hell will be in store for him to whom He can say : I was clothed, and you have taken the clothes from off My body ? If he who refused to shelter Christ in the person of His poor, must take his place amongst the demons, what will become of him who by treachery and cunning has driven the poor from their homes ? In a word, if he who has not done good to his neighbor will be lost forever, how can he who has in any

<sup>1</sup> Si in ignem mittendus est qui non dedit propria ; ubi mittendus est qui rapuit aliena ?—S. Aug. de Sanctis, serm. 38.

way robbed and injured his neighbor, hope to get to Heaven ?

Ah, my brethren, let us all write deep in our hearts the words of the commandment : "Thou shalt not covet anything that is thy neighbor's." <sup>1</sup> It is forbidden even to desire, much less then is it allowed to take unjustly, to keep, or to injure what does not belong to us. The Almighty knows well that where there is desire, and an opportunity offers, the hand will soon be stretched out to seize the coveted object; therefore, even the desire of the thing is unlawful. Happy those households which resemble that of Tobias. This pious old man was blind, and not knowing what purchases his wife made here and there, he once heard a kid bleating in the house ; he became uneasy at once, thinking that it was stolen : "Take heed, lest perhaps it be stolen," said he, "restore ye it to its owners, for it is not lawful for us either to eat or to touch anything that cometh by theft." <sup>2</sup> Hear this, Christians, says St. Augustine, "he was unwilling to hear the sound of a theft in his house." <sup>3</sup> I hope you will all have the same delicate ears, and that you will avoid all injustice, so that the name even of theft may not be heard in your houses.

Exhortation and resolution to avoid all kinds of injustice.

If the greed of gain, and a favorable opportunity should excite in you a desire of appropriating anything unjustly, recall to your minds at once the words of the Holy Ghost : "Better is a little with justice, than great revenues with iniquity." <sup>4</sup> And in fact, experience teaches that ill-gotten goods never bring a blessing, for so God has justly decreed. We might say that they come in at one door, and go out at the other. They are like an uncooked morsel, which the stomach is obliged to reject, and with it the good food which it had begun to digest. Whatever just profit a man has made, generally disappears with what he has acquired dishonestly, as happened to the Israelites in the desert ; if one of them took more than his just share of the manna, all he had, became corrupted in his hands. And even if ill-gotten goods did bring prosperity, would it not still be a foolish thing to take or keep what I know I must restore, besides being obliged to make good any loss I may have otherwise occasioned, if I wish to go to Heaven ? And not only that, but the whole time I possess anything unjustly, I am at variance with God and with my conscience, and I run the risk of con-

For it can do us no good in time, and entails the loss of the soul.

<sup>1</sup> Non concupiscēs rem proximi tui.—Exod. xx. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Videte, ne forte furtivus sit : reddite eum dominis suis, quia non licet nobis aut edere ex furto aliquid, aut contingere.—Tob. ii. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Nolebat sonum furti, audire in domo sua.

<sup>4</sup> Melius est parum cum justitia, quam multi fructus cum iniquitate.—Prov. xvi. 8.

demning to hell, not only myself, but my children and descendants, who will continue to possess the unjustly acquired wealth after me. Away, then, with such folly! Away with such a blind love of gain! I would rather beg my bread from door to door, than do a dishonest action; I do not wish to gain even a penny, or a penny's worth unfairly. I will do the best I can to keep and to increase what I have for me and mine; but I will never exceed the limits of justice. Have I much? Then I will possess and enjoy it with a quiet conscience. Have I little, or nothing? Then I will console myself with the thought that I have as much as God wishes me to have, and I shall live in the certain hope that having served God faithfully and contentedly on earth, I shall enjoy an eternal treasure in Heaven. Amen.

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*TENTH SERMON.*

**ON THE NECESSITY OF RESTORING ILL-GOTTEN GOODS.**

Subject.

The restitution of ill-gotten goods, 1. Is necessary; 2. Is absolutely necessary, so that nothing can excuse one from making it.—*Preached on the thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

*Non est inventus qui rediret, et daret gloriam Deo.*—Luke xvii. 18.

“There is no one found to return and give glory to God.”

Introduction.

To return and give thanks for having been restored to health, is certainly an obligation which the law of gratitude imposes on all men; but amongst ten, there was found only one who fulfilled this law, as Our Lord complains in to-day's Gospel: “Were not ten made clean? and where are the nine?”<sup>1</sup> Without further delay, my dear brethren, I will speak of the law of justice. On last Sunday, I explained that many men practise different kinds of injustice, and what I fear is, that out of every ten who do so, hardly one is found to come back and make restitution for what he has taken, kept, or injured of the property

<sup>1</sup> *Nonne decem mundati sunt? et novem ubi sunt?*—Luke xvii. 17.

of others ; and yet that restitution is absolutely necessary, as I shall now show.

### Plan of Discourse.

*The restitution of ill-gotten goods is necessary. Such is briefly the first part. It is absolutely necessary, so that nothing can excuse one from making it. Such will be the second part. Therefore every one should at once restore what he possesses without right. Such will be the conclusion.*

To which, may the grace of God help all, through the intercession of Mary and the holy angels guardian, I hope this subject will affect but few of you, and that the greater number of you are free from injustice ; nevertheless, it will do good to you all, by inspiring you with a fear and horror of dishonesty, and such is my principal intention.

It is necessary to restore what I have unjustly taken, what I unjustly possess, or what I have injured of the property belonging to others ; this truth is so evident that it does not require much to prove it. All laws, human, natural and divine say : “ Pay what thou owest.” “ But if it were taken away by stealth, he shall make the loss good to the owner ;”<sup>1</sup> and a hundred other texts of similar import in the Old and in the New Testament, which it is needless for me to bring forward. Even if all these texts were blotted out, the light of reason alone is enough to show that we must restore whatever we possess unjustly. As St. Augustine says: “ This law is written in the hearts of men,”<sup>2</sup> so that no one can doubt of this obligation. Even impious libertines and atheists, who despise all laws, human and divine, must submit to this law. The worst robbers and thieves acknowledge it. And it is a duty founded on the first principles of nature and human intercourse : “ Do not to another, what you do not wish to be done to yourself.” Now, just as I do not wish a stranger to come and take away or injure anything I have, so there is no one who does not desire to have his stolen or injured property restored to him. Thus, the same general law of justice, which forbids us to steal, commands us to restore what we have stolen.

The restitution of that which belongs to another, is commanded by the divine and natural law.

And what fearful disorders would arise, if one were allowed to retain what he acquires dishonestly. Stealing, usury, oppression, how common they are even now, when people know that

The common good requires it.

<sup>1</sup> Quod si furto ablatum fuerit, restituet damnum domino.—Exod. xxii. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Lex scripta in cordibus hominum.

they are bound to give back the stolen property ! How would it be if there was no such obligation amongst the many who are influenced by greed of gain ? How would it be, if after repenting of one's sin, there was no further atonement required, so that the thief might consider himself the lawful owner of what he has stolen ? Who could protect himself against robbery if such were the case ? It seems strange that God has attached such importance to acts of dishonesty, as to forbid them under pain of eternal damnation, although He sets such little value on worldly goods ; although Christ, His Divine Son, did not think it worth while to possess anything ; although He has scattered those goods everywhere over the world profusely, amongst heathens and Turks, as well as Christians, amongst his bitterest enemies as well as amongst His dearest friends ; nay, He even commands those who wish to save their souls to despise riches, while they who wish to be perfect must not only despise them, but also really give them up ; so that amongst the first Christians He wished everything to be in common, and no distinction to be made between mine and thine. It seems strange, I say, that in spite of all that, God has so strictly commanded that no one should injure another in his worldly substance, and if such injury is inflicted, that restitution for it be made at once. But the common good of the human race, and the conditions under which men live together, require such a strict command ; otherwise the world would be full of disorder.

When possible, it is a necessary means of salvation.

Following St. Thomas, theologians distinguish two kinds of necessity : necessity of precept, according to which a thing is done or omitted, because it is commanded or forbidden by God ; and necessity of means to salvation, according to which a thing is to be done because it is required to save one's soul. For instance, to love my enemy, to be meek and humble, to practise purity according to my state of life, etc., all these things are necessary because they are commanded by God under pain of sin ; yet they are not necessary as a means of salvation, that is to say, it does not follow that if I transgress in any of these particulars, I cannot save my soul. By no means ; for I can repent of having been guilty of pride, hatred, revenge, or impurity, do penance, and thus save my soul. On the other hand, the baptism of water, if I have the opportunity of receiving it, confession, when I have grievously sinned, and can go to confession, are necessary, not only because they are commanded by God, but also, because they are

the only means of salvation for which nothing can be substituted. Certainly, a man may save his soul by the baptism of desire, that is, by the perfect love of God, if he has no chance of receiving the baptism of water; he can also obtain forgiveness of mortal sin by making an act of perfect contrition, if he cannot find a priest to whom he can make his confession; but when the opportunity of receiving the baptism of water, or of making sacramental confession, is offered, neither a perfect love of God, nor perfect contrition will avail anything unless that opportunity is made use of. Such is the necessity of making restitution, when it is possible for me to do so, as St. Thomas teaches; so necessary is it to salvation, that without it, or at least the sincere intention of making it, I cannot save my soul, no matter what else I do.

There is no sin so great that the Catholic Church has not power to forgive, provided the sinner is truly sorry and firmly purposes amendment. I may have committed all kinds of impurity, I may have cursed my neighbor, without actually doing him any other injury, I may have beaten my father and mother, blasphemed God, and signed with my own blood a contract giving my soul to the devil; yet, fearful as those sins are, if I am sincerely sorry for them, and confess them to a priest who has power to absolve me from them, with a sincere purpose of amendment, I have done all that is required on my part to be freed from those terrible sins, and to become again a child of God. But if I have stolen a single dollar, and am in a position to restore it, but fail to do so, even if I were to weep tears of blood for my sin, and most solemnly promise never to do the like again, and confess the theft a hundred times, it is all of no use. If I do not make restitution when I can, not all the power on earth, neither priest, nor bishop can absolve me; and if I receive absolution a hundred times, it will do me no good; the owner of the stolen property is the only one who, if he wishes, can free me from the obligation of restitution. Our Lord said to Zacheus: "This day is salvation come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham."<sup>1</sup> On what occasion did Our Lord use those words? Zacheus was exceedingly desirous of seeing Him, and climbed up into a tree for that purpose; Jesus looked up and saw him, and told him to come down; but He did not yet tell him that he was a child of Abraham, that he was justified, and that he was in the way of

Without  
restitution  
sorrow and  
confession  
are worth  
nothing.

<sup>1</sup> Quia hodie salus domui huic facta est, eo quod et ipse filius sit Abrahamæ.— Luke xix. 9.

salvation. Jesus went with him to his house, but not even then did He tell him that he was justified. At last Zacheus spoke to the purpose, when he said: "If I have wronged any man of anything, I restore him fourfold."<sup>1</sup> Then it was that he heard the joyful news: "This day is salvation come to this house," now is Zacheus a child of Abraham, a child of God. That merchant comes to hear Christ speaking to him in sermons, on Sundays and holydays, that he may learn how to do good; a pious man he must be, from all appearances; but I ask him, has he restored the unjust gain he made in his business by cheating and trickery of all kinds; if he has not, I am afraid that, although he has admitted the Saviour into his heart, salvation is not come to him. That man lives in a pious and Christian manner outwardly; that woman is looked upon as a saint; she goes two or three times a week to Confession and Holy Communion; very good signs indeed. But I ask, do these people pay their debts? Do they restore what they possess unjustly? If not, then no matter how often they receive their Saviour in the Holy Communion, I do not believe that salvation is come to them; they must first say: If I have wronged any one I will restore him what belongs to him. If they refuse to do that, there is no salvation for them.

The reason  
of this  
truth.

The reason of this undoubted truth is evident; in every act of theft, or unjust retention of what belongs to another, and in all dishonest profit, there is a twofold malice; the first consists in the grievous offence I commit against God, my Sovereign Lord, by despising His commands; and the other in the injury I do my neighbor, by taking from him unjustly what is his. These two different kinds of malice, which constitute one sin, and which cannot be separated from each other, give rise to two different obligations; one, that of atoning for the offence I have committed against God; the other, that of making good the injury I have done my neighbor. It will not do for me to try to satisfy one of these obligations without the other, I should still remain guilty of injustice. Sincere sorrow, Confession and a firm purpose of amendment, although they are sufficient for the remission of any other kind of sin, are not of the least use in a case of injustice, without the firm purpose of making restitution, when it is possible. As St. Augustine says: "Such a sorrow is only feigned; the sin will not be forgiven until restitution is

<sup>1</sup> *Si quid alicquem defraudavi, reddo quadruplum.*—Luke, xix. 8.

made.”<sup>1</sup> And nothing can excuse from this, but inability alone ; that is to say, if I have not the means of making restitution ; but even in that case, I must still have the sincere wish and intention of making restitution as soon as ever I can.

It is a remarkable thing, my dear brethren, that in this matter, God is more careful, so to speak, of the rights and the property of men, than He is of His own rights. He has appointed His priests as judges with full power to forgive all sins that are committed against His honor alone ; but He gives them no power to free any one from the obligations incurred towards others.

God will forgive the sin committed against Himself, but will not dispense any one from restitution.

Such is the fact. Priests of the living God, you are stewards and dispensers of the treasures and graces of Heaven, which you can give to the penitent sinner by sacramental absolution, when God’s honor alone has been injured ; but your power falls short when an injury has been done to another, unless restitution for it has been made ! You can often dispense, commute, take away altogether the obligations that your penitents have contracted towards God, such as vows, for instance ; but you have no power over the least thing that belongs to another man ; no dispensation, no commutation into another good work can free from the obligation of restoring the ill-gotten property.

Even mercy, religion, God Himself must give way, for such is His will, where there is question of the rights of God on one side, and the restitution of ill-gotten goods on the other, it being impossible to satisfy both together. For instance : I have promised God by a vow to give a hundred dollars to the Church, or to the poor ; I am certainly obliged to fulfil my promise if I can ; but if it so happens that I have injured my neighbor to the extent of a hundred dollars, I am bound to pay him first, before I give anything to the poor, or to the Church ; and further, if the only money I have to dispose of is a hundred dollars, I must let the Church and the poor look out for themselves, and make restitution to the man I have wronged. So strictly has God commanded restitution to be made. To give back what of right belongs to another, is necessary, absolutely and indispensably, and nothing can excuse from it, as we shall see in the

Nay, we must also prefer it to His rights.

### Second Part.

This is acknowledged by all who wish to use their reason. If I were to ask every one here, all would say at once, that of course

On account of the difficulty of res-

<sup>1</sup> Non agitur poenitentia, sed fingitur ; non dimittitur peccatum, nisi restituatur ablatum.

titution, people invent all kinds of pretexts to free themselves from it.

restitution is necessary; no one ever doubted that. But if I were to ask one who possesses dishonestly something of value and were to say to him: come now, give back what you know does not belong to you; should I probably get the answer that the Philistines gave to the priests who exhorted them to atone for the injury done to the ark of the covenant: "What is it we ought to render unto him for sin?"<sup>1</sup> we are willing to do all that is necessary? Oh, I am afraid there would be a good deal of hesitation, and all sorts of excuses would be brought forward to show that either the obligation does not exist in this particular case, or that it is not urgent. So difficult is it, when once greed of gain has got the upper hand, to part with what one has got possession of. The same avaricious desires and inclinations that inspire a man with the idea of making an unjust gain, prevent him from making restitution, and suggest to his imagination a hundred plausible excuses to set his conscience at rest, so that he may retain the unjustly acquired property. The injury he has suffered from others, the fear of losing his good name by making restitution, his own wants and the requirements of his state of life, the necessity of supporting his family decently, these and similar false pretexts are brought forward to excuse him from fulfilling his obligation, so that he may retain possession of what does not belong to him. Let us examine the principal excuses that are given.

Some bring forward the harm that others have done them.

I myself am very often cheated and robbed; many things are stolen from me; people do not pay me what they owe me; I have never known any one to make restitution to me, although I have often missed articles of value; when restitution is made to me, I will make it to others; I need not do so before. Such is the first excuse, but in my opinion, it is the most flimsy of all, it might hold good with a fool, but not with a sensible man; still, a man's conscience is often stupefied by an inordinate greed of gain. And what sort of an excuse is that to make? Is there the least sign of reason in it? Because you have been wronged, you are allowed to wrong others; because you have been robbed, you are allowed to steal from your neighbor; no one pays you what is due to you, therefore you need not give back what you have belonging to others, nor pay what you owe them? If that were true, we might do away with every law, human and divine. Tell me, did they who robbed you act rightly? No, you will say, they were thieves and rogues. Nor are you yourself a bit

<sup>1</sup> Quid est quod pro delicto reddere debeamus?—I. Kings vi. 4.

better, for you have stolen from others. They who do not restore what they have unjustly taken from you, are they in the right? No, they will go to hell with their ill-gotten gains. And if so, how can you think that you, with your ill-gotten gains, which you still have, can go to Heaven, unless you make restitution? How is it possible for those whom you have wronged, to prevent others from treating you unjustly? Have they on that account less right to what belongs to them? No, your excuse is worthless; pay what you owe, give back what you possess wrongfully.

I know well that such an excuse is of no value, says a second: I acknowledge that I must make restitution; but I cannot. And what prevents you? My honor and good name are worth more than gold to me. If I made restitution, I should lose them, and should be looked upon as a thief. That is indeed a plausible excuse; your good name! Which do you think the more valuable; your honor in time, or the salvation of your soul in eternity? Keep your honor by all means, but do not lose your soul for its sake. Why have you acted in such a way as to risk being looked upon as a thief, if it becomes known? Who forced you to be dishonest? Must the innocent suffer on that account, and lose their right to what belongs to them? Try what your excuse will avail you at the judgment-seat of God; say to Christ: Lord, I have been careful of my good name, and therefore I have kept what I have unjustly acquired. I, He will answer, have never wronged any one, and yet I have allowed Myself to be crucified like the worst of thieves. Is your honor then, of such account, that for the sake of it, you can take away from My servants, and keep what is theirs of right? Besides, in what does a good name consist? In being guilty of theft and injustice, or in fulfilling the law of justice and doing good? To give back what one possesses unjustly, is a good, praiseworthy and necessary act of justice, which will not make you a thief or a rogue; but to keep what you have stolen is the very thing that will make every honest man look upon you as a thief. Still, as you are so anxious about your good name, ask an experienced and prudent confessor to help you; tell him clearly, as you are bound to, what, how much, and in what way, you have taken unjustly; he will be able to tell you how to make restitution, and at the same time to preserve your honor intact, so that not a soul will know anything of it to your discredit, not even the person whom you have wronged. Therefore, in spite of your excuse, pay what you owe.

Others say that their reputation would be injured, if they made restitution.

Others, that they would fall from their position.

Yes, says a third, but if I were to give back all I have dishonestly acquired, I should be in a very bad position. I, says another, would become a beggar from being a rich man ; therefore, they to whom I should make restitution, cannot reasonably demand it. Granted that what you say is true ; although greed of gain supplies the imagination with many pretexts to avoid giving up what has once been acquired, pretexts that are not, and never will be true ; granted that your excuse is a true one, there are many circumstances connected with it, which require the help of a learned confessor ; some of them on the part of him who is to make the restitution ; others on the part of him to whom it is to be made. I shall give a short general explanation of the matter.

To what they are obliged who, before they committed injustice, were in a good position.

In the first place, you were in a good position before you committed the dishonest act, or else you raised yourself to the position you now occupy, by means of it. If you were in a good position before, and in case you made restitution, you would suddenly and certainly fall into poverty, then you are not bound in conscience to pay back the whole sum at once, unless the person whom you have wronged should find himself in a similar position. And here we must condemn the hard-heartedness and cruelty of those creditors, who act like the servant in the Gospel of St. Matthew, and compel their debtors to pay, dunning and importuning them by every means in their power, leaving them neither rest nor peace, and at last stripping them bare of all they have, and taking away their good name in the eyes of the world ; although the unfortunate people have humbly protested that it is impossible for them to pay, and have asked, like the servant in the Gospel, for a little delay ; “ Have patience with me and I will pay thee all.”<sup>1</sup> That is not acting in a Christian manner, for it runs counter to the principles of sound reason and charity ; do unto others as you wish they should do unto you. Meanwhile, you who possess goods unjustly, are still bound in conscience to give back what you can, although by doing so you should gradually come down in the world a little ; you are bound to moderate your expenses in dress, food, servants, furniture, gambling, drinking, useless pastimes and other things of the kind, that you may be able to make restitution all the sooner ; for it is unjust to make a show before the world and to make merry with what belongs to another. We have a right to nothing except what is necessary to enable us to live decently ;

<sup>1</sup> Patientiam habe in me, et omnia reddam tibi.—Matth. xviii. 29.

no right at all to superfluities, much less to superfluities that we procure with what belongs to other people. Besides, do you know in what your state consists here on earth? It consists in being a good Christian, serving God faithfully, that you may save your soul. That is your only necessary care, that state you must keep up; and your worldly position must be sacrificed to it, if you cannot keep up that position unless by sinning against justice and risking your soul.

But if you have raised yourself to a good position by unjust means, then there is no escape for you; you must give back everything, although by doing so, you reduce yourself to beggary. For, your present position does not belong to you, you have attained it by the sin of injustice; you have built on ground that is not yours, and that too with deliberate malice, so that what you have built belongs to the owner of the ground. In what position would you have been, if you had not acted dishonestly? You must now be contented with it, for your acts of injustice do not give you a right to a better. Ah, how many there were in the times of the early Christians, how many there are now who willingly give up all they possess, and make themselves poor, that they may be more certain of Heaven, and better able to imitate the poverty of their Saviour; why should you, then, hesitate to restore what does not belong to you, when you are bound to do so under pain of eternal damnation? Finally, with regard to him to whom you have to make the restitution, if he is in the same circumstances as you, that is, if he will be forced to come down in the world, unless he gets back what you wronged him of, there is not the least doubt that you are bound to restitution, no matter what your position was before, or how low you will be reduced now; for, if either of you must suffer, it must be the guilty, not the innocent one. Therefore, pay what thou owest.

But, a fourth will say, what is to become of my children, if I must make full restitution? How can I ruin them? How can I see them not so well clad as formerly, and having less to eat? It would be like tearing my heart out. You are completely mistaken; if you refuse to make restitution, you will then ruin your children in reality; for you will place them in the unhappy state of sin. When you are in hell, your children will either make restitution, or they will not. If they fulfil their duty, what richer are they for what you have left them? None at all, but they have all the trouble that you should have taken, in restoring your ill-gotten gains to their lawful owner.

The obligation of those who have raised themselves to a good position unjustly.

Others say that their children will be impoverished if they make restitution.

These latter by not restoring, damn themselves and their children. Shown by an example.

If they do not fulfil their duty, although they know, or have a reasonable suspicion, that what they possess has been unjustly acquired, then you drag them, and perhaps their children's children, down to hell also ; because, no prescription, not even of a hundred thousand years, can justify any one in keeping property which is known to be the result of dishonesty ; the obligation of restitution still remains. Hear what St. Peter Damian writes : There was a certain nobleman in Germany, who had many castles and estates, and who was universally regarded as a very good and pious man, a reputation he enjoyed until his death. A religious prayed earnestly to God to reveal to him the state of that pious man's soul ; his prayer was heard, and he was carried in spirit down to hell, where he saw a long ladder, on the top rung of which was the unhappy nobleman surrounded by fire and hideous demons. The religious, thunder-struck at the sight, cried out : How did you come here ? How is it that you who led such an edifying life, are now in hell ? Alas, answered the soul, I am lost forever, because I kept some lands I inherited from my ancestors, although I knew from my private papers that they belonged of right to a certain citizen of Metz. You must know that I am the tenth of our family thus condemned to hell on account of that property. We are now descending deeper into the abyss in order to make room for our descendants. But go and tell my son to make restitution, or else I shall expect him here too. Hereupon the religious came to himself again, and delivered the message intrusted to him. Restitution was made, and the succession of lost souls on the hellish ladder was put an end to. Thus one property unjustly acquired, caused the eternal loss of ten generations of the same family. Remember this, you who now fear to make restitution, lest you should impoverish your children. Will you involve them in the same ruin with yourself ? If not, restore what is not yours ; restitution or damnation ; you have no other choice !

Good children will help to make such restitution.

If your children are pious, good and dutiful, if they honor and love their parents as they ought, they will be glad to do all they can to help you to save your soul, and of course they will look with horror and aversion on the money that would be the cause of your damnation. And, as they would not have the hearts of children if they were not ready to undergo any danger in order to save you from temporal death, so for a much stronger reason, they must be firmly resolved to save you from eternal death, and to purchase eternal life for you, by restoring

ill-gotten goods. If they are not so disposed, what blindness and folly it would be for you to sacrifice your soul for the sake of such children, who think so little of you and of your salvation, who are looking out for your wealth like birds of prey for carrion, and who will curse you in hell for all eternity, because you left them that unjust gain which caused them, too, to lose their souls. What will become of my children? Give back first what is not yours, look after your soul, and leave your children to the fatherly care of God's Providence, which does not forget to feed the worm of the earth and the sparrow of the air; how much more will It not take care of your children, who have been redeemed by the Blood of Christ and are adopted children of God? Certainly, that Providence will not allow any one who trusts in It and serves God, to perish of hunger. Pay what thou owest. You must know that your ill-gotten wealth will not help your children, even temporally; but will deprive them of the divine blessing and bring them to poverty all the sooner.

In Norway there is a lake into which flow twenty-four rivers, that are afterwards all led out through a channel; this channel is called the Devil's Gap, because all along it were found several caves in which some highway robbers had hidden their booty. But they did not long enjoy their treasures, for their hiding place was discovered by means of the smoke which came out at the top; the robbers were hanged, and their booty became the property of those who captured them. So it is too with ill-gotten goods; they are hidden, it is true, but in a Devil's Gap, in which they cannot long be safe; for, either the injustice will be detected, through the interposition of Divine Providence, or the goods that one lawfully possesses will melt away along with the unjust gain; so that those who inherit such property, lose more than they gain by it. Not in vain has God pronounced that threat by the mouth of the prophet Jeremias: "Woe to him that buildeth up his house by injustice."<sup>1</sup> You have built that house with money obtained by usury and fraud, that you may leave it to your children; but woe to you and to them. "They shall build up and I will throw down."<sup>2</sup> You wish to leave to your children that vineyard, that land you have acquired unjustly; they will sow in it, but God will not permit them to reap: "They have sown wheat and reaped thorns."<sup>3</sup> Your children will inherit your wealth, but it will

Otherwise,  
they will  
find neither  
luck nor  
grace in  
this life.

<sup>1</sup> *Væ qui ædificat domum suam in injustitia.*—Jerem. *xxii.* 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Isti ædificabunt, et ego destruem.*—Maluch. *i.* 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Seminaverunt triticum et spinas messuerunt.*—Jerem. *xii.* 13.

not prosper with them : “ They have received an inheritance, and it shall not profit them : you shall be ashamed of your fruits, because of the fierce wrath of the Lord.”<sup>1</sup> We read the same threat in the Book of Job : “ The riches which he hath swallowed, he shall vomit up.”<sup>2</sup> Mark the comparison ; if a man eats too greedily food which the stomach cannot digest, he is compelled to reject it again, and with it, the other food which would otherwise have been easily digested. Ill-gotten goods are an indigestible morsel ; not only are they hurtful in themselves, but also they generally bring about the loss of what has been honestly acquired. “ The riches which he hath swallowed, he shall vomit up, and God shall draw them out of his belly.” Experience teaches us that there are many families, the members of which toil and worry day after day, but cannot get things to prosper with them ; they are always in difficulties and cannot find the reason of it. Ah, you dead ancestors, come up out of the abyss, and show your descendants the cause of their poverty, show them that money, that property, which you gained by usury, bribery, injustice, and left to them. That is the hidden worm that is gnawing away their property, that is the indigestible morsel that compels them to part with the fruits of their honest labor. What will become of my children ? Give back what you have no right to, and you will merit for your children a blessing from that God, who gave back to his servant Job seven-fold all that he had lost. In a word, it is absolutely necessary to make restitution of property that is unjustly acquired, kept, or injured : and no excuse, no pretext, except impossibility alone, can dispense from doing what is commanded by the natural, divine and human law. Pay what thou owest !

Hence he acts foolishly who seeks to make an unjust gain.

From all this, my dear brethren, we can see how foolish and senseless it is to desire and seek for unlawful gain ; for I ask you again : Do you intend to make restitution or not ? If you do intend it, why do you take what you must give back, greatly against your will ? Why should you then burden your conscience, and offend God by such a foolish and unprofitable sin ? Do you intend to keep what you have got dishonestly ? Oh, then I pity your poor soul, for you are doing a still more foolish thing. Do you wish to be lost for ever ? Ah, merciful Saviour, cry out so that all will hear, those words of the Gospel : “ What

<sup>1</sup> *Hæreditatem acceperunt et non eis proderit : confundemini a fructibus vestris, propter iram furoris Domini.*—Jerem. xii. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Divitias quas devoravit, evomet.*—Job. xx. 15.

doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?"<sup>1</sup> What does it profit him, I will not say to make a few dollars unjustly, or to get possession of a princely estate, or to become a king or an emperor, but to gain the whole world and become master of it, and all its wealth, if he lose his soul? What will he find in the whole world to compare with his immortal soul, I will not say, to give in exchange for it? All the pearls of the Indies, all the diamonds and treasures that the sea conceals in its bosom, all the silver and gold of Peru, all the wealth of the world could not equal the value of one soul. And yet, blind mortals that we are, we sell our souls for the sake of making a shilling's worth of unjust profit! Poor soul, how you are to be pitied; you are given up to the devil for a vile piece of money, although you are worth more than all the treasures of earth!

If one of you, my dear brethren, were condemned to the gallows and the chance of saving his life and reputation were offered him on condition of his paying two or three thousand dollars, would he not willingly part with that sum, if he had it, to save himself from a shameful death? Of course he would; and if any one should complain that he was reducing himself to poverty, or that he would have nothing to leave his children, he would pay little attention to the complaint, but would think himself fortunate in being able to save life and honor by the sacrifice of his money. O, Christian, if there is any one here, as I hope there is not, who possesses anything unjustly, I tell you in the name of God, or rather God Himself tells you, that you are sentenced to eternal death, that you will burn in hell forever, if you keep what is not yours. The only means of avoiding this shameful death is restitution, and will you hesitate to adopt it? In order to preserve your temporal life, that will last, may be, only a few days, you are ready to give away all you have; but to preserve your eternal life and to save yourself from hell, you hesitate about parting with a little money that does not belong to you; money that death will soon take from you violently, hurling your soul down amongst the demons. Why do you not give it up at once to the great profit of your soul?

How foolish to refuse to restore what belongs to others.

Ah, I beg of you, for the sake of your salvation, pay what you owe. Give back to that storekeeper what you cheated him of; make restitution to those customers with whom you have

Exhortation and resolution to make due restitution.

Quid prodest homini si mundum universum lucretur, animæ vero suæ detrimentum patitur?—Matth. xvi. 26.

dealt dishonestly ; give to those workmen and servants the wages you withheld from them ; make good the injustices you have committed in your office or employment, through malice, ignorance, or negligence ; give back to those poor people what you so cunningly cheated them of ; restore all that you have gained by usury and oppression. Pay what you owe, I beg of you again most humbly, for the sake of your soul ; if you do not grant what I ask of you now, death will come and will cry out to you in a far more terrible voice : leave the money that you made unjustly, the property that you never had a right to, give back the blood of the poor that you have gorged yourself with ; away, accursed one, out of the house of which you were never a rightful owner ; away with you to that hell which you yourself have chosen for the sake of your unjust gains ! Ah, do not wait for those fearful words ! Think now, and say from your heart, away with that money, I will save my soul, and go to Heaven. My worldly condition may suffer, but I shall save my soul ; my children may become poor, but I shall save my soul ; I may even lose my honor and good name, but I shall save my soul ; my friends may even laugh at me and despise me, but I shall save my soul. If restitution were merely a pious work of supererogation I might dispense myself from it ; if I could supply for it by prayer, fasting, and alms-deeds, I might have recourse to those means in order to save myself from eternal death ; but as it is, I have no means but restitution to avoid hell. Therefore I will adopt it ; away with that unjust gain ; this very day it shall leave my house ! Away with that money which has taken my God and His eternal riches from me ! With Thee will I remain, O my God, Thee will I serve in time, Thee will I possess in eternity ! This is my firm resolve. Amen.

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*ELEVENTH SERMON.*

**ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF RESTITUTION.**

**Subject.**

Who has to make restitution, to whom has he to make it, what has he to restore, and when ?—*Preached on the fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

*Dedit illum matri suæ.*—Luke vii. 15.

“And He gave him to his mother.”

Introduction.

Was there any necessity for Christ to give back the young man to his mother, after having restored him to life? “And he gave him to his mother.” Did the young man still belong to his mother? No, my dear brethren, once death has intervened, although one is restored to life by a miracle, all the bonds are loosed which during life connect men with each other, whether they arise from natural ties, or from mutual agreement. Thus, if to-day a husband dies, and to-morrow is restored to life again, his former marriage is annulled, and both husband and wife are freed from all obligations towards each other. Still, if a child restored to life should belong to any one, there is no doubt, that it is to his mother. Therefore “He gave him to his mother.” I return, my dear brethren, to the matter I have already spoken of. I have recently treated of restitution, and shown that it is necessary, and indispensably necessary, in order to avoid eternal damnation, so that inability alone can excuse one from making it. I have still one point to treat of, which will conclude the subject, and that is the manner in which one is bound to make restitution. So that we have now four circumstances to consider, namely, who, to whom, what, and when.

Plan of Discourse.

*Who must make restitution? Such is the first question. To whom must it be made? The second question. What must be restored. The third question. When must it be restored? The fourth question. I shall answer each one separately. I do not at all suspect, my dear brethren, that much knavery and injustice is committed amongst us; my only design is to inspire every one with a horror of it.*

To this end help me, O Virgin Mother, Mirror of justice, and you too, holy guardian angels.

With regard to the first question, it might seem as if I only wished to have something to talk about in order to pass away the time and to fill up the hour for the sermon, when I undertake to explain to you who is bound to make restitution. For, you will think, there is no difficulty about that; we all know that that obligation concerns those who take, keep, or in any way

It is generally petty thieves who make restitution.

injure what belongs to others, as we have already heard in another sermon. That is quite true; but would to God that all who know of this obligation would fulfil it when it concerns them, according to their knowledge! How many injustices are committed here and there in the world? How seldom do we hear of restitution being duly made for them? As St. John Chrysostom says, "Men are most eager to take the property of others, but very sluggish about restoring it."<sup>1</sup> Generally speaking, they who make restitution are those who resemble the small birds that plunder the vineyard by taking a grape here and there; but what of the wolves that tear down whole vines and do great damage? That is to say, restitution is generally made by such people as poor servants, or workmen who have taken a few shillings from their employers; when they hear injustice spoken of, their conscience at once begins to annoy them, and they try in their poverty to find the means of giving back secretly what they have stolen, or of making good any injury they have done others; and if they have no other means, they try to make up for the theft by increased diligence in their work.

Great ones  
seldom do  
so.

But what of the great thieves who commit gross injustices, who steal by hundreds and thousands in their offices or business dealings? St. Augustine in his Epistle to the Macedonians, asks: Where shall we find one, through whose carelessness or fraud a poor man has lost a law-suit for want of money to carry it on, whose conscience reproaches him, and who endeavors to repair the injury he has caused? Where shall we find one who, having undertaken too many charges through greed of gain, which he is unable to look after properly, is uneasy on that account, and ready to make good the harm he must have done to many? Where shall we find one who is willing to give up the fruits of the benefice he has acquired through simony, and enjoyed for many years? Where shall we find one who, having refused to do his duty and defend the rights of others, unless they fill his hands with bribes, feels troubled in conscience, and wishes to give back what he has thus unjustly received? Where shall we find one who, having enriched himself by usurious contracts, and oppression of the poor, is willing to make restitution? Where shall we find one who, having dishonestly supplanted another in his office and employment, so that the latter has suffered greatly thereby, is ready to atone for the injury inflicted? Where shall we find one who is willing to restore what

<sup>1</sup> *Ad aliena rapienda avidissimi, ad reparanda frigidissimi.*

he has unjustly extorted from poor widows and orphans? Where shall we find one who is ready to repair the harm he has done by his wicked counsel in subjecting whole districts and countries to unusually severe taxation? No, it is not easy to find people of that kind who are willing to make restitution, although they are bound to do so.

Besides, we must not forget that not only the people themselves who have taken, kept, or injured the property of others, but also their children, heirs and all who share in the unjust gain, are under the same obligation, if the former do not make restitution, and the latter are aware of the injustice committed. Yet, many a one thinks to himself; what is it to me if my ancestors, or others from whom I have received anything, have acquired unjustly what they have given me? Let them look to it; it is their own affair; I have not stolen; I have taken in good faith what they have given me; how could I prevent them from doing wrong? No, that will not do, my dear brethren; what is unjustly gained always cries out for its lawful owner,<sup>1</sup> as jurists and theologians say. Even if I buy a thing with my own money, and hear that it is stolen, I must give it back, and suffer the loss. The sin of injustice is the only one that binds the children and descendants of the guilty man to atonement. For instance; if my father and mother had been given to cursing and blaspheming, although I believe quite the contrary of them, I as their son should not have to answer for them; they must bear all the consequences of their own guilt, nor am I bound to anything on their account. If my father neglected to perform the penance enjoined on him in confession, I should not be obliged to perform it for him, and if I did so, it would not benefit him. If my mother injured the character of another, I should not be bound to restore that other's good name. But with regard to the restitution of another's property, there is a great difference. If my father left me a property, some of which I know to have been unjustly acquired, for which he made no restitution during his life, I would be bound under pain of sin, although I had no share in his injustice, to restore that ill-gotten property to its lawful owner, or in case I could not find the owner, I ought to give it to the poor. And if I do not fulfil my obligation, it passes on to all who inherit, or receive that property from me. God forbade the Israelites, by the Prophet Ezechiel, to make further use of the then common

Not only they who have committed the injustice, but their children and heirs are also bound to restitution.

<sup>1</sup> Res clamat domino.

proverb: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the teeth of the children are set on edge:"<sup>1</sup> that is to say, the children must bear their parents' sins. No, that must not be: "As I live, saith the Lord God, this parable shall be no more to you a proverb in Israel. Behold all souls are mine, as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine; the soul that sinneth, the same shall die,"<sup>2</sup> and no others on account of it. "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, and the father shall not bear the iniquity of the son; the justice of the just shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him."<sup>3</sup> Therefore if the father is wicked, he alone has to bear the penalty. If the son is pious, all the better for himself. But in the matter of restitution, my dear brethren, of which we are now speaking, the proverb is quite true: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the teeth of the children are set on edge;" the children share in the sin of their parents, if they do not restore the unjustly acquired property left them by their parents.

Therefore those parents act foolishly, who seek to enrich their children unjustly.

From this, parents, you can see how foolishly you act when you try to enrich your children by dishonest means. You think that it is out of fatherly love and tenderness you are acting, when you endeavor to leave them a rich legacy; while in reality you could not do a worse thing for them than to leave them what you have made dishonestly. If you were determined against the law of nature, to make your children miserable, in time and eternity, you could not better carry out your cruel purpose, than by making them heirs of your unjust gains; for in that way you lay them under an obligation so grievous and so troublesome, that it is very unlikely that they will ever fulfil it properly, according to the words of St. Augustine: "They burden their children with the tears of poor widows, and thus instead of educating, they suffocate them."<sup>4</sup> Poor children, how I pity you. I do not mean you who inherit not even a crust of bread from your parents dying in extreme poverty, for divine Providence, if you have confidence in It, will take better care of you than your father or mother could. But I pity you, rich and yet most miserable children, who have inherited from

<sup>1</sup> Patres comederunt uvam acerbam, et dentes filiorum obstupescunt.—Ezech. xviii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Vivo ego dicit Dominus Deus, si erit ultra vobis parabola hæc in proverbium in Israel. Ecce, omnes animæ meæ sunt: ut anima patris, ita et anima filii mea est: anima, quæ peccaverit ipsa morietur.—Ibid. 3, 4.

<sup>3</sup> Filius non portabit iniquitatem patris, et pater non portabit iniquitatem filii: justitia justis super eum erit, et impietas impiorum erit super eum.—Ibid. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Obrunt illos lachrymis viduarum; hoc non est educare, sed suffocare.

your parents much wealth that was not all honestly made, and for which you will probably never make due restitution! Unhappy are you indeed, to be born of a father and mother, who by leaving you a few handfuls of money, condemn you to hell for all eternity! So that every one who possesses, or enjoys, or receives the fruits of what he knows to have been dishonestly acquired, in any way whatever, is bound to make restitution. To whom must it be made? That is the second question.

It seems to be an unnecessary one like the first; for there is no one who is not ready to answer that restitution must be made to him who is the owner of the stolen or injured property. Such too, is the case, my dear brethren, yet the contrary is very often done. Many men make a grievous mistake in this matter; they think they will satisfy their conscience and fulfil their obligation by giving the stolen money to the poor, or to the Church, or by having Masses said for it; nay, sometimes ignorant confessors advise their penitents, who accuse themselves of theft, to make restitution in that way. Certainly, if I do not know and, after diligent inquiry, cannot find out the person I have stolen from, or injured, then it is enough for me to give the stolen money to the poor, or to get Masses said for it; but I must devote to this purpose, not merely a part, but the whole of the money in question, and that I am bound to do in those circumstances, under pain of sin. But if I can find out the lawful owner, or the community I have injured, neither alms nor Masses will suffice, nor an offering to the Church; the rightful owner must have what belongs to him. It is a work of Christian charity to give alms, and no one will gainsay that; but they must be given from one's own, and not from what belongs to other people. The poor man, says St. Augustine, to whom you give an alms, rejoices and prays for you; but the man whom you have wronged cries out to Heaven for vengeance on you; which of these two will God hear? When you give alms, it is to Jesus Christ Himself you give them; but on the other hand you rob Jesus Christ in the person of your neighbor to whom you have acted dishonestly. Tell me, would you be satisfied if a man were to take your money from you and give it to the poor? No, you would say, if I want to give alms, I can do so myself.

It is not lawful to give to the poor the property of others, when the lawful owner can be found.

You have caught a thief in the act, and you bring him before the judge in order to recover what belongs to you. The thief goes secretly to the judge, and gives him the half, or the whole

How unjust to our Lord such a mis-giving is.

of the stolen money ; the judge accepts the bribe and lets the thief go. What would you think of that ? Oh, what an unjust and wicked man, you would think ; are you a judge ? You are more of a thief than the other. And you would be quite right in thinking so. But you try to make our Lord act in that way ; you have robbed others, and enriched yourself with the blood of the poor, who cry out to Christ our Judge, for restitution to be made them. Now what do you do ? You give alms instead ; that is, you try to bribe Christ your Judge, that He may let you free, and not condemn you to hell. Thus, wicked man that you are, you wish to make Christ an unjust judge who will help you to steal the property of others ! How can you be so reckless ?

Shown by a comparison.

Imagine you see the Patriarch Jacob, when Joseph's coat, stained with blood, was brought to him, and they said to him : " See whether this be thy son's coat." <sup>1</sup> What grief the old father must have felt ! Alas, he said with bitter tears, I know it, " an evil wild beast hath devoured Joseph." <sup>2</sup> Unjust possessor of the property of others, what do you do when you give alms to the Almighty with what is not yours ? You place before Him the blood money of His child, you show him the coat of a poor orphan, the goods you have robbed others of. There, you say to Him, see if you recognise that. Ah, if God could feel pain, certainly an alms of that kind would cause him a bitter pang. " An evil wild beast hath devoured Joseph " ; you are that evil beast, who by your usuries and thefts have taken away what belonged to My servants and children. Certainly I know that money ; it belongs to that merchant, to that poor citizen, to that workman, to that widow, and you dare to lay it as an offering at My feet ! Unchristian, wicked alms, you call on Heaven for vengeance, instead of mercy !

It is also unmerciful to the poor.

It is cruel, I know, not to help the hungry and naked, when one can ; but it is still greater cruelty to throw them stinking carrion, in the shape of other peoples' money. If the poor are good Christians, they must protest against it and cry out with St. Ambrose : " Do not feed us with the blood of our brethren." <sup>3</sup> The pelican feeds its young with blood, and the eagle too ; but what a difference between them. The pelican tears open its own breast, in order to give its blood to its young : but

<sup>1</sup> Vide, utrum tunica filii tui sit, an non.—Gen. xxxvii. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Fera pessima devoravit Joseph.—Ibid, 33.

<sup>3</sup> Nenos alas de sanguine fratrum nostrorum.

the eagle gives to its young the flesh and blood of other birds and beasts. If you feed the poor, you must do it like the pelican, and not like the eagle. The elder Tobias said to his son : " Give alms out of thy substance :"<sup>1</sup> do not give them out of what belongs to others. St. John Chrysostom uses these emphatic words : " Christ has said : give alms, and not avarice ; what is given out of the property of others, is no alms, although it be given to the needy. He who takes what belongs to others is certainly not merciful, although he gives endless treasures to the poor : if you have stolen only a farthing, and give a talent of gold in alms, still you have not yet restored the farthing."<sup>2</sup> In a word, unjust Christian, if you have given a hundred times more in alms, than your stolen property is worth, you are, therefore, not freed from your obligation ; you are still bound under pain of eternal damnation to restore what you have stolen, to its lawful owner provided you can discover him. If you want an example, you have one in Zaccheus after his conversion : " Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor ; " Certainly a rich alms ! But he says " of my goods,"<sup>3</sup> and he adds, " And if I have wronged any man of anything, I restore him four-fold."<sup>4</sup>

I will have Masses said for it, you think, and many others with you. Fine Masses they will be ! A nice sacrifice that, which you offer to God with other people's money ! It is to such as you that St. Chrysostom applies the words of the Prophet Malachias. " You have covered the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and bellowing, so that I have no more a regard to sacrifice, neither do I accept any atonement at your hands."<sup>5</sup> Now you wish to have Masses said, and to bedew the altar of the Lord with the tears of the poor whom you have deceived and wronged ; must not the Most High reject such a sacrifice with disgust ? Certainly, for according to the Wise Man : " The victims of the wicked are abominable to the Lord,"<sup>6</sup> because they come from injustice. Stolen incense is

They also act wickedly who have Masses said with the money that belongs to others.

<sup>1</sup> Ex substantia tua fac eleemosynam.—Tob. iv. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Christus dixit : date eleemosynam, non avaritiam ; quæ ex alieno datur eleemosyna non est, quamvis egentibus impendatur. Aliena rapiens non est profecto misericors, licet infinita largiatur ; quod si vel obulum rapueris, et talentum reddas, vix ita quoque resarciatur.—S. Chrys. Tom. 3. hom. 80. in Joan.

<sup>3</sup> Ecce, Domine, dimidium bonorum meorum do pauperibus.—Luke xix. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Et si quid aliquem defraudavi, reddo quadruplum.—Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Operietis lacrymis altare Domini, fletu et mugitu ita, ut non respiciam ultra ad sacrificium, nec accipiam placabile quid de manu vestra.—Malach. ii. 13.

<sup>6</sup> Hostiæ impiorum abominabiles.—Prov. xv. 8.

not accepted in Heaven ; the sighs of the poor find a hearing before the prayers of the priest. God looks upon such a sacrifice as an abomination, not certainly in itself, for the Holy Mass is a most pleasing sacrifice in the eyes of God ; but because it is offered with money unjustly gained and with the blood of the poor. We read in the Book of Ecclesiasticus those terrible words: "He that offereth sacrifice of the goods of the poor, is as one that sacrificeth the son in the presence of his father."<sup>1</sup> What a horrible thing it would be to see a murderer tearing a son out of his father's arms, killing him, and then throwing the mangled body at the father's feet. Such, according to the Holy Scriptures, is the act of him who steals from another and offers the stolen goods to God. "The victims of the wicked are abominable to the Lord." So that the conscience is as little helped, the obligation is as little fulfilled by that means, as by alms-giving. We may apply to this the words that Christ uses in another sense in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "If therefore thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there thou remember that thy brother hath anything against thee." I say, if you remember that you owe your brother anything: "leave there thy offering before the altar, and go first to be reconciled to thy brother." I say, go and give your neighbor what belongs to him ; "and then coming thou shalt offer thy gift."<sup>2</sup> Then, if you wish, you may have Masses said.

And also  
they who  
give it to  
the Church.

I will give the money to the Church, thinks a third, I will keep a lamp burning constantly, or will have an altar put up. And what good will it do you, to give to the Church the money that belongs to other people ? That, says St. John Chrysostom, would be a present like the one Judas offered, when he threw down in the Temple, the thirty pieces of silver, the blood-money, for which he sold Our Lord ; a present that deserves the answer that St. Peter gave to Simon the magician, when the latter wished to purchase from him the power of giving the Holy Ghost: "Keep thy money to thyself to perish with thee."<sup>3</sup> Those vestments that you give to the Church are made of materials belonging to one who has perhaps not means enough to clothe himself decently ; the silver lamp that you keep burning is

<sup>1</sup> Qui offert sacrificium ex substantia pauperum, quasi qui victimat filium in conspectu patris sui.—Ecc. xxxiv. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Si ergo offeres 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, et tunc veniens offeres munus tuum.—Matth. v. 23, 24.

<sup>3</sup> Pecunia tua tecum sit in perditionem.—Acts viii. 20.

made of the sweat of the poor workmen whom you have defrauded of the whole or the part of their wages ; that chapel you have built with money gained by usury. Away with such gifts ! They will only help you to destruction. Do not imagine that you can purchase pardon from a just God at such a price. Surlius, in the *Life of St. Gall*, writes of a poor and simple-minded but pious man, who was very anxious to make an offering to St. Gall, but had not the means of doing so. At last he thought of a plan: he stole from a certain rich man a bee-hive filled with wax and honey, thinking that it was no harm to take that much from such a rich man, for such a holy purpose. He brought the wax home, melted it, and carried it to the Church of St. Gall. But when he was on the point of making his offering, he found the wax turned to stone. Terrified at this, he told his companion what he had done, and the latter at once warned him of the necessity of doing penance, and told him that he must not be generous to the Saints with other people's goods. You may see from this, O unjust man, that if God worked a miracle to show his displeasure at a gift that was offered to him with a good intention and through simple piety, solely because it was stolen ; how can you expect that the same God will accept the gift that you have so maliciously and unjustly taken from another ? Away with your gift ! Restore what does not belong to you. But to whom ? To its rightful owner and to no one else. Give back the money you made by charging unjust interest in times of scarcity ; give back to your workmen the wages you still owe them ; make restitution to those whom you have defrauded of their rights, by accepting bribes from their opponents. Give it all back ; but to no one except its lawful owner ; and if he is no longer alive, give it to his heirs, or to his children. But if none of these can be found, then you can, and must give it to the poor not as a charitable alms, but as a debt that you are obliged to pay under pain of sin.

The third question is, what must be restored ? But it is a question that answers itself. We must restore whatever we have taken, kept, or injured. There can be no doubt of that ; but we must not forget that all has to be restored, when possible ; it will not do to give back the half or any other part only. How rarely are instances found of such exact restitution. Olaus writes that in the North Sea there are different whirlpools that swallow up not only the water, but often ships as well. Of these ships hard-

Everything  
must be re-  
stored to the  
lawful own-  
er

ly anything ever comes to the surface again, except perhaps, a few pieces of shattered timber ; the rest remains at the bottom of the abyss.<sup>1</sup> The same thing happens with restitution ; avarice makes some people like the raging whirlpool, they swallow down the property of others whenever they get a chance. Of how many shipwrecks are they not the cause ! The hard work of the laborer, the wages of servants, the money owed to store-keepers, the usurious interest paid by the poor, etc., all are swallowed up in that whirlpool, which gives nothing back. Weeks, months and years go by before an uneasy conscience, or the claims of creditors compel some thing to be disgorged. Restitution is then thought of ; but at the same time a hundred excuses are invented to prevent its being made in full. The documents that prove the debts are mislaid or torn ; when there is no chance of denying the debt, every means is tried to force the creditor to be content with part payment, etc. The Wise Ecclesiasticus says of such people : “ And if he be able to pay, he will stand off, he will scarce pay one-half, and will count it as if he had found it.”<sup>2</sup> But is that right ? Is that the way to pay what one owes ? Suppose a robber attacked me, and demanded all my money (although I am not in a great fright about that, for he would find little on me), and that I managed to persuade him to be satisfied with the half, which I offer to give him freely ; do you think that robber would have a right to that half ? No, you would say, he has not, because he has robbed you of it. Yes, but I have made an agreement with him, I have given it to him. No matter, you would answer, that agreement is like throwing bread to a dog that he may not bite you ; it is the result of fear and violence, and is not made with your free will. Such is the way in which many debtors act, who are well able to pay all they owe, but keep their treasures hidden, and pretend to be poor, until at last their creditors, afraid of getting nothing otherwise, gladly accept the half, or part of what is due to them, and remit the rest of the debt. Are the debtors thus released in conscience and before God, from the obligation of paying the whole sum ? They will find that out when the affair is examined at the divine tribunal ! It remains then true, that complete restitution is to be made at once if possible, and if not, it must be made by degrees, as well as one can.

<sup>1</sup> *Nafragiorum reliquæ perraro redduntur, et si sere redduntur, videntur attritæ et comminutæ.*—Olaus l. 2, c. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Si autem potuerit reddere, adversabitur : solidi vix reddet dimidium, et computabit illud quasi inventionem.*—Ecc. xxx. 7.

Besides, not only must restitution be made for what one has unjustly taken, kept, or injured ; but also all the harm suffered by the lawful owner, on account of being deprived of his property, must be made good. For instance : I have stolen a hundred dollars, and kept them for ten years ; at last my conscience begins to trouble me, and I make restitution through my confessor. Thanks be to goodness then, that I am relieved of that load. But wait, the load is not quite got rid of yet ! But how is that ? I have given back the hundred dollars I stole ? Quite so ; but you must remember that the owner of that money could have made profit with it during those ten years, had he had it. So that, that profit has to be restored to him, although the money has been lying idle all the time in the possession of the thief ; for the latter is the cause of the loss that the owner suffered by not being able to make his legitimate profit. Nay, if the owner were unable to carry on his business, for the want of the hundred dollars I have stolen, so that he has become poor, I am bound to reinstate him. So that I shall have made a fine profit by my theft ! And it is a not unfrequent consequence of unjust gain that the stolen thing has to be restored, two, three, or four times over, before one's sin can be forgiven. We have an example of this again in Zaccheus, who promised to restore four-fold any wrong he had inflicted on others ; that is, he was ready not only to give back what he had taken unjustly, but also to make good all the loss caused by his act.

Finally, the fourth question is, When is restitution to be made ? The answer is, As soon as possible, so that no unnecessary delay is allowed. Theologians teach that he who commits a theft, has the guilt of it on his soul as long as he defers making restitution, when it is in his power to make it ; nay, that the sin is renewed as often as he remembers that he has what belongs to another, and renews his determination not to restore it yet. This teaching is based on the natural law of justice, which forbids us to wrong any one. For, he whom I have stolen from has always the right to his property, a right that I violate as long as I am determined to keep his property against his will ; and, as I do him wrong by stealing from him, so also I wrong him by unjustly hindering him from using what is his own ; but that I do every day and hour that I put off restitution, when it is in my power to make it. This holds good, not only for actual thieves, but also for all those who borrow money and without just cause, defer repaying it beyond the time appointed. There is only this

And besides  
all losses  
must be  
made good.

Restitution  
must be  
made as  
soon as possible.

difference between the highway-robber, and one who borrows money or makes purchases without paying, that the former takes the money by violence and keeps it without further troubling the person from whom he has taken it, while the latter receives the goods, or the money as a friend, and to the great chagrin of the lender, or seller, keeps it without any attempt at restitution. There are many, says the Wise Ecclesiasticus, who are very skilled in this kind of trickery ; they are able to live in grand style and to keep up a fine appearance with other people's money. " Many have looked upon a thing lent as a thing found, and have given trouble to them that helped them."<sup>1</sup> If they wish to borrow or buy anything, they bow and scrape in the most humble manner, and are full of honied words and promises : " Till they receive, they kiss the hands of the lender, and in promises they humble their voice ; but when they should repay, they will ask time."<sup>2</sup> And if the creditor presses for his money, " they will return tedious and murmuring words and will complain of the time. And if he be able to pay, he will stand off."<sup>3</sup> Finally, after long waiting, the unfortunate creditor, instead of getting his money, is put off with abuse and hard words. " He will defraud him of his money, and he shall get him for an enemy without cause ; and he will pay him with reproaches and curses, and instead of honor and good turn will repay him injuries."<sup>4</sup> If this is right and just, what will be reckoned as an injustice.

Therefore they act foolishly who defer restitution to a future time, or even to the hour of death.

I will make restitution, many a one thinks, but not yet. And when will you do it ? Some other time. Why not now, since it is in your power ? It is evident that you are not yet willing to be converted and to return to God, and to leave off sinning. I will make restitution when I am dying ; I will put it in my will. When you are dying ? That is a fine penance indeed, that you put off to your death-bed. Of a hundred such penances there is hardly one that is of any good. Very meritorious indeed it will be for you to restore on your death-bed, what you can no longer possess, and which leaves you, instead of you leaving it. A restitution of that kind is like throwing goods

<sup>1</sup> Multi quasi inventionem aestimaverunt fœnus, et præstiterunt molestiam his, qui se adjuverunt.—Ecl. xxix. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Donec accipiant, osculantur manus dantis, et in promissionibus humillant vocem suam ; et in tempore redditionis postulabit tempus.—Ibid, 5, 6.

<sup>3</sup> Loquetur verba tædii et murmurationem, et tempus causabitur ; si autem potuerit reddere, adversabitur.—Ibid, 6, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Fraudabit illum pecunia sua, et possidebit illum inimicum gratis, et convitia et maledicta reddet illi, et pro honore et beneficio reddet illi contumeliam.—Ibid, 8, 9.

overboard out of a ship in a storm, in order to prevent her from sinking. How earnest you can be in making it, I leave you to imagine. The hour of death is a time of terrible storm, the mind is full of trouble, anxiety and torment ; is that the time you choose for conversion, and for restoring ill-gotten gains ? From what motive will you act? Hardly from love of God and of justice, but because you cannot help yourself, and because you are afraid of death. I will leave it in my will. But suppose you die without making a will, what is to become of your soul ? If your will is already made but your children and heirs defer restitution, like yourself, what will become of your soul? It has been so hard for you to make it, hitherto, that you have been living all this time in the state of sin, and in danger of eternal damnation; will your children and heirs have less difficulty than you, in giving back not what they have stolen, but what they have received from you? Must they be more zealous for your salvation than you yourself?

Suppose that your children intend to make the restitution according to the terms of your will, or your dying injunctions, how do you know that God will give you the great grace of being ready to make due restitution in the hour of death ; since you refused to make it so constantly during life ? Is it probable, nay, is it possible that such will be the case ? Ah, I am afraid it will be with you as it was with the usurer mentioned by Cardinal John of Abbeville ; this usurer was often warned by the priest during his life, to be converted and to make restitution, but he always answered, “ I will do so, but there is still time.” He grew dangerously ill, and was again exhorted to penance and restitution ; he again made the same answer, “ I will, but there is time enough, there is no danger yet.” The priest continued to warn, and the usurer to make the same answer, until death came on, when he fell into a faint, as if his soul had really left his body. He came to himself again, and the priest renewed his entreaties, but the dying man cried out in a despairing voice : “ O penance, where art thou ? Now I can no longer do penance, according to a just decree of the Supreme Judge, because while it was in my power to do it I neglected it,”<sup>1</sup> and he immediately gave up his unhappy soul.

O man, whoever you are, who have still restitution to make, are you sure that you will fare better in your last moments ?

For then it is seldom made. Shown by an example.

Even if it is made on one's death-

<sup>1</sup> O pœnitentia, ubi es ? de cætero pœnitere non valeo, hoc iudicante justo iudice, quia dum facere pœnitentiam potui, non volui.

bed, it is  
foolish to  
defer it so  
long.

Still, granted that it will beso, and that as you now intend, you will then sincerely repent, and make full restitution, what do you gain by the delay? Nothing but to make it harder for yourself later on; because desire increases by continued possession, and the longer it lasts, the more difficult will it be for you to part with your unjust gains. Besides, the longer restitution is put off, the greater the injury done, and of course, you will have to give back much more later on. Along with that, you are always uneasy, you cannot receive a sacrament; any confessions and communions you make are sacrilegious, the absolutions you receive are invalid; for no one can absolve you, unless you are really determined to make at once, whatever restitution is in your power. Therefore, why do you put it off? Pay what thou owest; and at once.

Exhortation  
and con-  
clusion to  
make resti-  
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once.

Say now with Zaccheus: "If I have wronged any man of anything, I restore him fourfold;" he does not say, I will restore, or I have the intention of restoring on my death-bed, or at some other time, or to-morrow; but I restore now, at once, this very moment I will get rid of my unjust gains and give them to the lawful owner. This is the only means by which you can provide for the salvation of your soul, nay, it is the only way to insure the happiness of your household and your descendants.

As soon as Zaccheus made that heroic resolve, Christ said to him those joyful words; "This day is salvation come to this house."<sup>1</sup> One might think that He should have said, "This day is salvation come to this man;" for it was Zaccheus alone who did the meritorious work. True, the merit was for him alone; but the consequences of his act were extended to his whole family, whose salvation was thus made more easy; for in the family which is burdened with the obligation of restitution, all the members are in danger of eternal damnation; because, as we have seen, the obligation is handed down by the parents to their children, so that the danger of eternal ruin becomes a sort of perpetual legacy in the family. Therefore, restore at once whatever you possess unjustly, that you too may say with a holy joy, "This day is salvation come to this house;" this day I have freed myself and my family from a heavy burden, and from the certain danger of damnation; this day is the beginning of my salvation.

My dear brethren, in order to avoid all this trouble, let us never seek to make any unjust gain; and that is the chief object

<sup>1</sup> *Hodie salus domui huic facta est.*

I wish to secure by all I have said on this subject. Better is it to have only a little, better to have nothing at all, with God as our friend, and a quiet conscience, than to have much money, nay, all the treasures of the world, with God as our enemy, and an uneasy conscience. Better be poor and just, than rich and unjust. But what am I saying? Can I be called poor, if I have God? Can I be any richer, if I can say with truth that the Supreme Good belongs to me? Him I shall always strive to possess, Him alone will I serve; I will try to enrich my soul by directing all my actions to God with a pure intention, and so heap up supernatural treasures; the rest according to the divine promise, will not be wanting: "Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things shall be added unto you,"<sup>1</sup> according to the will of God; with that I shall always be content. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Quærite ergo primum regnum Dei et justitiam ejus, et hæc omnia adjicientur vobis.—  
Matth. vi. 33.

# ON LUST.

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## TWELFTH SERMON.

### ON THE FOLLY OF IMPURE DESIRES OF SENSUAL PLEASURES.

#### Subject.

The impure man who seeks to gratify his desire for sensual pleasures finds nothing ; for he seeks a pleasure, which 1. Cannot be called a pleasure, and, 2. Which should rather be called a pain.—*Preached on the eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

#### Text.

*Offerebant ei paralyticum jacentem in lecto.*—Matth. ix. 2.

“And they brought to Him one sick of the palsy lying in a bed.”

#### Introduction.

By the diseases of the body, which we read of in the Gospel, that our Lord cured, are signified the diseases of the soul, the healing of which was the chief reason why the Son of God came down on earth, and became man. And what are those diseases? St. Ambrose in his homily on the Gospel tells briefly what they are: “Our disease is avarice, our disease is ambition, our disease is impurity.”<sup>1</sup> There we have according to the testimony of the Apostle St. John, the three chief maladies of the soul, from which all other sins and vices spring. And that is the reason why I have tried to inspire you and myself with a hatred for them. You have already heard enough about ambition and avarice. But there still remains a vice to consider which occasions the eternal death of most men, namely, the vice of impurity. I will follow the order hitherto observed, my

<sup>1</sup> *Febris nostra avaritia est, febris nostra ambitio est, febris nostra libido est, etc.*

dear brethren, and show first the vanity and nothingness of impure pleasures. I have said that an ambitious man who seeks honors, and an avaricious man who seeks riches, find nothing; now in the same way I say—

Plan of Discourse.

*The impure man who seeks to gratify his desire for sensual pleasures, finds nothing. Why so? Because he seeks a pleasure which cannot be called a pleasure; as I shall show in the first part. He seeks a pleasure which should rather be called a pain; as I shall show in the second part.*

O Mary, Immaculate Virgin Mother of God, and you pure Spirits of heaven, holy angels guardian, one thing I beg of you in such a delicate and dangerous subject, which caused me much hesitation and reflection before venturing to speak of it, place prudent and chaste words in my mouth, that I may not hurt pure hearts and ears by the very means I make use of to inspire myself and others with a fear of that horrible vice.

It is a common saying among philosophers that a little may be regarded as nothing; <sup>A little is regarded as nothing.</sup> a short pleasure is looked upon as no pleasure. And such is really the case. Who would consider me a rich man, because I have a penny for a long time, or a thousand dollars for a few minutes? In the first case I should have too little, in the last case my wealth lasts too short a time for me to deserve the name of a rich man. Who would say that he really enjoyed himself because he had spent a day looking at a beautiful picture, or a moment tasting something sweet? The first is too small, the last too short to cause real enjoyment. And what better would that rich man have been, who was buried in hell and who asked Abraham to send Lazarus to him with a drop of water, if his request had been granted.

So it is, my dear brethren, with impurity; the pleasure it gives is so short, that it ends as soon as it has begun; hardly is it tasted when it is gone. <sup>The pleasure of impurity is very short-lived.</sup> Have you ever noticed how eagerly little children run after butterflies in the summer time? They run about for hours and hours; they strive to grasp them in their hands, or to catch them in their hats; and they wonder at what they think to be beautiful birds, with variegated wings. But how short-lived their joy is: for it consists in catching the butterfly after a deal of trouble. And when they have caught

<sup>1</sup> Parum pro nihilo reputatur.

it, what have they? Nothing but a nasty worm which soils their hands; so that their pleasure is at an end. Such, it seems to me, is the case with the impure; they are attracted either by beauty, which in reality merely conceals the food of worms; or their own imaginations draw flattering pictures of pleasure for them, and immediately the passions are excited, the mind is agitated, and there is neither rest nor peace until the imaginary pleasure is enjoyed. And when they have gained the object of their desires, what have they beyond the memory of a short-lived pleasure? If I have acquired great riches, I have certainly an empty good, still I can enjoy it for many years, nay, for my whole life, and my only care need be to prevent it from being stolen, or otherwise taken away from me. If I have attained great honors and dignities in the world, I must acknowledge that I have gained nothing but an empty breath of air; still, the vain pleasure I feel lasts as long as I am in an honorable position. Amongst all pleasures the epithet *momentary*, is especially applicable to impurity. Daily experience confirms this. Acknowledge the truth of it, impure man, who perhaps this very morning have offended God by your sensuality; you have enjoyed that pleasure by consenting to an impure thought, by impure conversation, by unchaste looks, by acts that no one dares to name; say, what have you now of your pleasure? What is left of it? Ah, you must confess, nothing remains of it; it has vanished completely; and has left behind it only mortal sin!

How foolish then, to commit sin for the sake of a momentary pleasure.

And is it then worth while for a man to barter a happy eternity for its sake? Poor Jonathan, how you were to be pitied for having against your father's command, merely tasted a few drops of honey; as you yourself complained: "I did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod which was in my hand, and behold I must die;"<sup>1</sup> that short-lived pleasure costs me my life! Unfortunate Esau, who gave up your birth-right for a mess of pottage, in order to satisfy your gluttony, you had reason to regret your folly in resigning your privilege and your father's blessing, and to bewail it bitterly: "And he wept with a loud cry!"<sup>2</sup> Oh, how much more you are to be pitied, unhappy sinners, who in order to taste a drop of honey, to enjoy a momentary pleasure, forfeit your heavenly birth-right, and

<sup>1</sup> Gustans gustavi in summitate virgæ, quæ erat in manu mea, paululum mellis, et ecce ego morior.—I. Kings xiv. 48.

<sup>2</sup> Irrugit clamore magno.—Gen. xxvii. 34.

incur the everlasting pains of hell ! Filled with compassion at such folly, St. Augustine cries out : “ O truly miserable condition, in which the pleasure quickly passes away, and the pain lasts forever.”<sup>1</sup> Oh moment ! Oh eternity ! Oh short joy ! Oh long sorrow ! Oh impurity, how quickly your pleasure passes ! Oh flames of hell how long and how fiercely you burn ! Oh miserable mortal who for the sake of the one, expose yourself to the other, how can you be so blind ?

And when you have enjoyed this short-lived and vile pleasure, what remains to you ? You are like the children who catch the nasty, winged grub in their hands. What a vile enjoyment it is ! One feels ashamed even to name it ! Even the most impure, when they are in decent company, try to veil their allusions to it under figurative language, lest they should be put to shame ; for it is this very vice and almost this alone, which can transform a reasoning being into a mere animal ; as we read in the Holy Scriptures, which compare those who indulge in gluttony and impurity, to dogs, swine, wolves, horses and mules. David says in the Psalms : “ And man when he was in honor, did not understand ; he had been compared to senseless beasts, and is become like to them.”<sup>2</sup> Pride is the sin of the angels ; envy, and jealousy, and tempting others to offend God, is the sin of the devils ; avarice and vindictiveness is proper to man ; but impurity belongs to beasts alone.

It is a hideous and brutal pleasure.

See what a short and degrading pleasure you indulge in, O impure man, and how you defile the temple of the Holy Ghost, of which St. Paul says : “ Know you not that your members are the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own ? For you are bought with a great price. Glorify and bear God in your body.”<sup>3</sup> From this temple you have driven away God, by your impurity, in order to introduce into it the evil spirit ; and you have defiled the members of Jesus Christ, as the same apostle says : “ Know you not that your bodies are the members of Christ ? ”<sup>4</sup> Members which He has united to Himself in baptism, and which He so often feeds with His own Flesh and Blood in the Holy Commun-

They act wickedly therefore, who defile their bodies with it.

<sup>1</sup> Vere plagenda nimis et miseranda conditio : ubi cito præterit quod delectat, et permanente sine fine quod cruciat.

<sup>2</sup> Et homo, cum in honore esset, non intellexit : comparatus est jumentis insipientibus, et similis factus est illis.—Ps. xviii. 13.

<sup>3</sup> An nescitis quoniam membra vestra templum sunt Spiritus sancti, qui in vobis est, quem habetis a Deo, et non estis vestri ? Emi enim estis pretio magno. Glorificate, et portate Deum in corpore vestro.—I Cor. vi. 19, 20.

<sup>4</sup> Nescitis, quoniam corpora vestra membra sunt Christi ?—Ibid. 15.

ion. Hear this, O Christian, and learn therefrom your great dignity, and also your shameless wickedness in dishonoring Jesus Christ. Your eyes are the eyes of Christ, and you sully them with impure looks ; your ears are the ears of Christ, and you allow them to be filled with the filth of impure conversation ; your tongue is the tongue of Christ, and you defile it with unchaste discourse ; your hands are the hands of Christ, and you use them to offend Him ; your heart is the heart of Christ, and you besmear it with foul thoughts and desires ; your body belongs to Jesus Christ, but you, like a foul animal, allow it to wallow in the mire of impurity ! Wicked Balthasar, men still condemn you when they remember that you profaned the sacred vessels of the temple of Jerusalem, by using them as drinking cups. Godless heretics, all good Christians are horrified at the sacrileges you commit, when you break into Catholic churches and desecrate the sacred chalice and monstrance ; although they are merely gold or silver vessels which have only an external holiness. But far more wicked are you Christians, who defile the temple of God and the members of Christ in yourselves by the degrading crime of impurity !

And their  
souls, too.

In this temple, you have sullied that beautiful image, your soul, which is made to the likeness of God, and which is so beautiful, that it attracted the love and admiration, not merely of men, but of the angels, of the Mother of God, and even of Our Lord Himself ; whose beauty led the Almighty God, to give up His Only begotten Son to become incarnate, and to suffer extreme poverty, and a painful and shameful death ; whose beauty forces even the demons to perform the lowest services for men, and to give them the whole world, if they could, in order to gain one soul. This beautiful soul you have so disgraced by your shameful lust, that it is now an abomination to God and His angels, and would be intolerable to all creatures, if they could only see it. Disgraced ? That is too weak a word ; for every mortal sin does that. You have completely blotted out that image. Take a beautiful picture, and cut it here and there with a knife ; it is spoiled ; but still the main features may be traced in it ; but throw it into the fire, and you will utterly destroy it. It is true that every mortal sin defiles the soul ; still there are some lineaments of the former likeness left ; it is the fire of impurity alone that completely blots out that image, turns it into that of a beast, and burns it up, so that there is nothing divine left in it. “ My Spirit shall not remain in man forever,

because he is flesh,"<sup>1</sup> and lives according to the flesh ; such are the words of God himself. By your own acts, O unchaste man, you testify to the deformity of the vice of impurity, for you dare not gratify your desires, unless in private, so that you must be ashamed even of yourself, if you are not dead to all shame ! And it is to a thing of this kind that you give the name of pleasure and enjoyment ! Is that what men seek with so much trouble and anxiety ? Alas, it is ; and for such a short-lived, detestable, and disgraceful pleasure, the human heart allows itself to become so infatuated and blinded, that honor and good name, and one's mortal soul, and the riches and eternal joys of Heaven, and God Himself, the Highest Good, are all sacrificed so that hell alone remains as the lot of the impure man for eternity ! Why should it be called pleasure ? Is it not rather a bitter pain ? It is so in reality, my dear brethren, for the unchaste find the very contrary of that which they seek ; as I shall now prove.

### Second Part.

Cardanus writes that Queen Fennella gave King Kenneth of Scotland, a golden apple, which was so constructed, that when it was held in the hand for a certain time, it sent forth sharp arrows which inflicted a mortal wound ; the king, ignorant of the danger, took the apple and lost his life by it. Impure and sensual desires offer a similar dangerous gift to men. St. Gregory of Nyssa says that "Lust is a cruel and tyrannical mistress, that always pierces the souls of its slaves with sharp arrows ;"<sup>2</sup> And is it not true ? With how many arrows is not the heart pierced, before the unchaste man is able to gratify his desires ? Oh ! cries out St. Bernard, how many uneasy and anxious thoughts, how many plans and contrivances, how many abasements and humiliations are required by that passion ! If the impure man has still some thought and fear of God left, what uneasiness and terror he has in his conscience ! All the principles of faith and right reason are against him ; the all-seeing Eye of God, that is looking at him ; the severe justice of the Almighty Judge, that he has to expect ; the terrible uncertainty of death, that he has to fear in the very moment of his guilt ; the miserable eternity that awaits him ; the fire of hell that he deserves ; the loss of heaven, that he has incurred ; what frightful

*Luxury is  
ful of bit-  
terness be-  
fore it is en-  
joyed.*

<sup>1</sup> Non permanebit spiritus meus in homine in æternum, quia caro est.—Gen. vi. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Crudelis domina et rabiosa luxuria est, quasi stimulis servilem mentem exagitant.

phantoms those are that haunt him ! His conscience, if it is not deadened, cries out to him ; Ah, unhappy man, what are you about to do ? Where is your shame ? What about your soul ? Where is your God ? He is present with you ; He goes with you to the very place in which you intend to commit your abominations ! What if He were to avenge Himself on you in the very moment of your crime ? What if death surprised you then, and your soul were hurled down to hell ? Can that be called a pleasure which in the very moment of enjoyment, fills the soul with such bitter thoughts ? Is not that torment of the conscience enough to terrify any reasonable man, and to keep him from committing such a dreadful sin ?

Shown by  
an example.

We read in the Bollandists an account taken from Caesarius, of a person living in a religious house, who was so blinded by impure desires, that he made up his mind to go back into the world and there gratify his passions. Acting on this determination, he was on the point of going out at the door of the church, when a crucifix placed itself in his way ; nothing daunted, he proceeded to another door and there was met by a picture of the crucified Saviour ; he was somewhat frightened at this but not converted, so he went on, and again encountered the same picture, which looked at him threateningly, as if to warn him from carrying out his design. (All Christians, my dear brethren, should keep Jesus crucified before their eyes when they are tempted to impurity ; one look at the cross should more than suffice to keep them from yielding to sin, and to lead them back to the way of virtue. For the thought must suggest itself : this head was crowned with thorns for me, those feet and hands were pierced with nails for me, this whole body was scourged and covered with wounds and blood for me. Why then do I not take a scourge and chastise myself, that I may do something for the love of Him who so loved me ? At least, O God, do not allow me to insult Thee by committing this vile sin before Thy very eyes. So should each one think, when tempted to impurity.) Ought not that person to have entered into himself, after having been three times warned by Christ Himself in such a remarkable manner ? But no ; notwithstanding all that, he went to the side door, saying : How much trouble it takes for me to enjoy myself only once in my whole life ! With these words he passed a marble statue of the Blessed Virgin, which stretched out its arm and dealt him such a terrible blow, that he lay half dead on the floor. He spent the night in a state of the

greatest alarm, and from that moment had such a horror of impurity, that he would rather undergo death itself than do the least thing contrary to chastity. All men whose consciences are not hardened have the same fear and dread to experience, although not in a miraculous manner, when they make up their minds to commit a sin of impurity. But even if the unchaste man has hardened his conscience, and forgotten God, he must still carefully hide his excesses from the eyes of men ; he must have recourse to a hundred contrivances to keep his sin concealed, and he must condescend to the most slavish and degrading actions, before he succeeds in gaining his end ; he must bear all his fears and labors alone.

But if all this trouble is in vain, and he fails in inducing the other party to consent to his sinful proposals, he is despised and looked down upon (and how justly do not all servants of God treat such infamous proposals with the contempt they deserve, instead of listening to them ; repelling them even with violence if necessary). And what a disgrace that is to him ! What hatred and rage he feels at it ! And to what a pitch of desperation it drives him to have to hate the person whom he wished to love, and by whom he wished to be loved ! Consider, says St. John Chrysostom, how the unchaste wife of Potiphar became the slave of her inordinate desires ; she who was mistress of her house, threw herself at the feet of her servant, and spared no effort to win his love. Would she not have been a thousand times happier if she had never allowed her desires to get the better of her ? Joseph, who feared God more than he did his mistress, took to flight and left his mantle behind him. How great the rage of the slighted woman, when she saw herself rejected in that manner ! Hatred filled her heart instead of love, and forced her to accuse Joseph falsely and have him cast into prison. Consider how Ammon fared, when he became a victim to his incestuous passion. He faded away and looked like a dead man, so that everyone who saw him asked : “ Why dost thou grow so lean from day to day, O son of the king ? ” Is that to be called a pleasure, I ask again, which, before it is enjoyed, fills the heart with such bitter cares ?

And suppose the unchaste man succeeds in his attempt ; does not the gratification of his passion, which he so much longed for, torture and afflict him ? What sharp thorns pierce his heart ! His wicked desires are like so many executioners that torture him ; nay, we might say that if all the pain and sorrow that the

And full of  
pain after  
enjoyment.

Even the  
very enjoy-  
ment of im-  
pure love  
causes un-  
easiness and  
torment.

other passions cause one to feel, were put together, they would not equal the tyranny with which the impure passion treats the heart it has mastered. Nor does that passion give to its votaries the joy and pleasure that the other passions sometimes bring with them. All the care and anxiety of the miser in keeping and increasing his store ; all the uneasiness and jealousy of the ambitious man in seeking for honors ; all the bitterness of the vindictive man against his enemy ; all the venom that gnaws at the heart of the envious man ; all the chagrin and discomfort that torments the impatient man, and drives him to cursing, swearing, and blasphemy ; all these things together must the impure man bear in the prosecution of his evil designs.

As all who  
are given  
to impure  
love experi-  
ence.

Unfortunate man, says St. John Chrysostom, how you are to be pitied ! Show me one hour out of the twenty-four in which you really enjoy peace and rest ; count the numberless desires that unceasingly torment you, when the object of your sinful passion is absent ; count the sleepless nights, the disquieting dreams that break your sleep ; the cares that plague you ; the trouble and anxiety, the despair that takes possession of you, if anything occurs to prevent you seeing the object of your passion ; count the uneasy thoughts that assail you when that object is present, knowing that your love is unlawful and cannot last ; the very consolation of those who love each other unlawfully consists in the sighs which testify to their mutual anxiety ; count the suspicious and jealous thoughts that fill the mind ; the envy, rage, hatred and vindictiveness, if there is the least cause given for jealousy ; consider the pain caused by the very object of the unlawful love, the least sign of neglect or forgetfulness, a change of manner, a look, a word, even silence itself is enough to fill the heart with melancholy, sorrow, and even despair ; the revenge on the favored rival is nothing but an increase of the secret and intolerable torment ; if anything happens adversely to either of the guilty parties, the other feels it just as keenly. All this you must acknowledge, impure man ; you sing of it in your love-songs, and you declare openly that there is no greater torment than a sinful passion. It is experienced even by those who have sworn constant fidelity to each other in the holy sacrament of matrimony, and who therefore, are bound to love each other. How much more, then, must that torment be felt by those whose love is unlawful, and forbidden by God under the penalty of eternal damnation ! “ Oh, how bitter are the fruits of

lust," says St. Jerome, "they are more bitter than gall, more cruel than the sword!"<sup>1</sup>

Since impure love re-unites all the pains and bitterness of the other passions, it can enjoy none of their sweets and comforts. The proud and ambitious man, after all the trouble and care he has, can enjoy the position he has gained; the avaricious man, although he plagues himself immensely, has a pleasure in his riches; the revengeful man, although he is tormented with bitter thoughts, has some satisfaction in avenging himself; the glutton has pleasure in eating and drinking; and all these pleasures may be had together; but there is nothing of the kind in unchaste love; for there is no satisfaction in money or honors, or eating or drinking when the beloved person is absent; this absence alone turns every joy into a sorrow. You may talk to the impure man hundreds and thousands of times of the eternal joys of Heaven, he will not feel the least desire for them. He would willingly give them up, if he could satisfy all his wishes on earth. He cannot even imagine a joy which does not consist in impure love. He is inclined sometimes to envy the beast of the field, and to wish that he had neither reason nor freedom, that he might gratify his passions without shame, or the fear of eternal damnation. So that he has lost all pleasure in, and taste for everything; nay, his ruling passion itself gives him no content, because his desires increase more and more and the greater they are the harder it is to satisfy them. According to Peter of Celle, "the impure man becomes more full of desire the more he gratifies himself, and with the desire the torment he has to suffer increases also."<sup>2</sup> I no longer wonder at the teaching of St. Augustine; just as the tyrants in former times, he says, urged on the executioners to torture the martyrs of Christ, so also the devil makes use of impure desires to torture his martyrs. He himself had to acknowledge, that before his conversion his experience taught him that "the unchaste man is more tortured by his passion, than the martyrs were by shedding their blood."<sup>3</sup> And this he said while he was still given to impurity.

For they have no real satisfaction in their impure pleasures.

When the enjoyment is passed, and the occasion of it is taken away by death or other separation, what happens then? Disgrace before the world, shame of one's self, gnawing remorse, which according to St. Augustine, is almost like the pain of hell;

After the sin follow pain, remorse and shame.

<sup>1</sup> O quam acerbus est fructus luxuriæ; amarior felle, crudellior gladio!

<sup>2</sup> Implet luxuriam et adhuc esurit; sustinet pœnam et adhuc crescit.

<sup>3</sup> Plus torquetur libidinosus voluptatis amore, quam martyr Christianus sanguinis effusione.

such are the fruits of impurity ; bitter repentance follows on satiety. I have sinned ! All the pleasure is gone ! My honor, my innocence, my soul, my God, Heaven, all is lost ! If I were to die now ? If the earth would open and swallow me up after I have fallen into the hands of the devil ? Such are the cries of conscience that the impure man hears day and night. And besides this, there is another torment, namely that of having to tell his sin with all its circumstances in confession, a thing that appears most difficult, nay, impossible to some ; so that they prefer to remain for ten, twenty, thirty years at enmity with God, and making sacrilegious confessions and communions, nay, they sometimes actually choose to go to hell, rather than disclose their shame to one unknown man, who is bound to the strictest secrecy ; or else if they get an extraordinary grace and resolve to tell their sins, they have to disclose all their past sinful lives, to their ten-fold confusion, because all their former confessions were bad. See, there you have the fruits of that short, shameful and bitter pleasure !

As they  
themselves  
acknowl-  
edge.

With reason did Demosthenes say to a lewd woman, who tried to tempt him, and every Christian should make the same answer when similarly tempted : “ I do not wish to buy repentance at so dear a rate ;”<sup>1</sup> away with you ; I am not so foolish as to expose myself to bitter suffering for such a short pleasure ! Some time ago, outside confession, as otherwise I could not say anything about it, and in another place, a person acknowledged to me that he had lived for some years in unlawful intercourse, and that he was so infatuated, that if he had seen hell open before his eyes, he still would refuse to be converted ; now the occasion of sin was taken away, and he was freed from his passion, and, said to me, in a most impressive manner : Father, if this bowl (alluding to one he was holding) were filled with money and it was all to be given to me on condition of my allowing myself to be enslaved by such a passion, even if it were not forbidden by God, I would not consent, solely on account of the continual torment that I should have to suffer. Now since I have done penance, I can live contentedly ; before, my life was like a hell on earth. So it is, says St. Augustine : “ Thou hast commanded, O Lord, and therefore, every inordinate desire punishes itself.”<sup>2</sup> “ I will go after my lovers,”<sup>3</sup> says the lewd woman in

<sup>1</sup> Tantū poenitere non emo.

<sup>2</sup> Jussisti, Domini, et sic est, ut sua sibi poena sit omnis inordinatus animus.

<sup>3</sup> Vadam post amatores meos.—Osee li. 5.

the Book of Osee ; thinking perhaps, that she will have much enjoyment ; but the Lord says : “ Wherefore I will hedge up thy way with thorns ; ”<sup>1</sup> I will overwhelm you with such bitterness that it will utterly poison the short joy you seek.

Nevertheless, such is the infatuation produced by this passion, that unless the occasion is taken from them by violence, those who are infected with it, like the person I have spoken of, find it almost impossible to be converted. They are to my mind like the bear that belonged to a certain prince ; the prince one day caused a pot full of boiling honey to be placed before the bear which rushed at it eagerly, but the scalding honey burned the animal’s mouth, and made him retreat from the pot, growling fiercely ; still he did not forget the sweet taste, and he came back again with the same result as before, and repeated this three or four times, until the scalding honey was too much for him, and he fell down dead at last. That is a true picture of the impure man ; like a madman, he swallows down poisoned draughts of pleasure, until his heart, his mind, his conscience, his honor all are gone, and still he cherishes his fatal passion until death puts an end to it, or some other violent means takes away the occasion of it. See what they gain who seek impure pleasure ! They look for joy and find sorrow.

Oh, certainly they are martyrs of the devil ! Accursed sin, what misfortune thou causest ! Accursed lust, thou art the pestilence that has infected the souls of most men, and for the sake of a few moments of vile pleasure, hast given them over to the torments of hell ! Ah, I should rather weep bitter tears for those unfortunates, than speak to them, for words will do them no good ! Mercy, O God, mercy ! Pity so many of Thy creatures who are made to Thy image and likeness, and whom Thou hast redeemed by Thy blood, but who are so blinded by shameful lust, that they cannot see their misery, so that they become an easy prey to the devil ! How long, O Lord, how long wilt Thou permit the loss of so many souls ? Ah, even one drop of Thy blood is enough to extinguish the fire of passion in us all ! Holy angels, save from this vice the innocent children intrusted to your care, that they may not hear or see anything to scandalize them ! And you who are still innocent, guard your senses if you wish to preserve your purity ; call every day upon the Blessed Virgin and your guardian angels, to save you from all dangerous occasions, and to inspire you with a lasting horror

And yet they cannot refrain from that bitter pleasure. Shown by a comparison.

Therefore we must deplore their miserable state, and beg of God to free us all from impurity.

<sup>1</sup> Propter hoc, ecce, ego septiam viam tuam spinis.—Osee, ii. 6.

of even the least impure thought. Think and say in all temptations with the chaste youth, Casimir: I would rather die than commit such a sin; <sup>1</sup> I will serve my God in purity of heart and soul, and I will love him above all things in time and eternity. Amen.

*Another Introduction of the same Sermon for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.*

**Text.**

*Ab æterno ordinata sum.*—Prov. viii. 23.

“I was set up from eternity.”—*From the Epistle of to-day*

And so it is; from all eternity it was decreed by God that sin should never have the least part in Mary, that not even for a moment was she to be subject to the stain of original sin, but that she should always be pure and immaculate; because she was chosen to be the mother of Him who takes away the sins of the world. All true Christians and servants of Mary know well that it is unworthy of her dignity for them to question this truth; and it is unnecessary now-a-days to spend longer time in proving it; for to doubt it even in thought, would be a sign of very small love for the Mother of God. To-day's feast, my dear brethren, inspires me with a two-fold wonder; the first is, what a shameful and disgraceful thing it is to be infected with original sin alone; since God did not allow His Mother to be under that stain even for a moment; nay, according to the testimony of the holy Fathers, Mary had such a clear knowledge of the malice and deformity of original sin, that if the choice were given her, either to be the Mother of God, and to have all the graces and privileges attending that dignity, with original sin, or to be free from original sin without that dignity, she would choose the latter. The second wonder is, how little we mortals make of the deformity, not merely of original, but of actual sin; since we so often sacrifice grace, God, our souls and Heaven, for the sake of a momentary and sinful pleasure. Both these things are to be wondered at; Mary's love of purity, and our folly and blindness. This last I will consider to-day, it concerns particularly those who are given to impurity, and who give up God and all His graces, their souls and their salvation, and for what? For an imaginary and false pleasure, nay, for a troubled and painful pleasure. Such is the subject of the present sermon. Plan of discourse, etc., continues as before.

<sup>1</sup> *Malo mori quam fœdari.*

THIRTEENTH SERMON.

ON THE INCURABLENESS OF THE VICE OF IMPURITY.

Subject.

1. There is no vice which so blinds the human understanding.
2. None which so hardens the human will in wickedness, as the vice of impurity.—*Preached on the twentieth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

*Incipiebat enim mori.*—John iv. 47.  
“For he was at the point of death.”

Introduction.

That is a time when one requires help, when one is at the point of death. But it is also a time when great skill is required to help; and it is a certain sign that a disease is incurable, when nothing but a miracle on the part of God can cure it. With reason then did the ruler, in to-day's Gospel, beg of our Lord to come: “Lord, come down, before that my son die;”<sup>1</sup> there is no time for delay, because he has already begun to breathe his last. A malady of that kind, my dear brethren, is impurity, of which I have already spoken; and it is an incurable and desperate malady, so that he who is infected with it has already begun to die an eternal death. For when it has once become deep-rooted, it can hardly be cured, unless by a miracle of divine grace. The reason of that is—

Plan of Discourse.

*There is no vice which so blinds the human understanding. Such is the subject of the first and longer part of my sermon. No vice which so hardens the human will in wickedness, as the vice of impurity. Such is the subject of the second part. I have no hopes that what I am about to say will do any good to those who are addicted to impurity, because there is hardly any chance of their conversion; so that I address myself chiefly to the innocent, in order to warn them against this frightful vice.*

Help me to do so, O Immaculate Virgin, and you too, holy guardian angels.

<sup>1</sup> Domine, descende prius quam moriatur filius meus.—John iv. 49.

Impure  
desires represent  
only what is flatter-  
ing to the pas-  
sions.

Zeuxis once painted a picture of a young man carrying grapes, so naturally, that the birds came and pecked at the canvas, thinking that the grapes were real. All who saw the picture praised it, and wondered at the skill of the artist. Zeuxis alone was dissatisfied at it, on account of a great fault he observed in it. And what fault was that? If, he said, the grapes are painted so well that the birds come and peck at them, the boy who is carrying them, must be very badly painted, or else the birds would be afraid to come so near him. Now, what do I mean by this, my dear brethren? A similar picture is drawn before the human understanding by sensual desires; but they paint in vivid colors only what is pleasing and flattering to the senses; so that the ardent desire of enjoying those pleasures may not be interfered with by shame or fear.

And conceal  
what is cal-  
culated to  
deter from  
sensual in-  
dulgence.

Meanwhile, all the bitterness and torment that such pleasures cause, and everything that could frighten men away from them, is carefully kept in the background, so that the understanding is blinded, and neither sees nor desires to see any of those deterrent causes; nay, once it has become enslaved by impurity, it is incapable of seeing or recognizing them. Thus, the impure man is not frightened by the omnipresence and Almighty power of God, from whom nothing is concealed, and who can annihilate him in an instant, during the actual commission of his shameful crime, (O great God, who can dare to despise and insult Thee before Thy very eyes!) nor by the uncertainty of death, which may surprise him in the midst of his wickedness, and hand him over to the devil as it has done with many already, (what a terrible thing to die in the very act of sin, or at least in the state of sin, and thus to enter into eternity!); nor by the strictness of divine justice, before which even the Saints have trembled, and which he may have to face with his sin still fresh upon him; nor by the thought of the beauty and endless joys of heaven, which he barter so miserably for a momentary gratification, (what folly, to give away eternal and unspeakable joys for the sake of indulging a brutish passion!); nor by the terrors of hell, which follow on the loss of Heaven; it is enough to make one's hair stand on end to think of burning in a fire forever, without any hope of being released! Yes, these are truths which he often thought of formerly, and they inspired him with a fear of sin; they caused him to feel a bitter remorse the first time he gratified his impure desires, and they kept him for a time in constant uneasiness; they are truths

that can terrify any other sinner, no matter how wicked he is, and bring him to repentance and amendment of life.

But the unchaste man, who has become addicted to sensual pleasures, or who has been immeshed in the toils of an impure attachment for any creature, is no more impressed by those truths, than he would be by the fables of the old pagan poets. He does not even think of them; if his blinded understanding is still capable of having a thought of the kind, he puts it away at once. He has no eyes, as St. Augustine, an experienced witness, says, for anything but the filth in which he is immersed. The Holy Scriptures say of the two impure judges, who wished to lead the chaste Susanna into sin: "They perverted their own mind, and turned away their eyes, that they might not look unto Heaven, nor remember just judgments."<sup>1</sup> St. Ambrose writes of a man who was so given to this vice, that it really made him blind, and when he saw that his sight was leaving him day by day, he cried out: "Farewell, friendly light;"<sup>2</sup> I will rather become blind altogether than give up my pleasures. Farewell, beautiful sun. I shall no more enjoy your light, but it does not matter, so long as I can gratify my passion! The same might be said by all who are resolved to give themselves up to impurity, and to indulge in unlawful affection: good-bye, friendly light of my soul, I do not want you any longer. Eternal principles, divine truths, inspirations of the Holy Ghost, salutary rays of grace, inspirations of my guardian angel, warnings and sermons of the servants of God, farewell! your light will never shine on me again. God will sometimes send you into my heart, but I shall not perceive you; you will knock, and I will not open to you; it will be of no use to send lights from above into my soul; for I shall henceforth wander about in my blindness, although it leads me into the darkness of hell.

The same may be said of all works of devotion; farewell, friendly light. Prayer and good works, I have hitherto been attentive to you with zeal and heavenly consolations; but now I must leave you; I have no more taste for you. Holy Sacrament of Penance, I have often cleansed my conscience by your means, but now I have done with you; it is impossible for me to repent of my sins of impurity, since I love them more than anything else.

The unchaste put away every thought of God and His truths.

They lose all taste for piety and devotion.

<sup>1</sup> *Everterunt sensum suum, et declinaverunt oculos suos, ut non viderent cœlum, neque recordarentur iudiciorum justorum.*—Dan. xiii.

<sup>2</sup> *Vale, amicum lumen.*

Precious Food of Angels, Flesh and Blood of my Saviour Jesus Christ, with which I have hitherto strengthened my soul once or twice a month, I desire you no longer; I prefer, like the prodigal, to satisfy my hunger with the husks of swine, rather than sit at the Table of God, and eat the Bread of Angels. Word of God, which it has been my pleasure and joy to hear, to the great profit of my soul, farewell; I cannot bear you now, for you speak to me of things that I hate to hear of, and you threaten me with eternal damnation for what I most love and am determined not to leave; good-bye, I have heard the last of you! Spiritual books, Lives of the Saints, in the reading of which I used to spend an hour every Sunday and holyday, away with you; I can no longer collect my thoughts, for they constantly turn to where my treasure is. You, O Saints, please me no longer, for your chaste lives are a constant reproach to my excesses! Tender love and devotion to the Mother of God, O what a consolation you were to me often, you were always my refuge in temptation, my helper in want, my consoler in afflictions, my only hope after God when I was doing penance for my other sins; farewell; I have no taste for you any more! I still say the Rosary every day, but I have no hope, nor confidence in it, because I know, O Mary, that thou hatest this impure heart of mine from which those prayers come. God, and all that belongs to His service, farewell; I cannot think of you any more, for you disturb me in my pleasure! Divine light of my soul, farewell!

King David  
is a proof of  
that.

And so it is in reality, my dear brethen. What a holy and perfect man David was; I wonder as often as I think of it; a man after God's own heart, who always walked in the presence of God: "My eyes are ever towards the Lord;"<sup>1</sup> whose mouth was always filled with the divine praises: "Seven times a day I have given praise to Thee;"<sup>2</sup> whose heart with all its thoughts and desires was occupied all day long with the law and the commandments of God: "Thy law is my meditation all the day;"<sup>3</sup> who used to break his rest during the night, in order to praise God: "I rose at midnight to give praise to Thee;"<sup>4</sup> who used to value the divine inspirations more than all earthly sweetness: "How sweet are Thy words to my palate, more than honey to my mouth;"<sup>5</sup> who was so full of the love of God that he could

<sup>1</sup> Oculi mei semper ad Dominum.—Ps. xxiv. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Septies in die laudem dixi tibi.—Ibid. cxviii. 164.

<sup>3</sup> Lex tua tota die meditatio mea est.—Ibid. 97.

<sup>4</sup> Media nocte surgebam ad confitendum tibi.—Ibid. 62.

<sup>5</sup> Quam dulcisa faucibus meis eloquia tua: super mel ori meo!—Ibid. 103.

swear that he would never forget Him nor His commandments : “ I have sworn and am determined to keep the judgments of Thy justice.”<sup>1</sup> “ Thy justifications I will never forget, for by them Thou hast given me life.”<sup>2</sup> David, I say, had hardly looked with a lustful eye on Bethsabee, and committed sin with her when, as the Sacred Writer tells us, he spent some years without thinking of God, although after the death of Urias he had taken her to wife, and could have a lawful affection for her. So much was he infatuated with this vice, that he did not even see how wicked he was until the Prophet Nathan explained it to him by the well-known parable of the poor man’s ewe lamb ; then his eyes were opened, and he remembered his God, and how grievously he had sinned, and he cried out : “ I have sinned against the Lord.”<sup>3</sup>

If there are any unfortunates here present, who are victims of an unlawful passion, I call them all to witness if such is not their own experience ? No matter how pious, devout and zealous they were in the divine service, as soon as they were ensnared by impurity, did they not at once lose all taste and inclination for piety and good works ? It cannot be otherwise ; St. Paul says : “ But the sensual man perceiveth not those things that are of the Spirit of God ; for it is foolishness to him, and he cannot understand ; ”<sup>4</sup> the light of his understanding is gone out, and he no longer finds joy or pleasure in anything, but the gratification of his brutish passion. While thus blinded, he pays no attention to his other duties and obligations ; his honor and good name, his position and authority, his office and dignity, farewell to them all, once his desires get the upper hand. The father forgets what he owes his children, the child what he owes his parents ; the husband forgets his wife, the wife her husband ; the man of high position forgets the character he has to keep up before the people ; the religious and the priest forget the holiness and dignity of their state ; the young man forgets his advancement, the young girl her virginal honor. All these things are utterly disregarded when unlawful love gains the upper hand.

In this blindness sins are heaped on sins with the utmost recklessness. The demon of impurity is called in Holy Scrip-

Daily experience teaches that the unchaste forget all their duties.

And think nothing of the number of sins they commit.

<sup>1</sup> Juravi, et statui custodire judicia justitiæ tuæ.—Ps. cxviii. 106.

<sup>2</sup> In æternum non obliviscar justificationes tuas : quia in ipsis vivificasti me.—Ibid. 93.

<sup>3</sup> Peccavi Domino.—11 Kings xii. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Animalis autem homo non percipit ea, quæ sunt Spiritus Dei ; stultitia enim est illi, et non potest intelligere.—I Cor. ii. 14.

tures, Asmodeus, which means in Hebrew, an abundance of sins ; to signify that the unchaste body is like a heap of countless sins of all kinds. And such is really the case. The thief does not steal every day ; the murderer is not always taking away people's lives ; the passionate man is not always cursing and swearing ; the vindictive man does not always seek revenge ; the drunkard is not always intoxicated ; but the impure man who is entangled in the snares of a guilty passion, commits so many sins every day, that his life is like a stormy sea, in which one mountain-wave of sin drives away another. Let us try to count up, my dear brethren, the fearful number of sins committed by such a man, in thought alone ; on the supposition, which is likely to be true, that he thinks of impure things wilfully only ten times a day, that makes already three hundred mortal sins in a month, and more than three thousand six hundred in a year ; what will it be if he continues that mode of life for two, three, five, ten years, or longer ? And yet, I have only reckoned ten sins of thought in a day. As a matter of fact, all his thoughts from morning till night, and even the night is not free from them, are about impure subjects ; he is always, as far as in him lies, ready to gratify his passions, and it is only the want of opportunity which prevents him from carrying his desires into effect. What a countless number of sins are thus committed in thought alone ! I will not speak of sins committed by immodest looks and conversations, by impure letters, by unchaste touches, and in other ways that I dare not name. I will not speak of the different kinds of sins, which arise from impurity committed with married people, with relatives, or with persons consecrated to God. They hardly do anything but sin, so that their whole lives, while they are addicted to an impure affection, are one continued sin. We might say that with other vices, the devil fishes for sins with a hook ; he has to wait a long time often, before the bait is taken ; but with impurity he catches sins as it were, in a net, and by the hundred. If the impure man wishes to confess his sins, he cannot count them all ; it is, humanly speaking, impossible to do so, and his confessor has only to ask how long, how many weeks, months, or years he has been in the habit of impurity so as to be able to give a guess at the vast number of sins, thought, word, and deed he has committed.

No sin too  
great for  
them, if  
they can

In this blindness, there is no sin too great for the unchaste man to commit, if it is necessary to his ends ; if it is required to make an enemy of his best friend, he does so ; to trouble

his brothers and sisters, he makes little scruple of that ; to dishonor his father and mother, he does so without hesitation ; if he must keep up appearances by receiving the sacraments sometimes, sacrilegious confessions, communions, and masses heard without profit, through want of true sorrow, are small matters to him. He has no respect for holy places consecrated to God, if he can there satisfy his lust by impure looks and desires. The blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle does not frighten him any more than if It were a dead thing ; for in Its very presence his heart is filled with filthy thoughts, and his eyes seek for new objects of gratification. Mention any of the greatest sins, such as murder, parricide, heresy, idolatry, which he is not ready to commit, for the sake of his impure love.

King David, the holiest of men, imbrued his hands in the blood of Urias, his most faithful and innocent soldier, on account of an impure passion. King Solomon, whose wisdom the world wondered at, bent his knee before idols of wood and stone, and offered incense to them ; to such a degree of folly was he brought by impurity. Tertullian says of him : “ Solomon lost the glory that he had with God, by women who brought him into idolatry.”<sup>1</sup> The city of Lubeck, as Drexelius narrates,<sup>2</sup> was shocked by the example of a young man of good family, who after a long indulgence in impurity, became so infatuated with a person of beautiful appearance, that neither the entreaties of his mother and his relatives, nor the fear of God, nor his decaying health, nor the loss of his wealth could bring him to repentance ; so that he at last was reduced to poverty and distress. His mother, who had hitherto supplied all his wants, seeing the bad use he made of what she gave him, refused to do any more for him ; so that the young man, blinded by his passion, rushed on her with drawn sword, threw her down and threatened to take her life, unless she gave him money to carry on his infamous amours. When his crime became known, he was afraid of being severely punished for it, so he withdrew with his companion into a house of public shame, and lived there until he had spent all the money he had extorted from his mother, as well as what he could get by selling his clothes ; until at last being reduced to the extreme of destitution, in a fit of madness he thrust a long knife into his breast and

gain their  
end by it.

Shown by  
examples.

<sup>1</sup> Solomon quam habuit in Deo gloriam, amisit per mulierem, in idololatram usque pertractus.—Tert. 1. s. contr. Marc.

<sup>2</sup> Drexel, Vicet L. 2, c. 12.

kept turning it round and enlarging the wound (as was verified after by an examination of the dead body) until he breathed forth his accursed soul. In our own times religious and priests have been known to leave their convents, and to forget their sacred character, to deny their faith and become heretics, and nearly always that they might indulge in impurity. If there are any real atheists amongst Christians (that there are real atheists who do not believe in God there is unfortunately no doubt) but if there are any such amongst Christians, they are those who are blinded by the passion of impurity, to such an extent that although they make outward profession of Christianity, they really do not believe properly in God or in any of His truths. This is almost the only vice which makes a man have recourse to witch-craft and devilry, and brings him so far as to deny God and His Saints, and make himself a slave of the devil, for the sake of gratifying his passions, as is proved by many examples, which time does not suffer me to narrate.

They are then blinded in their understanding.

Oh, how I pity poor Tobias, when he lost his sight! "Joy be to thee always;" said the Angel Raphael to him. Alas, said the blind man, "What manner of joy shall be to me, who sit in darkness and see not the light of Heaven?"<sup>2</sup> But I could weep tears of blood, through heartfelt compassion for those unfortunates, who are so blinded by their filthy passion, that they cannot see their misfortune, and actually love it! O unfortunate souls, how are you to be helped? I hardly know how; for as there is no vice which so blinds the understanding, so there is none which so hardens the will in evil, as we shall see in the

### Second Part.

Hence they are also hardened in the will, and do not think of amending.

This follows necessarily from the first part, and therefore does not need much proof. For, as the will cannot work unless the understanding goes before with its light and knowledge, it is evident that when the understanding is blinded to good, as is the case with those who are given to impurity, the will cannot be led on to good. There is a great difference between the maladies of the body and those of the soul; if I am attacked by a dangerous fever, I may be cured although I know nothing of the nature of my illness, nay, even if through the violence of the disease, I am utterly unconscious, it is enough if the doctor

<sup>1</sup> Gaudium tibi sit semper.—Tob. v. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Quale gaudium mihi erit, qui in tenebris sedeo, et lumen cœli non video?—Ibid, 12.

knows what to do to cure me. But if I am sick in the soul, that is, in the state of sin, it is not enough that God, the only Physician of souls, knows my miserable state and can cure it; I must first see the malice of my sin, and the misery of my condition, in order to help in the work of my cure by repentance and a purpose of amendment. But what hope of repentance can an unchaste man have? How can he have it, since he is so blinded, that he does not even know the malice, misery and danger of his state, and therefore pays no attention to it?

Besides, even if he did open his eyes and see his misery, it is almost an impossibility for him to resolve to abandon it, and to hate above every evil what he hitherto loved more than anything else; nay, humanly speaking, it is an impossibility for him to renounce an impure passion and affection, as long as he is in the occasion of it. We know that bad habits become a sort of necessity; but there is none that takes a quicker hold of the heart, strikes deeper root and lasts longer than impurity, when once one has become addicted to it. Have you never remarked what the ivy does to the oak? It first creeps over the outside of the bark, and as it gets stronger, it grows into the oak and forms but one tree with it. Try now to separate them from each other, and you will find that you cannot tear down the ivy without bringing away the bark of the oak, and so killing it. So it is with carnal pleasures. The desires of them increase with continued indulgence, until they become a second nature, so that it is easier to separate the soul from the body, than to take them out of the heart. This is the vice of which God says in the Book of Job: "His bones shall be filled with the vices of his youth, and they shall sleep with him in the dust. For when evil shall be sweet in his mouth, he will hide it under his tongue."<sup>1</sup> "His sin even to hell."<sup>2</sup> I know well that there is nothing impossible to the Almighty, but if anything were impossible to Him, it would be the conversion of one who is entangled in the meshes of an impure love; for what means could God use to bring him to true repentance, as long as he is in the occasion which foment his passion? When camphor is once set alight, it defies all efforts to put it out, and burns even under the water. Agricola says: "The nature of camphor is so suit-

And humanly speaking, will not amend.

<sup>1</sup> *Ossa ejus implebuntur vitilis adolescentiæ ejus, et cum eo in pulvere dormient. Cum enim dulce fuerit in ore ejus malum, abscondet illud sub lingua sua.*—Job xx. 11, 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Usque ad inferos peccatum illius.*—*Ibid.*, xxiv. 19.

able to fire, that when it is once alight, it burns until it is altogether consumed, and will burn even under water.”<sup>1</sup> See the unhappy state of an impure man. Isaias says, using the words of the Holy Ghost: “You shall conceive heat, . . . your breath as fire shall devour you. And the people shall be as ashes after a fire.”<sup>2</sup> And the Prophet Ezechiel: “Thy uncleanness is execrable; because I desire to cleanse thee and thou art not cleansed from thy filthiness;” that, I have not been able to do; “Neither shalt thou be cleansed before I cause my indignation to rest in thee.”<sup>3</sup>

Shown by  
an example.

It is a terrible thing that Father Veja relates of a Sicilian merchant, who went to the Indies in pursuit of wealth, accompanied by his paramour. After a few days they were overtaken by a fearful tempest, which so frightened them, that they resolved to be reconciled to God in the Sacrament of Penance, and to separate from each other. The tempest ceased, and they arrived safe at Manilla. There they forgot their resolution, and recommenced their former sinful life. After some time they again embarked, and such a great storm arose that the ship was driven on a rock and nearly all on board perished. The merchant, by a special act of divine goodness, was enabled to hold on to a piece of the wreck and so to keep his head above water, and what is still more to be wondered at, his companion in sin was enabled to do the same. In this dangerous condition, they floated about for some time, cursing the wicked life they had been leading, and, shedding tears of bitter sorrow, they promised God earnestly that if He would save them, they would never again offend Him by the sin of impurity. The merciful God heard their prayer and on the following day they reached land, and again arrived at Manilla. Who would not think that now at least, the sinful man would have entered a monastery, and the woman, like another Magdalen, have done penance in a cave? And yet they returned to their former mode of life. But God was still patient with them, and found another means of trying to bring them to do penance; He sent a mortal illness to the merchant, so that according to the opinions of the physicians,

<sup>1</sup> Camphoræ natura adeo est amica ignibus, ut si eos semel conceperit, usque dum tota consumatur ardeat. et accensa non extinguatur, ardens in aquis.—Georg. Agricola, de Nat. Fossil., cap. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Concipietis ardorem, . . . spiritus vester ut ignis vorabit vos. Et erunt populi quasi de incendio cinis.—Isa. xxxiii. 11, 12.

<sup>3</sup> Immunditia tua execrabilis, quia mundare te volui, et non es mundata a sordibus tuis. sed nec mundaberis prius, donec quiescere factam indignationem meam in te.—Ezech. xxiv. 13.

there was no hope of his recovery. What shall I do now, said the sick man? How can I prepare myself for death? There is no hope for me; I am lost. He gave the same answer to the priest who went to give him the last Sacraments; still the latter was so far successful, that the dying man was induced to send away his accomplice in guilt, after which he confessed his sins and received the other Sacraments. Now, at last it seemed as if he had finally made his peace with God, but, oh terrible power of impure desire! no sooner had he begun to get a little better, so that the doctors told him he was out of danger, than he began to repent of having turned his paramour out of doors, and sending for her, he begged her pardon for having done so, throwing the blame on the stupidity of the priest, as he phrased it, who had frightened him with the danger of death; then taking her by the hand, he leaned forward to embrace her, and in so doing, gave up his sinful soul to the devil. So true are the words, "His sin even to hell," so that penance even in the last moment can hardly be a real supernatural penance.

I no longer wonder at that which the Abbot Rupert at first found so strange; namely, that when Noe heard from God that the world was to be destroyed by a deluge, he did not have recourse to the divine mercy in prayer: "The end of all flesh is come before me; the earth is filled with iniquity through them, and I will destroy them with the earth."<sup>1</sup> Noe knew well that he was pleasing to God, and that his prayers would be heard, why then did he not try to avert such a terrible punishment from the human race? Could he not at least have asked God to mitigate it a little, and to destroy only some families? Certainly, Moses acted quite differently when God in His anger threatened to destroy all the people of Israel; for he offered himself as a victim to appease the divine anger: "Either forgive them this trespass, or if thou do not, strike me out of the book that Thou hast written;"<sup>2</sup> Noe, on the contrary, never said a word to prevent the destruction of the whole world: "Noe, a just and perfect man, remains silent and does not pray for the unjust," says Rupert, "nor try to appease the anger of God that they may not be punished."<sup>3</sup> This is the reason, my dear

Unless God gives them a wonderful grace which He gives to few.

<sup>1</sup> Finis universæ carnis venit coram me: repleta est terra iniquitate a facie eorum, et ego disperdam eos cum terra.—Gen. vi. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Aut dimitte eis hanc noxam, aut si non facis, dele me de libro tuo quem scripsisti.—Exod. xxxii. 31, 32.

<sup>3</sup> Audit Noe vir justus atque perfectus, et tacet, nullamque precem pro injustis offert, ut Deum teneat, ut viam ejus suspendat.—Rupert, de Vict., l. 2, c. 29.

brethren. The sin of the Israelites in the desert was idolatry, a far greater sin than impurity, but not so difficult to repent of and to avoid, and therefore, after the first promise on the part of Moses, idolatry disappeared. On the other hand, at the time of the deluge, the vice of impurity had gained the upper hand: "The sons of God seeing the daughters of men, that they were fair, took to themselves wives of all which they chose."<sup>1</sup> Noe saw that there was no hope of repentance in such a case, and therefore he did not think it worth his while to pray. The event justified his anticipations, for we do not read of a single one being converted, in spite of the threatened punishment. Hence, all spiritual writers agree in saying that it requires a miracle of grace to make an unchaste man leave off his vicious habits and unlawful amours, and be really converted. What a great happiness it was for you, Augustine, to get that wonderful grace through the prayers and tears that your holy mother Monica offered for you during the space of seventeen years! You acknowledge yourself that you so often wished to be free from the burden, and yet, that you could not overcome yourself nor give up your vicious habits: "I groaned under the iron bondage of my own will."<sup>2</sup> You acknowledge that God, in His mercy, drew you out of the abyss, as it were, by the hair of the head. Oh, you who now-a-days are converted, and have given up your impure habits, you too can speak of your happiness! Certainly you have great reason to return humble thanks every day of your lives to God, for the extraordinary grace by which He freed you from the occasion of sin, either through the death of your accomplice, or by some other act of His power. Is it not true, that if that occasion was not taken away, it would be impossible for you to resolve to quit it? You must acknowledge in your conscience that such is the case; that you neither could, nor would have done so.

But they do not even desire such a grace.

But you, unhappy people who are still living in sin, do not expect that God will give you a grace which He bestows upon hardly one in a hundred. Yet, what am I saying? You do not even wish for that grace! A physician once said to a sick man, who was asking him for something to allay his thirst: "Wait, and I will give you what you want." "Good," said the sick man; "but I do not wish the thirst to be taken away altogether."<sup>3</sup> He

<sup>1</sup> *Videntes filii Dei filias hominum quod essent pulchræ, acceperunt sibi uxores ex omnibus, quas elegerant.—Gen. vi. 2.*

<sup>2</sup> *Suspirabam ligatus ferrea mea voluntate.*

<sup>3</sup> *Sed ita ut non omnino tollatur sitis.*

wished to feel a little thirsty, that he might have more pleasure in drinking. So it is with the impure; they do not wish to be freed from their desires, that they may have the pleasure of gratifying them. St. Augustine says of himself: "I prayed to Thee, O Lord, and yet, I was afraid Thou wouldst hear me too quickly, and free me from the disease of concupiscence, which I preferred to gratify rather than to overcome."<sup>1</sup>

How can there be any hope of conversion under such circumstances? Terrible are the words of the Prophet Osee; they should make one dread even the name of this vice: "They will not set their thoughts to return to their God;"<sup>2</sup> that is, not only will they refuse to be converted, but they will not even once turn their thoughts to God. And why not? "For the spirit of fornication is in the midst of them, and they have not known the Lord."<sup>3</sup> And will they then never think of conversion? No, not even in old age; when their bodily strength has left them, their hearts will still be full of impure desires. But will they not think of God on their death-beds, when most men try to think of Him? No, not even then, and even then least of all; their sin is even to hell. Would to God, my dear brethren, that this were not confirmed by bitter experience!

Therefore they are rarely converted, even on their death-beds.

Passing over the numerous examples that are given in books, I will relate one that was told me by one of our Fathers who is still living. He was once called to a dying man, who confessed his sins, and received the last Sacraments with every mark of fervor, so that the Father went away consoled, thinking the man well prepared for death. Hardly had he left the house, when the maid-servant came running after him, calling him back. What is the matter? asked the Father, is he dead already? No said the maid-servant, with pallid countenance; it is with me that the sick man used to sin; when you went away I had to go into his room for something, and as soon as he saw me, he made impure proposals to me, saying that if I consented, he would die satisfied. The Father ran back at once, but found the man speechless; he tried his best to arouse him to renew his sorrow for sin, but while he was so engaged, the man died. Father Segneri relates a nearly similar example of a girl who lived in improper intimacy with her intended husband (unfortunately such sins are only too common before marriage), God in his

Shown by examples.

<sup>1</sup> Timebam Domine, ne me cito exaudires, et cito sanares a morbo concupiscentiæ; quam malebam expleri, quam extingui.—S. Aug. Confess., l. 8, c. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Non dabunt cogitationes suas, ut revertantur ad Deum suum.—Osee v. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Quia spiritus fornicationum in medio eorum, et Dominum non cognoverunt.—Ibid.

mercy sent her a dangerous illness, in order to put a stop to her crime; the illness lasted some months, so that she had time to repent. She profited by the opportunity and often renewed her sorrow and detestation of her sins, with a firm purpose of amendment. At last she asked her confessor's leave to speak to her partner in guilt, and to warn him to repent, that he might not lose his soul. The priest incautiously consented, not suspecting any evil, and suggested to her what she should say to warn him; but hardly had she laid eyes on her lover, when she forgot all she had intended to say; the old, impure flame burst forth anew, and she cried out with all the strength she had left: **I have always loved you with my whole heart, and it is now that I can best prove my love for you; I know that I am to be damned for your sake, but no matter; I am quite willing that it should be so.** With these words she fell back exhausted and gave up her unhappy soul! The priest and the young man, who were standing by, were almost frightened out of their lives. **O desperate passion! "O infernal flame of impure love!"**<sup>1</sup> (I might cry out with St. Jerome), which can hardly be extinguished until it is buried in the flames of hell.

Conclusion  
and dif-  
ferent ex-  
hortations.

Unfortunate souls, what shall I say to you? I can be sorry for you, and that is about all; unless the Almighty God in His mercy, gives you some wonderful grace and opens your eyes! Innocent souls, it is to warn you that I have undertaken to speak of this subject; it is for you also that I repeat the conclusion of my last sermon: Bless God, and thank Him for the special grace by which he has hitherto preserved you from this accursed vice; but be all the more careful to preserve the precious treasure of your purity. The very first thing you learn from this vice, is hurtful to your innocence; a single moment in dangerous company, may be for you the beginning of an unhappy eternity; a single immodest look, or any other occasion, may be the first unhappy moment of an accursed life: a single immodest conversation, or an impure love tale may be the cause of your having to weep and gnash your teeth in hell; a single impure thought, wilfully indulged in, may be the cause of final impenitence to you! Do not tire of the constant violence you must use in combating the desires of the flesh; victory will be followed by an exceeding great reward. What glory for you, chaste souls, to be able to offer a pure sacrifice to the Almighty! The angels in Heaven will honor you as their dearest friends;

<sup>1</sup> O ignis infernalis luxuria!

the Immaculate Virgin and Mother of God will take you under her special protection, as her beloved children ; Jesus Christ, the Spouse of chaste hearts, will invite you to His eternal and joyous marriage feast ; the calm and peace of your own consciences will give you more comfort and pleasure, than all earthly delights, that the world and the flesh can give, and you can rejoice in the sure hope that you are dear children of God, who will follow the Lamb into eternal joys. Amen.

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*FOURTEENTH SERMON.*

**ON THE ANGER OF GOD AGAINST THE VICE OF IMPURITY.**

**Subject.**

1. There is no vice which so excites the anger of God. 2. None against which God has given more proofs of His anger, than the vice of lust and impure love.—*Preached on the twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost.*

**Text.**

*Iratus Dominus ejus, tradidit eum tortoribus.*—Matth. xviii. 34.

“ And his lord being angry, delivered him to the torturers.”

**Introduction.**

It was a great act of mercy on the part of this lord to grant the humble petition of his servant, and not only to let him go free, and unpunished, but also to forgive him his debts. This parable, my dear brethren, is an image of the great mercy of God, in admitting to His friendship the sinner who has been guilty of countless crimes, on the sole condition of his being really sorry for them, a sorrow that he may have in a moment of time ; and the sins thus forgiven, are forgiven for ever. Eternal praise and thanks to Thee, O most merciful God ! What a happiness for me and other poor sinners, that we have to do with a God of such infinite goodness ! Alas ! how could I pay the debts I have contracted towards Thee by my sins, if Thou wert not so generous in forgiving them ? But, oh, how ungrateful we are ; it is this very goodness which makes many sinners offend with all the greater audacity and heap debt upon debt,

thinking that they will have no difficulty in obtaining pardon afterwards. Such presumption, my dear brethren, seems to be found chiefly among those who unfortunately form the largest class of sinners, I mean those who are addicted to impurity, and unlawful indulgence in sensual passion, as we have seen in the last sermon. What harm is it, they think, to gratify myself this once? It is a mere human failing; a natural weakness, which God must take pity on; it is a sin that He will easily forgive, as He knows how weak we are, etc. In that way people make nothing of it. I mean to speak against that erroneous and presumptuous opinion in to-day's sermon, and to show that there is no sin that deserves less patience, and towards which God has shown less patience, than the sin of impurity, and that generally speaking, God deals with the impure, as the master in to-day's Gospel did with his servant, when the latter incurred his anger the second time; "And his lord being angry, delivered him to the torturers." To this end I say—

#### Plan of Discourse.

*There is no vice which so excites the anger of God, as the vice of lust and impure love. That I will show in the first part. There is no vice against which God has given more proofs of His anger, than the vice of lust and impure love. That I will show in the second part.*

O God of justice, grant that the threats of Thy anger and punishment may inspire us with a horror of this odious vice, that we may serve Thee with chaste bodies and souls; this we ask of Thee through the intercession of Thy Immaculate Mother, and the holy angels guardian.

The malice of every sin consists in its turning away the heart of man from his Creator to creatures.

What is the reason that the good and infinitely merciful God, whose nature is goodness itself, and who loved us men even unto death, is so exasperated by one sin, that He pursues the sinner with His bitterest anger, as the Wise Man says: "To God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike;"<sup>1</sup> so that He punishes that sin with hell? The nature of this sin itself is the answer to my question; for it is a contempt of God, or, as theologians say: "A turning away of the heart from the Creator," whom we should love above all things, "and attaching it to creatures,"<sup>2</sup> whom we should love only for God's sake. Every vice has the same bad quality; the ambitious man turns

<sup>1</sup> Odio sunt Deo impius, et impietas ejus.—Wis. xiv. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Aversio a creatore, et conversio ad creaturas.

away from his Creator, to whom alone honor is due, and seeks empty esteem and praise from rational creatures. The avaricious man turns away his heart from God, who is the greatest good, and fixes it on lifeless things, such as money and worldly goods. So that it is true of all vices, that, "To God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike."

But there is hardly any sin which so turns away the heart of man from God, and attaches it to creatures, as the sin of impurity and unchaste love. St. Thomas says: "Lust especially turns man away from God;"<sup>1</sup> for it makes him forget God altogether, and despise Him, for the sake of a vile pleasure; as the Almighty Himself complains by the Prophet Ezechiel: "Thou hast cast Me off behind thy body."<sup>2</sup> To make this clearer; there is no one who doubts that idolatry is a detestable sin, by which God is denied and abandoned; for by it, man subjects the Most High to the judgments of his own mind, and adores senseless stocks and stones as gods. But, due proportions being observed, this is what the impure man does, whose heart is attached to a creature by an unchaste passion. Is it not so? I take all to witness who have experienced this passion, and I ask them, if they do not show far more honor to the object of their idolatry, than to God? They have no longer any relish for God, and for divine things, as I have shown in a former discourse; they have no zeal for piety and good works, no desire for heavenly goods, no fervor in prayer; their only desire is to stifle the reproaches of conscience, and to forget God, that they may sin without anxiety and thus lose God altogether. Their forgetfulness of God goes so far, that they value the love of the object of their sinful passion more than the love of God; so that they are prepared to give up all hopes of Heaven, and to forfeit all the divine promises of eternal joys, provided God leaves them the creature on whom they have fixed their hearts.

Such is especially the case with impurity.

We never hear an avaricious man say to his money, or an ambitious man to his dignity, thou art my God. It is only impure passion which can bring a reasoning being to such a degree of madness. My heart, my soul, my treasure, such are the titles given to a miserable worm of the earth! And what is that but placing one's last end, and highest good in creatures? What is that but denying the true God, and adoring an earthly

He who indulges an impure passion denies God and adores a creature.

<sup>1</sup> Per luxuriam maxime recedit a Deo.—D. Thom. 1. 2. qu. 73, a. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Projecisti me post corpus tuum.—Ezech. xxiii. 35.

idol? Nay, according to Tertullian, there is a far greater degree of malice in impure love, on the part of a Christian, than in idolatry and denial of the faith. And he is quite right. Why? Because the Christian who denies God, and adores an idol, does so through fear of torture; while the unchaste man gives up God freely in order to gratify his passion. The unchaste man acts with full determination of the will; the apostate Christian acts through fear of pain. Which of the two, asks Tertullian, has the most to answer for? "Which is the worst apostate: he who denies Christ in torments, or he who denies Him in pleasure?"<sup>1</sup>

He is worse than others who deny Christ.

Unhappy Christians, who, through fear of a tyrant, denied God, and adored stocks and stones! You have committed a fearful sin; but I pity you with all my heart, for the drawn swords that were to take your lives away, the crosses, wheels and gibbets on which you were to be tortured to death, the red-hot irons and burning caldrons, the melted lead, the terrible rack and other instruments of torture, were held out to terrify you; and certainly they were enough to make the bravest hang back and deny his faith. Therefore, it is not so much to be wondered at if you outwardly apostatized. But you, wicked Christians, who reject your God, and adore a wretched creature, what excuse have you? What has forced you to do so? What torments have you had to fear? None; nothing but the wilfulness of an untamed passion has brought you to such a degree of impiety. Whose apostasy is the more shameful? Who are more deserving of the anger of God, you, or the renegades of old?

He takes his heart away from God altogether, and gives it to his idol.

Besides, in what consisted the honor shown by the apostate Christians to idols? In bending the knee, or bowing the head, or burning a little incense; that is all they did to show their adoration of a creature; in most cases, their minds and hearts were still attached to the true God. But, impure man, what do you keep for your God? Nothing. And what do you offer to your idol? Everything without exception, that you can offer. Holy Job says: "I made a covenant with my eyes that I would not so much as think on a virgin."<sup>2</sup> And why, O holy Prophet, were you so careful? "For what part should God above have in me, and what inheritance the Almighty from on high?"<sup>3</sup> If

<sup>1</sup> Quis magis negavit, qui Christum vexatus, an qui delectatus amisit?

<sup>2</sup> Pepigi foedis cum oculis meis, ut ne cogitarem quidem de virgine.—Job xxxi. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Quam enim partem haberet in me Deus desuper, et hereditatem Omnipotens de excelsis?  
—Ibid. 2.

*The Anger of God against the Vice of Impurity.* 201

I allowed my eyes to wander at will, I should soon become a prey to impure desires, and then, what part would God have in me? In other sins and vices man leaves something for God; if the soul is stained, the body is not defiled; if the mind is turned away from God, the senses at least are free from sin. Impurity alone infects the whole being like a pestilence; eyes, ears, tongue, hands, memory, imagination, understanding, heart and will, all are occupied in lustful excesses; all are sacrificed to the sinful idol. Money and wealth, honor and good name, authority and dignity, sleep and rest, freedom and health, you are all counted as of no value; you are sacrificed at once for the sake of a miserable creature!

All natural inclinations, tendencies and proclivities, no matter how violent they are, are restrained, nay, even eradicated, if the object of the sinful passion requires it; a vindictive man forgives his enemy, if his idol intercedes for him; an irascible man becomes as meek as a lamb; a proud man is ready to humble himself; a coward grows bold; a brave man, as timid as a child; a miser turns into a spendthrift; a drunkard becomes temperate, and conquers the desire for drink, that he would otherwise hardly hope to conquer; even the impious man reforms in everything that concerns the other vices, if his idol expects it of him.

Holy law of God! Gospel of Jesus Christ! Life of the Incarnate God! Example of the Saints of God! Inspirations of the Holy Ghost! Exhortations of the angels guardian! Word of God, you cry so loud and so often, and command so earnestly the mortification of the passions, the denial of one's self, true humility and meekness, patience in trials, love of one's enemies, moderation in eating and drinking, and contempt of earthly goods! And what do you effect? Nothing at all in most cases; all your commands are neglected, all your power is insufficient to move the human heart. Men close their ears and refuse to listen to you; they look on it as an impossibility to do as you command. But when a brutish passion speaks, when a miserable creature shows by a look or a smile that such is her pleasure, oh, then, everything is easy, there is no difficulty any more in any act of obedience! Every joy and sorrow, and suffering and satisfaction of soul and body is shared with the object of unlawful love. What an idolatrous dependence of one's whole being on the whim of a mere creature!

And has not that jealous God, who wishes to be loved above all things, a right to be angry at such a crime? O God of in-

To please this idol, he restrains all his other evil inclinations.

Which he would never do for the sake of God and his love.

Therefore God must be most

wroth with  
such a  
crime.

finite perfection, Thou hast created man for Thyself alone ; Thou hast placed one great command above all others, and Thou sayest to each one, "Thou shalt love ;" whom ? None but the Lord thy God. Thou hast given us a heart, a soul, an understanding, a memory, a will, outward senses and bodily strength, and of these things our whole nature is made up, and with all these Thou commandest us to love Thee : "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind." <sup>1</sup> See, O Lord, how despite of Thee, the impure man does quite the contrary ; his whole heart and mind and all his faculties of soul and body are given up to lust, and not even the least part of them is given to Thee ; they are all devoted to the love of a wretched creature. And can any one call that a small vice, or try to make little of it ? Can a sin of that kind be considered as a mere human frailty, which the merciful God will surely pardon ? No, Christians ; if every mortal sin excites the anger of God, because it means a turning away of the heart from Him in order to fix it on creatures, it follows as a matter of course that the vice of impurity and unchaste love is more deserving of the divine anger than any other sin, because it takes away the whole heart, the whole being from God, and devotes it to the love of a creature. And so it is, my dear brethren, as we learn from experience, for since the beginning of the world no vice has been so severely punished by God, as the vice of impurity and unchaste love, as I shall show in the

### Second Part.

All the  
divine per-  
fections are  
worthy of  
admiration.

There are none of the divine perfections which I find so hard to understand as the mercy and patience of God in bearing with sinners. An Almighty Lord, who by one act of His will created Heaven and earth out of nothing, and who could create infinite numbers of them with just as little trouble ; a Lord of infinite wisdom, who knows every movement of all His creatures from the highest angel to the lowest worm that crawls the earth, and whose knowledge extends to all the past and the future, without being disordered or wearied by the multiplicity and variety of its objects ; an all-wise Lord whom the heavens and the earth cannot contain, and whom no space can enclose ; an all-wise Lord who created so many different creatures in such beautiful order,

<sup>1</sup> Diliges Dominum Deum tuum ex toto corde tuo, et in tota anima tua, et in tota mente tua.—*Matth. xxii. 37.*

that each has its appointed work to do, and without whose Providence not even a snow-flake falls to the ground ; a Lord of infinite justice who cannot allow the least good act to go unrewarded, or the least bad one to be unpunished ; a most holy Lord, at whose name all in Heaven and on earth and under the earth must tremble ; a Lord infinitely happy, who is not in want of any creature to increase His happiness ; a Lord of infinite beauty, from whom comes all that is beautiful, who has in Himself infinite good, and is worthy of infinite love for His own sake ; these are perfections that our weak understanding must wonder at, but still it must acknowledge that they all belong to God in the highest degree.

But that such a great Lord should allow a creature, whom He can annihilate at any moment without any loss to Himself, to despise and treat Him contemptuously by mortal sin, while He bears the insult with the greatest patience, and even longs for the offending creature to return to Him ; that is what I find most difficult to understand. Try to remember, O sinner, how many years you have been at enmity with this great God ! Count the sins you have committed. See what harm God has done you during that time, nay, reckon up rather the benefits He has been constantly heaping upon you, when He could have easily hurled you into hell ; and then you may cry out, O God of patience and long-suffering, how inconceivably great is Thy mercy, to me a wretched sinner !

Least of all can we understand God's patience in dealing with sinners.

What am I to conclude from this, my dear brethren ? That impurity must be an intolerable vice in the sight of God, for it is the only vice almost, which makes God forget His patience and mercy, and which has at all times, provoked Him to pour out the vials of His bitterest wrath on the sinner. Read the Old and New Testaments, and you will find the words of St. Thomas of Villanova verified : " We read that the crime of lust is punished more severely than other crimes." <sup>1</sup> Nay, you will find that nearly all the remarkable examples of the divine anger recorded in Scripture are due to lust alone.

Hence God has a special hatred of impurity, since he always punishes it so severely.

You will find in the sixth chapter of the Book of Genesis, the history of that fearful punishment, the Deluge, in which the whole human race was destroyed, with the exception of eight individuals ; and the most of those who thus perished, were in the state of sin, and were condemned to hell. " My spirit shall not remain in man forever, because he is flesh," said

As is seen in the history of the deluge.

<sup>1</sup> *Luxuriæ facinus præ aliis atrociori vindicta punitum legimus.*

God in His anger to Noe ; And being touched inwardly with sorrow of heart, He said : “ I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth, from man even to beasts, from the creeping thing even to the fowls of the air ; for it repenteth me that I have made them.”<sup>1</sup> Certainly those expressions make the divine anger sufficiently evident. As Lessius says, the world was at that time in the bloom of its youth, and was more populous than now, because people lived then to be seven, eight, and nine hundred years old, and were allowed to practice polygamy ; so that we can easily imagine what a vast number of people were born in the sixteen hundred years that elapsed between the Creation and the Deluge. Doubtless there were many innocent people amongst them, at least as little children. And yet that vast multitude found no mercy from God, because it had to bear the punishment of impurity. Even while they were engaged in their sensual gratifications, the Deluge overwhelmed them and swept them all away, innocent and guilty together ; as St. Matthew says : “ For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, even till that day in which Noe entered into the Ark and they knew not till the Flood came and took them all away.”<sup>2</sup> The waters gushed up from the earth, and poured in torrents down from the heavens ; houses were carried away, the highest trees afforded no refuge, not even the mountain tops were safe resting places, “ For the water was fifteen cubits higher than the mountains which it covered.”<sup>3</sup> With the exception of the few who were in the Ark, all human beings, as well as beasts, birds and every living thing, were destroyed ; “ And all men and all things wherein there was the breath of life on the earth, died.”<sup>4</sup> Thus God punished the impurities of the world by such a vast number of deaths, and washed away its filth by the waters of the Deluge.

That is shown by the fate of Sodom and Gomorrha.

You will read in the nineteenth chapter of Genesis, of a whole country, seventy miles in circumference according to Cornelius a Lapide, in which Sodom, Gomorrha and other towns were sit-

<sup>1</sup> Non permanebit spiritus meus in homine in æternum, quia caro est . . . Et tactus dolore cordis intrinsecus, delebo, inquit, hominem, quem creavi, a facie terræ, ab homine usque ad animantia, a reptilibus usque ad volucres cœli : poenitet enim me fecisse eos.—Gen. vi. 3, 6, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Sicut enim erant in diebus ante diluivium comedentes et bibentes, nubentes et nuptul tradentes, usque ad eum diem, quo intravit Noe in arcam, et non cognoverunt, donec venit diluivium, et tulit omnes.—Matth. xxiv. 38, 39.

<sup>3</sup> Quindecim cubitis altior fuit aqua super montes, quos operuerat.—Gen. vii. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Universi homines et cuncta, in quibus spiraculum vitæ est in terra, mortua sunt.—Ibid. 21, 22.

uated, being destroyed by fire sent from Heaven, and reduced to ashes, so that after so many thousand years, the fruit of that country is still nothing but ashes inside, an undying evidence of the implacable hatred that God bore to the sin of its inhabitants. And what was that sin? Nothing else but brutal lust; and therefore "The Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrha brimstone and fire from Heaven. And He destroyed these cities and all the country about, all the inhabitants of the cities, and all things that spring from the earth." <sup>1</sup> Before this terrible punishment was inflicted, Abraham, that faithful servant and friend of God, exhausted himself in prayers and tears to avert the divine anger from those unfortunate cities. How often did he not pray to God? With what persistency did he not ask Him to forgive those people? But all his prayers and tears could not avert the punishment. God, who is otherwise so ready to hear the prayers of His servants, and who allows Himself as it were to be compelled to grant them, was not in the least moved on this occasion, to mercy and pity. Those impure people were to be consumed by fire, so that all impure men might learn from their example to dread the fire of hell which awaits them.

You will read in the twenty-fifth chapter of the Book of Numbers, how twenty-four thousand of the chosen people of God were condemned to die, some by the cross and gibbet, others by the sword. What a terrible act of justice! Twenty-four thousand people would make a not inconsiderable town, and had they all to die a violent death? What grief there must have been amongst the spectators of that fearful tragedy! How the women wept and lamented on seeing their husbands, fathers, brothers, children and friends crucified, or hanged, or cut to pieces with the sword! How many brave generals of the Israelite army were thus massacred! How many of the noblest families utterly extinguished! Yet the command of God had to be obeyed; the noblest were condemned to the gallows, the others were slain by their neighbors and friends: "The Lord being angry, said to Moses: Take all the princes of the people and hang them up on gibbets against the sun, that my fury may be turned away from Israel." <sup>2</sup> Still the punishment was not enough; "And Moses said to the judges of Israel: Let every man kill his

By what  
happened  
to the  
Israelites.

<sup>1</sup> Dominus pluit super Sodomam et Gomorrhā sulphur et ignem a Domino de cœlo; et subvertit civitates has, et omnem circa regionem, universos habitatores urbium, et cuncta terræ virentia.—Gen. xix. 24, 25.

<sup>2</sup> Iratus Dominus, ait ad Moysen: Tolle cunctos principes populi, et suspende eos contra solem in patibulis, ut avertatur furor meus ab Israel.—Num. xxv. 3, 4.

neighbors . . . . ; And there was slain four and twenty thousand men.”<sup>1</sup> The principal reason of this severe punishment was the impurity of the people : “ The people committed fornication with the daughters of Moab.”<sup>2</sup>

And to the  
tribe of  
Benjamin.

You will read in the twentieth chapter of the Book of Judges, that only a few of the men of Gabaa were found guilty of impurely abusing a poor woman, and what was the consequence ? Punishment was inflicted, not only on the evil-doers, but also on the whole town of Gabaa and the surrounding country ; eighteen thousand were slain before the gates of the town, and five thousand were killed in flight, and soon after, two thousand more ; so that in one day five and twenty thousand men were slain on account of the sin of impurity. Lest we should think that this was merely the result of accident and not a punishment of lust, God has shown that He was the Author of it, and that it was His Almighty power which strengthened the arms that wielded the sword : “ And the Lord defeated them before the children of Israel, and they slew of them in that day five and twenty thousand, and one hundred, all fighting men.”<sup>3</sup> Besides this, all the towns and villages of the tribe of Benjamin were burned down, and all the people who were left were cut down remorselessly ; not even the dumb beasts were spared. Thus that once populous country was filled with dead bodies, and only six hundred men of the whole tribe escaped, who had to keep to the mountains for one hundred and twenty days. Thus fire, bloodshed and devastation were the punishments inflicted on so many for the impurity of a few, and that by a most just, and at the same time, a most merciful God ; “ The Lord defeated them.”

And to the  
Ninivites.

In the third chapter of the Book of Jonas you will read the terrible prophecy that resounded through Ninive, the great city of three days journey ; “ Yet forty days, and Ninive shall be destroyed.”<sup>4</sup> A prophecy that would surely have been fulfilled, and, as interpreters say, solely in punishment of impurity, if the inhabitants from the greatest to the least had not done penance in sack-cloth and ashes ; “ And the men of Ninive believed in God ; and they proclaimed a fast and put on sack-

<sup>1</sup> Dixitque Moyses ad iudices Israel : Occidat unusquisque proximus suos, . . . et occisi sunt viginti quatuor millia hominum.—Num. xxv. 5, 9.

<sup>2</sup> Fornicatus est populus cum filiabus Moab.—Ibid. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Percussitque eos Dominus in conspectu filiorum Israel, et interfecerunt ex eis in illo die viginti quinque millia et centum viros, omnes bellatores.—Judges xx. 35.

<sup>4</sup> Adhuc quadraginta dies, et Ninive subvertetur.—Jonas iii. 4.

cloth, from the greatest to the least.”<sup>1</sup> How would it have been for them if they had not done penance?

We read in profane history that the greatest monarchies of the world were destroyed through this vice. Sardanapulus lost Assyria; Balthassar, Chaldea; Darius, Persia; Cleopatra, Egypt; all through indulgence in carnal pleasures. Salvianus shows that the dismemberment of the Roman Empire took place when the vice of impurity was most prevalent. “God wished to show thereby,” he says, “how hateful and intolerable this vice is in His sight.”<sup>2</sup>

And from profane history.

Do you think, my dear brethren, that God hates it less now, than in former times? Were not the men of old made of flesh and blood, were they not weak mortals, as we are? Those who perished by water, fire and sword, what Holy Scripture had they to teach them chastity? What sacraments had they to strengthen them against temptation? Where was the Blood of Christ, by which we are now saved from the yoke and attacks of the devil? They defiled their bodies, but they were not made members of Jesus Christ by baptism; they had not become temples of the Holy Ghost, as we Christians have. They sinned, but they had not solemnly renounced the flesh and the devil in baptism as we have. If then the anger of God was so great against impurity in those times, what sort of punishment must unchaste Christians expect, since their sin is three and four-fold greater, so to speak, than the sins of those of ancient time?

Impurity is worse in Christians, than in older times.

Oh, if we could only see the cause of the chastisements and trials that afflict whole countries and provinces! If we were to ask: whence come the miseries and poverty that are now desolating Europe? Whence come the wars, the bad harvests, the scarcity and famine, the plagues and sicknesses, the inundations, the miserable mortality amongst cattle, the general poverty and want? They are, as Salvianus says, heralds of the divine anger, which is punishing the world on account of impurity; “God wishes to show how hateful and intolerable to Him is this vice.” Many a time has the Almighty given proofs of His anger against impurity, by miraculous signs. In England, as Ballard writes, a field of wheat ready for the sickle was once eaten up in a night by a swarm of most hideous flies; some of those flies were caught, and were found to have the words “ira,” on one wing, and “Dei” on the other; “ira Dei,” that is, anger of God: as if to

And therefore the anger of God against them is greater.

<sup>1</sup> Et crediderunt viri Ninivite in Deum, et predicaverunt jejunium, et vestiti sunt saccis a majore usque ad minorem.—Jonas iii. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ostendere Deus voluit quam odisset carnis libidinem.—Salv. l. 1, de Provid.

say: The cause of the destruction of your crop is the anger of God ; do not think we have come here by accident ; the anger of God has sent us.

and their  
punishment  
more  
severe.

I will say nothing of the punishment that the impure suffer individually ; it is a matter of daily experience. They suffer in their health by disgusting maladies which their excesses cause ; in their lives, which they shorten : in their honor which they sometimes lose by public disgrace ; in their repose, which is disturbed by remorse of conscience and mental anxiety, as I have already explained. And even if they had not those things to suffer, if they were left free and unhindered in the gratification of their passions, would not that be punishment enough ? Can a more fearful punishment be well imagined than the blinding of the understanding and the hardening of the will which all follow on this vice as its consequence, and do not cease until the soul is buried in hell ? O my God, I know that I have deserved Thy anger ; punish me in this life, I beg of Thee : behold, I offer Thee my head, my eyes, my ears, my tongue, my hands and feet and my whole body ; strike with Thy fatherly rod, as long as it pleases Thee ; but one thing I ask of Thee, “ Rebuke me not in Thy indignation, nor chastise me in Thy wrath ; ” <sup>1</sup> do not allow me to be blinded and hardened by my own wicked desires, for that is the worst punishment of all ; it is the punishment Thou inflictest on impure Christians, by which the most of them are lost forever.

Conclusion  
for the im-  
pure.

Ah, blind mortals, who are not yet terrified by those fearful chastisements, who still make so little of the shameful vice of impurity, and look upon it as a small fault that arises from human infirmity, and that God will easily pardon ; blind mortals, woe to you ! One day, when it is too late, you will learn that no vice so exasperates the Almighty, and incurs such severe punishment from Him in this life and in the next, as that very vice, which you fear so little to commit, and for which you hope to find pardon so easily !

For those  
who were  
formerly  
impure, but  
have re-  
pented.

To you who were perhaps formerly given to this vice, but who now, through a special grace of God, are freed from it, I have little to say, except that you must not be surprised if God sometimes sends you a fatherly chastisement in the way of crosses and trials. Oh, do not complain that you are treated harshly or unjustly ! Remember how you have treated the Almighty God ; think of the numbers who are now in hell for the very sins, and perhaps for fewer sins than you have committed. Say then,

<sup>1</sup> Ne in furore tuo arguas me, neque in ira tua corripias me.—Ps. vi. 2.

*The Anger of God against the Vice of Impurity.* 209

with humble hearts, in all trials : O my God, I accept this cross from Thy fatherly hand ; I know that I have deserved it, and a thousand times more ! May Thy holy name be blessed !

In the meantime, my dear brethren, that we may have none of these things to fear, let us fortify our hearts and minds once for all against this odious vice, and make a firm resolution rather to die a thousand times, than for the sake of such a short, brutish and dangerous pleasure, to offend God even by an impure thought, not to speak of impure words and actions. Such is the resolution we mean to keep with Thy help and grace O God. Amen.

*Another Introduction to the same sermon for the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin.*

**Text.**

*Postquam impleti sunt dies purgationis ejus secundum legem Moysi.*—Luke ii. 22.

“ And after the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished.”

O most pure and Immaculate Virgin, Mother of the Word Incarnate, how did the law of Moses, regarding this ceremony, affect thy sacred person, so that thou hast wished to submit to it? It was a hard law, the observance of which must necessarily have seemed derogatory to thy virginal purity ; for thou hadst to present thyself to the priest, like an ordinary woman, and to beg to be made clean. There is no doubt, my dear brethren, that she who conceived by the Holy Ghost, the Author of all sanctity, and who brought Him stainless into the world, was not bound by that law ; still, since she saw that her Son submitted to the law of circumcision, like a sinner, she wished to follow His example, and to submit to the law of purification, as if she needed it. Oh how pleasing a spectacle that was in the sight of Heaven ! But what am I to say of the multitudes of men who remain buried in the filth of impurity for years and years, and never even think of doing penance and cleansing their souls from that stain ? What an abomination they must be in the sight of God ! Yet, they think, what harm is it to gratify myself this once, etc.—*continues as before.*

# ON ENVY.

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## FIFTEENTH SERMON.

### ON THE FOLLY OF THE ENVIOUS.

#### Subject.

1. What envy is, and how common a vice. 2. It contradicts especially one's love for one's self, and thereby shows the folly of the envious.—*Preached on the sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

#### Text.

*Et ipsi observabant eum.*—Luke xiv. 1  
“They watched Him.”

#### Introduction.

Why did the Pharisees watch Jesus Christ? Not to admire and praise His wonderful works, but to envy, blame and condemn the good He was doing. So that not even piety itself is free from the attacks of envy, which despises holiness and sanctity, when occasion offers. This is a very common vice nowadays, my dear brethren, and I mean to show how common and how foolish it is.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*What envy is, and how common a vice, I will show in the first part. It contradicts especially one's love for one's self, and therefore the envious are very foolish people, as I shall show in the second part. Let us not be so foolish as to be guilty of such a sin; such will be our conclusion.*

With Thy grace, O Lord, which we expect through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

Envy or grudging is defined by St. Thomas and by all theologians, as "Sorrow at another's good, inasmuch as it diminishes our own honor and excellence."<sup>1</sup> From this it follows that not every sorrow at another's prosperity, is envy; for I may regret that prosperity for many reasons. Thus, I may be troubled at the success of another, because he is my enemy, and has grievously insulted and injured me; this is, properly speaking, hatred and vindictiveness. Or I may be sorry that one who has hitherto persecuted me, is raised to a high position, in which I see that he will have many an opportunity of annoying me. This is not envy, but rather a well-founded fear of misfortune. Or I may regret that a dignity has been conferred on one who is not fit for it, and who therefore can do a great deal of harm to the community. This sorrow may sometimes arise from a just and pious zeal; as was the case with the Prophet David, when he said: "I had a zeal on occasion of the wicked, seeing the prosperity of sinners."<sup>2</sup> Still, this zeal, no matter how righteous it appears, must always be joined with an humble submission of our judgment to the decrees of God's providence. For it is God who rules all things in this world, and who, from some all-perfect reason known to His providence, but not to us, often permits the most wicked and godless sinners to enjoy honor, fortune and prosperity; and therefore the Holy Ghost suggested another thought to David: "Be not emulous of evil-doers, nor envy them that work iniquity;"<sup>3</sup> but attribute everything to the decrees of Providence. I can also be secretly disquieted and troubled when I see that another is very rich and prosperous, not because it is good for him to be so, for I wish him well with all my heart; but because I wish to be equally prosperous. That is not envy, but rather emulation; a very dangerous thing in worldly matters, as it can easily degenerate into envy; but if it concerns piety and the practice of virtue so that I am troubled because I am not so good and virtuous as others, then it is a praiseworthy and holy zeal, that we all should have, in order to strive to imitate the virtues of others, according to the exhortation of the Apostle: "Be zealous for the better gifts;"<sup>4</sup> Hence the company of the wicked is dangerous and hurtful, while that of good and pious Christians is profitable in the highest degree. The same may be said of

What envy  
is.

<sup>1</sup> *Tristitia de alieno bono, prout est diminutivum propriæ excellentiæ.*

<sup>2</sup> *Zelavi super iniquos, pacem peccatorum videns.—Ps. lxxii. 3.*

<sup>3</sup> *Non æmulari in malignantibus; neque zelaveris facientes iniquitatem.—Ibid, xxxvi. 1.*

<sup>4</sup> *Æmulamini autem charismata mellora.—I Cor. xii. 31.*

reading the lives of the Saints, because it encourages us to tread in their foot-steps, and makes us ashamed of our tepidity and sloth. Finally, if I am troubled at my neighbor's prosperity, wealth, honor, or praise, merely because I imagine that my own prosperity or honor will be lessened thereby, that is envy, or grudging. And it is a vice that comes from pride, inasmuch as I cannot bear to see another equal or superior to me in a certain thing, my wish being to excel in that thing myself.

A vice common to all classes of people. To the higher classes.

Nothing is more common in the world among men of all classes and conditions, than this odious vice. "I considered all the labors of men," says the Wise Preacher, "and I remarked that their industries are exposed to the envy of their neighbor."<sup>1</sup>

Envy rules amongst soldiers; if one is renowned for his courage and heroic actions, he cannot bear to see another equally favored by fortune, showing himself brave also and holding the field against the foe, thus gaining great renown too, in the eyes of the world. This creates a feeling of enmity between the two men; the praise given to one, grates on the ear of the other, who looks upon that praise as diminishing his own glory. Thus Cæsar and Pompey could not bear each other. Cæsar could not tolerate a superior, Pompey could not brook a rival. Belisarius was the Emperor Justinian's general-in-chief, and was unsurpassed in military powers; after he had driven the Goths out of Italy, and conquered the Persians and Vandals, whose king he brought to Constantinople to grace his triumph, Justinian showed him every mark of esteem, and amongst others, he had a silver coin made, on the one side of which was the effigy of Justinian, on the other that of Belisarius with the inscription, "Belisarius, the glory of the Romans."<sup>2</sup> But how long did he enjoy those honors? The envy of those who could not bear to see him so prosperous, effected his ruin by calumny, and not only deprived him of his well-earned dignities, but had both his eyes plucked out, and reduced him to such misery that he was forced to find shelter in a poor hut, and to beg for alms in the well-known words: "Give an obolus to Belisarius, who was exalted by his valor, and deprived of sight by envy."<sup>3</sup>

To others, and even to people of ordinary station.

Envy reigns amongst courtiers; if one of them is honored by the special favor of his sovereign, he is at once a cause of secret discontent and envy to the others. One lawyer envies another

<sup>1</sup> Contemplatus sum omnes labores hominum, et industrias animadverti patere invidia proximi.—Eccles. iv. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Belisarius decus Romanorum.

<sup>3</sup> Date obulum Belisario, quem virtus extulit, invidia obcecavit.

who has been more successful in his case. One physician envies another whose medicines are more efficacious in healing. The merchant envies his more prudent and more successful rival. The tradesman is jealous of the superior skill that another displays in the same branch of work. Envy is found amongst musicians and painters, on account of the greater skill of their rivals in the same profession; amongst families, because the children of the one are more beautiful or more clever than those of the other; amongst women, when one is dressed in better style than the other. It is found also amongst scholars, when one is better able to learn and has gained a higher place in school than the others; in private families, when one child is favored more than the others by its parents; and amongst servants, when the master or mistress shows a preference for the one more than for the others. Envy is not wanting even amongst brothers and sisters, when one marries better, or can keep up greater state than the others.

Nay, (and who would believe such a thing possible) even the most holy and zealous servants of God are sometimes envious of each other, when one does more than the other for the glory of God and the salvation of souls; that is to say, when one is more praised or admired than the other, or is looked upon as having more influence for good, or as doing more for the conversion of sinners, etc. All this comes from secret pride and vanity, which makes one fear that his honor or the esteem in which he is held, is about to be lessened. Josue, in spite of his piety, was much troubled on hearing that two of the common people, Eldad and Medad, were endowed with the gift of prophecy. Why, said he to Moses, do you permit that? Tell those people to be silent, for we look on you alone as our prophet. "Josue the son of Nun, the minister of Moses, and chosen out of many, said: "My lord Moses, forbid them."<sup>1</sup> But Moses answered: "Why hast thou emulation for me? O that all the people might prophesy, and that the Lord would give them His Spirit."<sup>2</sup> In the same way, the disciples of St. John the Baptist were envious of our Lord Himself, because the people had more recourse to Him than to their master; and therefore, they complained: "Rabbi, he that was with Thee beyond the Jordan, to whom Thou gavest testimony, behold he baptiseth, and all

Nay, to people who seem pious and zealous servants of God.

<sup>1</sup> Statim Josue filius Nun, minister Moysi, et electus e pluribus, ait: Domine mi Moyses prohibe eos.—Num. xi. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Quis tribuat ut omnis populus prophetet, et det eis Dominus Spiritum suum?—Ibid, 29.

men come to him ;”<sup>1</sup> But John explained to them the reason of that : “ A man cannot receive anything unless it be given him from Heaven. You yourselves do bear me witness, that I said : I am not Christ, but that I am sent before him. This my joy, therefore, is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.”<sup>2</sup> He must be exalted, but I must be lowered. So cunning is this vice, that it can introduce itself under the appearance of sanctity, even into the holiest actions.

Even in the solitude of the desert.

Reason have we to be astonished when we read in the lives of the hermits of old, how the devil penetrated into the wilderness and overcame, by means of envy, those men who led such mortified lives, whom no other temptation could seduce from the service of God. To pass over many other examples, I read of an old grey-haired hermit in the desert of Scythia, who out of charity, once gave hospitality to a young hermit who had just arrived in the desert. This young stranger had received from God a special gift of interpreting the word of God, so that many of the brethren came to him to get instruction in the truths of salvation ; whereupon the old hermit became filled with envy. How is this, he said to himself, I have been so many years in the desert and the brethren seldom or never come to me, or if they do come, it is only on great feast days ; whereas this young man has such a crowd of visitors nearly every day ? Go, he said to his disciples, and tell that brother in my name, that he must leave my cell at once, as I want it for myself. But the stranger did not leave, because the disciples did not venture to give him his master’s message, and the old man took a great stick in his hand and went to the cell where the other was, with the intention of expelling him by force ; but the latter came to meet him, fell at his feet, and by his humility showed him how the demon of envy had befooled him. In a word, it is hard to find a man who is not sometimes tempted to envy, as St. Augustine says ; a man envies his equals, because they are equal to him, his superiors, because they are above him, and even his inferiors, through fear that they may become equal to him.<sup>3</sup> But how great the folly of those who allow themselves to be overcome by this vice ! For

<sup>1</sup> Rabbi, qui erat tecum trans Jordanem, cui tu testimonium perhibuisti, ecce, hic baptizat, et omnes veniunt ad eum.—John iii. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Non potest homo accipere quidquam, nisi fuerit ei datum de celo. Ipsi vos mihi testimonium perhibetis, quod dixerim : Non sum ego Christus, sed quia missus sum ante illum . . . Hoc ergo gaudium meum impletum est.—Ibid., 27-29.

<sup>3</sup> Parihus quod ei cœquantur, superioribus quod ei non cœquantur, inferioribus ne sibi cœquantur.—S. Aug. de gen. l. 11, c. 24.

there is no vice which more contradicts one's love for one's self; and consequently there is no vice that displays more the folly of men than envy. I shall prove this in the

### Second Part.

To love one's self is to wish one's own good, to seek one's own profit, and to avoid carefully all that could be a source of discomfort or inconvenience. Now my dear brethren, he who allows himself to be influenced by envy, does exactly the contrary of all this. He does not seek or gain the least good or profit for himself by envy; on the contrary, he occasions himself a great deal of bitterness and pain. Is not that a foolish thing to do? For, in the first place, what does he seek? What profit can he find in grudging his neighbor's prosperity? All evil inclinations can be called madness, when one gives way to them, as they disturb the heart and the mind; still, a man seeks by them what appears at least to be good or pleasureable to him; the ambitious man seeks honor; the avaricious man, money; the impure man, sensual gratifications; the glutton, fine eating and drinking; the vindictive man, revenge; the slothful man seeks his ease and avoids labor. All these things have certain attractions to induce a man to consent to them; but envy is such a foolish passion that through it man offends God, and yet has not the least inducement to lead him into sin; he gains no honor before the world; nay, his very envy forces him to acknowledge to himself with shame, that his honor is lessened by the growing reputation of the other; nor does he seek money or wealth, for the riches of another, that excite his envy, will not in that way become his; nor does he seek comfort or convenience, for envy is nothing else but trouble, or bitterness of heart; nor is pleasure in eating or drinking the object of his desires, for his envy takes away his appetite for food; nor does he want revenge or satisfaction, because all his envy cannot hurt the object of it, or take away his wealth; and that is a reason why he is all the more disturbed at seeing the other continuing in the enjoyment of prosperity. He sins, then, and knows not why; he offends God, and deserves hell, without having either pleasure, honor, or profit by it.

This vice contradicts one's own love for one's self because one can derive no profit from it.

Besides, he deliberately brings on himself the evil that all men hate and avoid, and that he himself would also try to shun, if he were not envious; and that is, trouble, mental anxiety and bitterness of heart, which plague him to no purpose. Amongst

And rather tortures himself by it.

the punishments that God threatened the High-priest Heli with, was this, that he should see his rival in the enjoyment of happiness and prosperity: "And thou shalt see thy rival in the temple, in all the prosperity of Israel."<sup>1</sup> And how was that a severe punishment? Because envy fills the heart with bitter torments, that are caused by grudging another's good fortune, so that the unhappiness of Heli was to be increased by seeing a stranger in possession of his rank and dignity. "Envy," says St. Peter Chrysologus, "always tortures those who are influenced by it; it torments the mind, annoys the external senses, and gnaws at the heart. What need is there of saying any more? He who is infected with this vice, punishes himself, because he makes himself his own executioner;"<sup>2</sup> The Wise man in the Book of Proverbs says: "Envy is the rottenness of the bones;"<sup>3</sup> or, as the Septuagint has it, "a worm gnawing away the bones." Hence, envy is depicted in the likeness of a fury, with serpents instead of hair on her head, and holding her own heart in her hand at which she gnaws with her teeth, in order to show that this passion is a hellish madness which eats away the heart of the envious man, and dries up the very marrow of his bones. Theologians generally agree in saying that many of the evil spirits dwell in the air, and there undergo their tortures; according to the words of St. Paul to the Ephesians, in which he calls the devil a prince of the air: "And you when you were dead in your offences and sins, wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of this air, etc."<sup>4</sup> Now, I do not wish to inquire the reason why the air has been assigned as a place of torment to the evil spirits, but St. Bernard lays down a reason, which will suit my subject admirably. He says that the devil roams about through the air, "that he may see," the people on earth who have been redeemed by the Blood of Jesus Christ, "and may envy their happiness and be tortured by this envy." So that the devil is tortured by seeing our happiness and envying it. Therefore, St. Augustine reads the words of the seventeenth

<sup>1</sup> Et videbis æmulum tuum in templo, in universis prosperis Israel.—1. Kings ii. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Invidia suorum carnifex semper extitit, torquet animos, discruciat sensus, corda corrumpit. Quid pluris? Hanc qui receperit sua sustinet sine fine supplicia, quia in se domesticum semper diligit habere tortorem.—A Chrysos. serm. 72.

<sup>3</sup> Putredo ossium, invidia.—Prov. xiv. 30.

<sup>4</sup> Et vos, cum essetis mortui delictis et peccatis vestris, in quibus aliquando ambulastis secundum sæculum mundi hujus, secundum principem potestatis aëris hujus, etc.—Eph. ii. 1, 2.

Psalm: "The sorrows of hell encompassed me;"<sup>1</sup> "the sorrows of envy;"<sup>2</sup> as if these three torments, of hell, of the devil, and of envy were one and the same. In fact, the envious man, like the wicked spirit, bears his own torture about with him, when he sees and envies the prosperity of others. Such was the case with Cain, who through envy at the favor with which God received the sacrifice of his brother Abel, became pallid and emaciated: "Cain was exceedingly angry and his countenance fell."<sup>3</sup> Aman became ill through envy of Mardochai; Saul became mad through his envy of David. So true is it that the envious man is his own tormentor. That is in accordance with an all-wise arrangement of the Almighty God, by which he makes that odious passion punish those who give way to it, for offending Him so foolishly. "Envy alone," says St. Gregory of Nazianzen, "is the most unjust, and at the same time, the most just of all the passions; it is the most unjust, because it is opposed to all good; it is the most just, because it torments and troubles him who gives way to it."<sup>4</sup>

And why does the envious man torment himself? Has he been the victim of misfortune? Has his property been stolen? Has death deprived him of a dear friend? Has he been insulted or injured? No, nothing of the kind has occurred. And what is the matter then? Some fellow-man has been lucky; his neighbor's affairs are in a flourishing condition; some acquaintance of his has been praised and made much of; his brother or sister is better off than he; another one is better dressed, or is more clever, or more beautiful, or more skilful, etc. But is that a reason for troubling himself? Should he not rather rejoice at it? These benefits are desired and sought after by nearly every one. But it is these very benefits which make the envious man suffer so much. What folly! With justice does St. Bernard say: "Consider, I beseech you, how his own evil things will afflict an envious man, since the good things of others cause him so much pain."<sup>5</sup>

Yet, this is not the only torment of the envious man. The prosperity of others often exists only in his imagination, or he forms an exaggerated idea of it, and so increases his trouble.

And that on account of a good at which he should rejoice.

This good he exaggerates in his own mind.

<sup>1</sup> Dolores inferni circumdederunt me.—Ps. xvii. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Dolores invidia.

<sup>3</sup> Iratusque est Cain vehementer, et concidit vultus ejus.—Gen. iv. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Solus ex omnibus affectibus iniquissimus et æquissimus invidia est; iniquissimus, quia bonis omnibus adversus est; æquissimus, quia dominos suos exest et conficit.

<sup>5</sup> Considerate absecro, qualiter invidos punitura sunt mala sua, quos etiam bona puniunt aliena.

and thus in-  
creases his  
torment.

He is like the blind man of Bethsaida, to whom Christ restored sight; the blind man opened his eyes after Our Lord had placed His hand on them, and looked about him. Jesus asked him if he saw anything. "I see men, as it were trees, walking,"<sup>1</sup> he said; he thought that every one he saw exceeded him in stature as much as a tree does a human being; the streets looked to him like forests in which the people were walking about like so many trees. Poor man, your eyes see, it is true, but they do not see aright. How astonished you must have been at your mistake when Christ restored you your sight fully! Envious people, my dear brethern, have the same imperfect sight; everything they are jealous of seems great and mighty to them, and they themselves alone appear small in their own eyes.

We have  
examples of  
this in the  
Sacred  
Scriptures.

We have many examples of this in the Sacred Scriptures; how jealous king Pharaoh was of the Hebrews, for fear they would revolt against him and hurl him from his throne! He called together all his councillors and spoke to them of his difficulty: "He said to his people: Behold the people of the children of Israel are numerous and stronger than we. Come let us wisely oppress them;"<sup>2</sup> But how could Pharaoh think that the Israelites outnumbered the Egyptians? They must have been far less in number; because otherwise they would not have borne the cruel treatment they had to suffer. For as the Sacred Scripture says, "He set over them masters of the works to afflict them with burdens;"<sup>3</sup> They had to build cities every-where, "And the Egyptians hated the children of Israel and afflicted them and mocked them; and they made their life bitter with hard works in clay, and brick, and with all manner of service, wherewith they were overcharged in the works of the earth;"<sup>4</sup> This the Egyptians would never have dared to do nor would the Israelites have submitted to it, if the latter had really been as numerous as Pharaoh said. Why then was Pharaoh so anxious? Denis the Carthusian, answers this question by saying that, as the Israelites had been much favored by former kings, and had received from them a most fertile piece of country, their prosperity was an occasion of envy to Pharaoh, who allowed himself to be so blinded by it, that he looked on them as more powerful than his own people.

<sup>1</sup> Video homines velut arbores ambulantes.—Mark viii. 24.

<sup>2</sup> *Alt ad populum suum: Ecce, populus filiorum Israel multus, et fortior nobis est. Venite, sapienter opprimamus eum.*—Exod. i. 9, 10.

<sup>3</sup> *Præposuit itaque eis magistros operum, ut affligerent eos oneribus.*—Ibid, 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Oderantque filios Israel Aegyptii, et affligebant illudentes eis; atque ad amaritudinem perducebant vitam eorum operibus duris lutu et lateris, omnique famulatu, quo in terræ operibus premebantur.*—Ibid, 13, 14.

“The passion of envy made him have an exaggerated idea of their prosperity;”<sup>1</sup> such are the words of Denis the Carthusian.

When Saul gave way to envy, how he exaggerated the importance of David ! He looked upon him as a mighty king ; he mistook the shepherd’s garment for a purple robe, and the crook for a sceptre, while he considered the people who followed David, as subjects doing homage to their king. “What can he have more but the kingdom ?”<sup>2</sup> he said. And why did David assume such large proportions in the eyes of Saul ? Simply because a few women praised him for having overcome Goliath, and put their enemies to flight ; “And the women sung as they played, and they said : Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten-thousands.”<sup>3</sup> This praise was more than Saul could bear, it seemed to him as if David were already made king over him. “And Saul was exceedingly angry, and this word was displeasing in his eyes, and he said : They have given David ten thousands, and to me they have given but a thousand. What can he have more but the kingdom ?”<sup>4</sup>

King Saul.

In the same way do all envious people act in our day ; if one whom they do not wish well, gains a high position, Oh, they say, he is a favorite child, he can get anything he asks for ! If they see any one better dressed than they themselves are, Oh, they cry out, where did all that finery come from ? If a man succeeds in his business, they are jealous of his good fortune. If they hear another praised in company, they affect to wonder at it, and feel as if they were neglected. And so it is always with the envious ; they look at men as if they were as big as trees ; and exaggerate their importance to an absurd extent. With what result ? With the result of increasing their own torment, and nothing more.

Envious people in our own day.

Would it not be better for the envious man to consider how things are with himself, instead of troubling himself about the affairs of others? My dear man, I would say to him, why do you not enjoy what God has so generously given you, and enjoy it in peace and quiet? Consider what you have yourself, do not mind what other people have. That man is richer than you, but you have better health than he; he has more servants than

The envious man has no pleasure in his own prosperity and wealth.

<sup>1</sup> Ex passione invidiae, prosperitas eorum videbatur ei major, quam fuit.  
<sup>2</sup> Quid ei superest, nisi solum regnum?—I. Kings xviii. 8.  
<sup>3</sup> Et præcinebant mulieres ludentes, atque dicentes : Percussit Saul mille, et David decem millia.—Ibid, 7.  
<sup>4</sup> Iratus est autem Saul nimis, et displicuit in oculis ejus sermo iste, dixitque : Dederunt David decem millia, et mihi mille dederunt : quid ei superest, nisi solum regnum?—Ibid, 8.

you, but you live more peacefully than he does; he has a more important charge than you, but he has also more care and anxiety; he has more means of procuring enjoyment, but you have less difficulty in saving your soul and going to Heaven. Therefore, I repeat, enjoy in peace and quiet what the good God has given you, and do not worry yourself about what He gives to others. But there is no use in talking; envy will not allow him to listen. His passion has brought him so far, that he cannot enjoy what he has, on account of the exaggerated idea he has of the prosperity of others.

As is seen  
in the case  
of Saul.

Let us again take Saul as an example. The giant Goliath, who had caused him and his whole kingdom the greatest alarm, is slain; the hostile army, before which Saul and his forces had to hide themselves in caves, was utterly routed; and Saul was thus enabled to rule in peace; the people rejoice exceedingly, and the whole land is full of jubilation; Saul alone, who had more reason to rejoice than all the others, is filled with bitterness and discontent, in spite of his good fortune, and gives way to those feelings until they bring him to the verge of madness. The praise given to David embitters all his prosperity, and his only wish now is, that David and his whole army were destroyed, so that he would not hear those praises that torment him so much. Amalekites, Philistines, you are no longer enemies of Saul; David is the enemy for whom he reserves all his hatred and fury, and on whose death he is resolved!

And of  
Aman.

Aman was exalted in dignity above all the princes of King Assuerus, as the Sacred Scriptures say: "King Assuerus advanced Aman, and he set his throne above all the princes that were with him. And all the king's servants that were at the doors of the palace, bent their knees and worshipped Aman."<sup>1</sup> He spoke to his friends of his riches and glory, and told them how the king had exalted him.<sup>2</sup> Fortunate Aman, could you have possibly risen to a higher degree of worldly honor? Yet Aman was filled with trouble and discontent, and he said to his wife: "Whereas I have all these things, I think I have nothing." And why? "As long as I see Mardochai the Jew, sitting before the king's gate;"<sup>3</sup> I am so annoyed at this, that I look upon all my wealth and honor as nothing!

<sup>1</sup> Rex Assuerus exaltavit Aman. . . . et posuit solium ejus super omnes principes, quos habebat. Cunctique servi regis, qui in foribus palatii versabantur, flectebant genua, et adorabant Aman.—*Esther* iii. 1, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Exposuit illis magnitudinem divitiarum suarum . . . et quanta eum gloria super omnes principes et servos suos rex elevasset.—*Ibid.*, v. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Et cum hæc omnia habeam, nihil me habere puto, quamdiu videro Mardocheum Judæum sedentem ante fores regias.—*Ibid.*, 13.

It is a strange misery, that of the envious man, says Salvianus: "He does not care to be happy, unless he whom he envies is unhappy."<sup>1</sup> He is rich, honored and prosperous, but envy leaves him as little power of enjoying these blessings, as if he had them not. How emphatically, O holy Apostle Paul, dost thou not tell Christians, that they are not to be attached to earthly goods: "It remaineth that they also who have wives, but as if they had none, and that 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."<sup>2</sup> But how do the envious observe this rule? Preach the Gospel to them and they will have a great difficulty in understanding it; but envy places that particular rule so clearly before their minds, that they are, as it were, forced to observe it, for they find no pleasure in the goods they themselves possess, and nothing but chagrin and vexation in the possessions of others, so that they are miserable either way. Moreover, since they cannot hinder the happiness of others, their misery is hopeless and beyond relief. What madness thus to plague and torture one's self! Certainly all sinners are called fools in the Holy Scriptures; but in my opinion, the envious are the greatest fools of all; for who would not look on that man as beside himself, who persists in being ill, because his neighbor is in good health, or who puts out his eyes because another has good sight, or who makes himself unhappy, because he sees that another is happy?

How miserable, and therefore how foolish, are the envious.

Far from us, my dear brethren, such folly as that; let us never offend God, and lose our souls, for what cannot profit us in the least, but rather causes us trouble and annoyance! We must not value worldly goods or pleasures so highly, as for their sake to commit sin, much less should this be the case when there is neither profit nor enjoyment to be had in the sin. If we do not love our neighbor, as the divine law obliges us, let us at least not hate him. We have trials and crosses enough, why should we increase them by giving way to envy? If we have nothing else to cause us trouble and sorrow, the consideration of our sins should give us enough to grieve for, and it would be a most profitable grief indeed. Let every one then be content with what God has bestowed on him, and not grudge

Conclusion and exhortation to fly envy.

<sup>1</sup> *Novum et inestimabile malum. Parum est si ipse sit felix, nisi alter sit infelix.*—Salvian. de Provid. l. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *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.

others what they possess. As often as you feel inclined to envy others on any account whatever, think and say to yourselves at once, what the soldier said in olden times, when his petition to be received amongst the body-guard of the Spartan king, was rejected: "I congratulate my country," said he, "on its having three hundred better men than me;"<sup>1</sup> Such, namely, was the number of the body-guard. I rejoice, you must also say, O Christians, that others have a better position than I, that they are richer, more beautiful and more clever than I; I rejoice that God is so good to them, and that they prosper so well, etc. In that way, although you may not have the same good fortune as they, yet you will at least be free from the gnawing pangs of envy. O what a happy and contented life we could all lead, if every one was so minded, if every one rejoiced, as a Christian ought, in his neighbor's success! For then not only would each one enjoy what he himself has, but he would also find satisfaction in the goods of others. "What a great treasure charity is," says St. Augustine, "for by it we make the goods of others our own, without any labor."<sup>2</sup> I will remember this charity (such should be your conclusion with me), whenever an envious thought occurs to me, and I will immediately thank God for having bestowed on others as much, nay more than he has bestowed on me. Eternal thanks, praise and love be to His liberality for all His gifts, no matter to whom He gives them! Amen.

*Another Introduction to the same sermon for the Feast of the Holy Apostles SS. Philip and James.*

#### Text.

*Non turbetur cor vestrum.*—John xiv. 1.

"Let not your heart be troubled."

Christ remarked that His disciples were troubled, anxious and afraid for two reasons; first, He had foretold them that one of them would betray Him, that He would be delivered into the hands of the Jews, and that Peter would deny Him thrice; so that they thought, if Peter who seems as strong as a rock, is to act in such a cowardly manner, what can we who are so weak, expect of ourselves? In order to relieve them of this fear, Christ said to them, "Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God.

<sup>1</sup> Gratulor patriæ quod trecentos habeat meliores me.—Plutarch.

<sup>2</sup> Quantum bonum charitas, quæ sine labore nostro aliena bona nostra facit.

believe also in Me ;”<sup>1</sup> for I am equal to my heavenly Father ; place your trust in Me, and I will not fail you. They were troubled also, because Christ said that He was going to the Father, whither Peter was to follow Him, while He said nothing of the others. Then they feared that they might be excluded from Heaven, that is, from His Father’s house. But Our Lord said to them : No, let not your heart be troubled on that account ; do not imagine that Peter alone is to follow me thither, as if there was room for no one but him ; you must know that “in my Father’s house there are many mansions ;”<sup>2</sup> you will also find a place there, for “I go to prepare a place for you, and if I shall go . . . I will come again, and will take you to myself, that where I am, you also may be ;”<sup>3</sup> Such is the explanation that Cornelius a Lapide gives of to-day’s Gospel. The disciples, my dear brethren, had two just reasons for being troubled ; for on the one hand, they were afraid of committing sin, and on the other, they were afraid of losing Heaven. Would to God, that we were all penetrated by this fear, for then we should be more careful of avoiding sin, and be more earnest in working for the glory of God, and the salvation of our souls. But how many Christians there are who have no fears of the kind ; nay, what is still more foolish, who trouble and annoy themselves, not on account of any harm they have suffered, but on account of the prosperity and good fortune of others ! And these are the envious, of whom there are many nowadays, and who are very foolish people indeed, as I shall now show, etc.—*continues as before.*

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## SIXTEENTH SERMON.

### ON THE MALICE OF ENVY.

#### Subject.

Of all the vices envy is the most malicious in combating the love of one’s neighbor ; from that the malice of this sin may be inferred.—*Preached on the twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost.*

<sup>1</sup> *Creditis in Deum, et in me credite.*—John xiv. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *In domo Patris mei mansiones multe sunt.*—*Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Quia vado parere vobis locum. Et si abiero, . . . iterum venio, et accipiam vos ad meipsum, ut ubi sum ego, et vos sitis.*—*Ibid.*, 2, 3

**Text.**

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

“So also shall my heavenly Father do to you, if you forgive not every one his brother from your hearts.”

**Introduction.**

If he is to be delivered over to the torturers, who does not forgive from his heart the debt his neighbor owes him, what will become of him who looks with envious eyes and bitterness of heart on the prosperity of him who owes him nothing, and who never injured him; that is, one who grudges another's happiness? This is a diabolical vice, my dear brethren, and unfortunately it is too common. I have already shown that it contradicts one's love for one's self, since the envious man torments himself without gaining anything thereby, and therefore is guilty of the greatest folly. I now say—

**Plan of Discourse.**

*Of all vices, envy is the most malicious in combating the love of one's neighbor; from which the malice of this sin may be inferred; such is the whole subject of to-day's sermon, let us then love each other sincerely, so as to avoid all envy. Such shall be our conclusion.*

With Thy grace, O God of love, which we beg of Thee through the intercession of Mary and our holy guardian angels.

What is required by the law of charity to one's neighbor.

“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;” such is the law of charity which God has obliged all men to observe, and much more all Christians, under pain of eternal damnation. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, that is, you must wish him well as you would yourself; you must try to do him good, as you would to yourself; you must rejoice at his good fortune, as if it were your own; you must sympathise with his misfortunes, as if you suffered them; and, as St. Paul says, this love should work such a union amongst us, as if we had but one heart and one soul, so that we wish and desire for every one, no matter who it is, just what we should wish and desire for ourselves. “Loving one another with the charity of brotherhood, with honor from preventing one another;” “Rejoice with them that rejoice, weep with them that weep, being of one mind one towards another; to no man rendering evil for evil; having

peace with all men.”<sup>1</sup> Such is the law of charity that Jesus Christ, Our Saviour, so often and so emphatically preached to His disciples, and in their person, to us all. “These things I command you that you love one another;”<sup>2</sup> “this is my commandment that you love one another;”<sup>3</sup> it is the commandment that I attach most importance to; “A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another, as I have loved you.”<sup>4</sup> This is the charity which he wishes us to extend even to our worst enemy, who hates, persecutes and tries to injure us; “But I say to you: Love your enemies.”<sup>5</sup> This is the love which is to characterise His Apostles, His followers, and all true Christians. “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples if you have love one for another.”<sup>6</sup> It is that love alone which shows that we are children of our heavenly Father.<sup>7</sup> In the observance of this charity He has placed the fulfilment of the whole law. This is the charity which St. John in his old age preached every day to his disciples. “My little children, love one another, for such is the command of the Lord, and if you keep it, you will have done enough.” “He that loveth not, abideth in death.”<sup>8</sup> “If any man say I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar.”<sup>9</sup>

From this, my dear brethren, you can infer the wickedness of the envious man. There is nothing in that sacred precept of charity which is imposed on us so solemnly by Jesus Christ and His Apostles, that he does not violate in every way, and at once by the sole sin of envy. Instead of wishing well to his neighbor, he wishes him ill; instead of rejoicing at the prosperity that his neighbor actually has, and wishing him still more, he grudges him the possession of good things and wishes him evil; instead of rejoicing at his happiness and sympathizing with his misfortunes, he does the very opposite, by being troubled at his success, and glad of his failures; instead of doing good to him and

This law is broken in every respect by the envious man.

<sup>1</sup> Caritate fraternitatis invicem diligentes; honore invicem prævenientes; Gaudere cum gaudentibus, flere cum flentibus; idipsum invicem sentientes; ... nulli malum pro malo red-dentes; ... cum omnibus hominibus pacem habentes.—Rom. xii. 10, 15-18.

<sup>2</sup> Hæc mando vobis: Ut diligatis invicem.—John xv. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Hoc est præceptum meum: Ut diligatis invicem.—Ibid. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Mandatum novum do vobis, ut diligatis invicem, sicut dilexi vos.—Ibid. xlii. 34.

<sup>5</sup> Ego autem dico vobis: Diligite inimicos vestros.—Matth. v. 44.

<sup>6</sup> In hoc cognoscent omnes, quia discipuli mei estis, si dilectionem habueritis ad invicem.—John xiii. 35.

<sup>7</sup> Ut sitis filii Patris vestri, qui in caelis est.—Matth. v. 45.

<sup>8</sup> Qui non diligit, manet in morte.—I. John iii. 14.

<sup>9</sup> Si quis dixerit: quoniam diligo Deum; et fratrem suum oderit, mendax est.—Ibid. iv.

warding off harm from him, as far as possible, his only desire is to deprive him of the good that he has, and to do him what harm he can. He thus completely perverts the Apostle's precept, "Rejoice with them that rejoice," for, as St. Jerome remarks, he weeps with them that rejoice, and rejoices with them that weep.<sup>1</sup> His happiness consists in the misfortunes of others, his distress in their well-being. How unjust, how fearfully wicked to be thus disposed towards one who never did him any harm, and whose only fault is, that he has received more understanding, or riches, or happiness, or honor from God!

And with  
greater  
malice than  
all the other  
vices.

I have said that the law of charity is violated in the most outrageous manner by envy; for in the first place, there is no vice which offers such determined opposition to charity. Avarice, for instance, although it occasions many a grievous sin against charity, by theft and injustice, yet does not cause the thief to be troubled at another's prosperity; in fact, he rather rejoices at it, because he will have more opportunity of taking something worth while. Nor does he commit a theft merely to injure his neighbor, but to benefit himself, and if it were possible for him to do so, he would steal without doing harm to any one. Impurity gives rise to grievous injustice and violation of charity, by causing the sin of adultery to be committed; still, he who commits that sin, seeks nothing but the gratification of his unbridled desires; he is not troubled, but rather glad if the person whom he has wronged, prospers in other matters. Hatred and anger are certainly directly opposed to charity, and lead to cursing, abusing, and assaulting the object of one's hatred; still the only idea of the angry man is to have satisfaction for the injury that he imagines he has suffered, and thus to appease his resentment. Envy alone is so odious and so wicked, that it makes a man grieve at his neighbor's good fortune and be troubled at it, without gaining, or seeking anything thereby.

From envy  
come nearly  
all other sins  
against  
charity. As  
is seen in  
the example  
of Cain and  
the brothers  
of Joseph.

Again, nearly all the offences against charity occasioned by the other vices, accompany envy. Whatever harm a man is inclined to do his neighbor through injustice, anger, hatred, or vindictiveness, the envious man attempts to do without any reason, and therefore with all the greater malice. When Cain became jealous of his brother Abel, he was not merely grieved that God had accepted the sacrifice of the latter, but he could not even bear the sight of him, through hatred and anger, and he went about thinking how he could be revenged; nor did he rest

<sup>1</sup> S. Hieron. in c. 12. ad Rom.

until he had killed his brother. How wicked and cruel the sons of Jacob were to their innocent brother Joseph. "And his brethren," says the Holy Scripture, "seeing that he was loved by his father more than all his sons, hated him and could not speak peaceably to him."<sup>1</sup> They spoke sarcastically to him, whenever they met him; they took counsel with each other as to how they could best take revenge on him, and at last they resolved on the inhuman crime of fratricide. "And when they saw him afar off, before he came nigh to them, they thought to kill him. And said one to another: Behold the dreamer cometh; come, let us kill him, and cast him into some old pit, and we will say: Some evil beast hath devoured him."<sup>2</sup> In fact they did throw him into a deep pit, with the intention of allowing him to die of hunger, but they afterwards changed their minds, and sold him for a few pieces of money as a slave to strangers. All these grievous sins against charity arose from envy alone. And what was the reason of that? What harm had Joseph done them? None; his only fault was that he was his father's favorite, and they were afraid from some dreams he had, that he would one day rule over them; for they said, after having resolved on his death: "It shall appear what his dreams avail him."<sup>3</sup> But what injury did the father's affection, or the dreams of Joseph do them? The free will of the latter had nothing to do with either. Did any one ever see a man put upon his trial for a dream? Envy is the only unjust and cruel judge that can condemn an innocent person.

How long and how unrelentingly Saul persecuted David, although he often acknowledged that David was innocent of any attempt to injure him! How often did he not, in his madness, try to pierce him through with a spear! With what cruel cunning did he not promise to give him his daughter in marriage, if he succeeded in slaying a hundred Philistines! His only object in making that promise, was that David might be overwhelmed by the number of his foes, and be killed. He followed him with his whole army, from place to place, and would certainly have put an end to him, if God had not interposed, and prevented that wicked intention from being carried out. What

And in that  
of Saul and  
Joab.

<sup>1</sup> *Videntes autem fratres ejus, quod a patre plus cunctis filiis amaretur, oderant eum, nec poterant ei quidquam pacifice loqui.*—Gen. xxxvii. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Qui cum vidissent eum procul, antequam accederet ad eos, cogitaverunt illum occidere; et mutuo loquebantur: Ecce somniator venit. Venite, occidamus eum, et mittamus in cisternam veterem, dicemusque: Ferra pessima devoravit eum.*—Ibid, 18-20.

<sup>3</sup> *Apparebit quid illi prosint somnia sua.*—Ibid, 20.

was the occasion of all this hatred? Nothing but jealousy and envy at the praises that were given by the women to David, after he had overcome Goliath. Why did Joab kill Amasa so treacherously? Through envy alone. David had intended to depose Joab, for having slain Absalom and Abner against his orders, and to make Amasa general in his stead; Joab knew of this, and conceived such a violent hatred against Amasa, that he slew him treacherously; "And Joab said to Amasa: God save thee my brother. And he took Amasa by the chin with his right hand to kiss him. But Amasa did not take notice of the sword which Joab had, and he struck him in the side, and shed out his bowels to the ground . . . and he died."<sup>1</sup>

In that of Aman, and of the Jews who crucified Christ.

The gibbet that Aman had erected, was intended for no one but Mardochai, whom he wished to see hanging thereon in his death-throes. What cruelty, envy was the occasion of, in this instance, and solely because Mardochai, who refused to bend the knee before the envious Aman, was held in esteem in the court of King Assuerus! What was it that drove the high-priests, Scribes and Pharisees to commit the crime of deicide, and to rage so ruthlessly against the Son of God, that they were not satisfied until they saw Him dying on the shameful cross? It was nothing but envy, as Pilate himself confessed, when he tried to have Jesus set free; "For he knew that for envy they had delivered Him."<sup>2</sup>

From daily experience.

How many murders would we not see now a-days, if all envious people could glut their rage with impunity! And meanwhile, what a number of other sins and violations of charity are committed every day, through envy alone, by persons of all classes! The envious man is ready to sin by thoughts of anger, hatred, suspicion, and rash judgment; he interprets in an evil sense all that his neighbor does; he wounds charity by his outward behavior, by his black looks, by his biting words; he has not a peaceful word for any one; he is always ready to contradict, to abuse and vilify the object of his envy when present, to calumniate and detract him when absent. Charity is injured by wicked deeds; all kinds of tricks and devices are resorted to in the hope of lessening another's dignity, or depriving him of his employment, or ruining him in his business or trade, and doing

<sup>1</sup> Dixit itaque Joab ad Amasa: Salve mi frater. Et tenuit manu dextera mentum Amase, quasi osculans eum. Porro Amasa non observavit gladium, quem habebat Joab, qui percussit eum in latere, et effudit intestina ejus in terram . . . et mortuus est.—II. Kings. xx. 9, 10.

<sup>2</sup> Sciebat enim, quod per invidiam tradidissent eum.—Matth. xxvii. 18.

him all possible harm. Alas, says St. Peter Chrysologus, considering this, "where shall there be an end of sin, when the prosperity of another and his happiness become the envious man's punishment and torment?"<sup>1</sup> St. John Chrysostom sums up in a few words all that can be said about envy: "Envy is the mother of all evils."<sup>2</sup>

The cruelties that this venomous mother gives rise to, surpass those of the most savage beasts. How so? Hear what occurred to Daniel: he was accused of having transgressed the king's command, and the latter was so influenced by the persistent misrepresentations of his courtiers, that at last he ordered Daniel to be thrown into the lions' den. When this order was carried out, the den was closed with a large stone on which the king set his own seal and also the seals of his nobles.<sup>3</sup> Why? "That nothing should be done against Daniel."<sup>4</sup> Now I ask, what was the king afraid of? Why did he think that any one could have hurt Daniel, who was in the midst of the lions? Certainly the king's seal could not protect Daniel from the fury of those animals; so that the reason of the precaution must have been to prevent any one from entering the den. Did the king then fear that the Prophet was in greater danger from men, than from the lions? And, besides, had he any reason for imagining that any one would dare to venture down amongst the hungry beasts, for the purpose of injuring him? There is no doubt of it, my dear brethren. Darius knew well that Daniel had been accused through sheer envy, and he thought therefore, that his innocence would be safer amongst the savage lions, than amongst his treacherous and wily accusers, who certainly would not have hesitated to venture their lives for the sake of putting him out of the way; so bitter was their envy. Therefore the king put his own seal on the mouth of the den, "that nothing should be done against Daniel."

The world is still shocked at the inhumanity of Tullia, the daughter of Tullius Sextus, king of Rome. This infamous woman was once going at full gallop through the streets in her chariot, when her charioteer suddenly came to a full stop. What is the matter? she asked, why do you not go on? Madam, said he, I cannot, there is a dead body in the way, and as I see now, it is that of your father. No matter said she, go on, can

<sup>1</sup> Quis malorum finis, ubi alterius bonum poena est, ubi cruciatus aliena felicitas?

<sup>2</sup> Malorum omnium mater invidia.

<sup>3</sup> Quem obsignavit rex annulo suo et annulo optimatum suorum.—Dan. vi. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Ne quid fieret contra Danielem.—Ibid.

Envy is  
cruel.

Shows by a  
simile taken  
from his-  
tory.

you not drive over it ?' Even if it is my father's body, the street is still free to me. What heartlessness ! To save herself the trouble of making a slight detour, she allowed her royal father's body to be trampled under her horses hoofs ! There, my dear brethren, you have an example of the cruelty that envy occasions ; it triumphs, so to speak, over the dead body of a neighbor, nay, of a brother or a sister ; it rejoices at another's moral death, at his disgrace, or loss of employment, or poverty ; it exults when calumny injures the fair fame of another, it takes a malignant pleasure in the persecutions, humiliations, oppression, misery and tears, nay, even in the untimely deaths of those whom it hates. It triumphs over their dead bodies, and thinks nothing of all they had to suffer ; the more they have to suffer, the better pleased is the envious man, whose only desire is to have them out of his way.

Confirmed  
by other ex-  
amples.

Metaphrastes, in the life of St. Joannitius, describes a fearful conflagration which reduced to ashes all the trees and gardens that were situated on a certain hill ; and this conflagration was not the result of accident, but of envy. The holy Abbot Joannitius lived on this hill, and as he could not long conceal his great learning and virtue and wonderful miracles, crowds of people flocked to him from all parts. Another monk, named Epiphanius, could not bear to see this, as very few came to him ; and the more the reputation of the holy Abbot increased, the greater grew the envy of Epiphanius, until at last he set fire one night to the forest on the hill, on which Joannitius lived, with no other intention than that the latter should perish in the flames. <sup>2</sup> But he was disappointed, for the holy abbot escaped from the fire, and went out to meet his enemy, with all humility, intending to convert him. Why did you regard me as an enemy, <sup>3</sup> he asked. The envious man, instead of answering, attempted to run him through with a spear, but God again saved His servant from being hurt. In spite of all this, Epiphanius did not cease his machinations against him, until a sudden death put a stop to them. A still more surprising consequence of envy is that it makes a man deliberately incur any misfortune, as long as he can injure his rival. James Cardinal of Vitry relates <sup>4</sup> that a certain king once gave permission to an envious man and to a

<sup>1</sup> Annon duces currum etiam per corpus mortuum ?

<sup>2</sup> Comatum illum et frondosum montem exussit, ut simul cum silva sanctorum quoque dederet flamma. *Metaphrasi in vita S. Joannit. apud Sur. 4. Novembris.*

<sup>3</sup> Cur ei velet esse inimicus ?

<sup>4</sup> Joan. Junior in *Scala cœli* ex Jacob Vitriac.

miser, to make any request they wished of him, on the sole condition that the last who put forward his request should receive double. The two hesitated, each one wishing to be the last, in order to get more. At last the king told the envious man to begin; and what request do you think he made, my dear brethren? Envy did not permit him to ask for anything good lest the other should receive a greater good, and so he asked the king to have one of his eyes put out, so that the other man might lose both his eyes. Could anything more cruel be imagined?

What a terrible sin envy is. It is, as St. Augustine says, a sin unto death; not merely because it causes the death of the soul like all mortal sins, but because it is a sin that deserves more than all others to be refused forgiveness and to be punished eternally in hell, for that is the proper dwelling-place of envy, which is also one of the torments of the damned. It is a sin against the Holy Ghost, who is a Spirit of love, and beneficence, who desires to bestow His gifts and graces on all men, a generosity which the envious man cannot bear, because it pains him to see others receiving benefits from God. "It is a vice of the devil," says St. Augustine; "for one cannot accuse the devil of adultery or theft, but of envying man." St. John Chrysostom says that "envy is a poisonous evil which turns man into a devil and a most cruel devil; for the devil carried out all his plans in paradise, and carried them out to perfection; he rejoiced therefore, when he heard the words: "Dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return."

Therefore it is a fearful and diabolical vice.

Nay, continues St. Chrysostom, "the envious man is even worse than the devil, for the latter envies men alone and not his own companions; but you, oh man, envy your fellow man, you hate your own nature, which the devil does not do. How then can you hope for pardon of your sin, what excuse can you bring forward, when you grow pale with envy at your brother's good fortune?" Envy is not so cruel in the devil as in man, as we

The envy of man is even worse than that of the devil.

<sup>1</sup> Peccatum ad mortem.

<sup>2</sup> Vitium diaboli est; non enim diabolo dicitur ut damnetur, adulterium commisit furtum fecisti, sed homini invidisti.—S. Aug. de disciplin. Christiana, c. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Invidia pestiferum malum, hominem in diaboli conditionem, ac in dæmonem immanis simum convertit; diabolus quidem omnes in paradiso insidias exasciavit summa votorum assecutus est; non sine tripudio audivit, terra es et in terram ibis.—S. Chrysos. in diversis orat.

<sup>4</sup> Invidus ipso diabolo magis diabolus; invidet Satan, sed hominibus, socio jam nemini; tu vero homo cum sis, hominibus invides, odium adversus genus naturam que communem exeres, quod ne Satan quidem facit. Quam igitur veniam assequeris? quam tandem excusationem prætendas, si fratris successum videns palliescas?—Ibid.

can see from the Holy Scripture. Both the evil spirit and the Jews were envious of Our Lord ; they both brought Him to the top of a mountain and to the summit of the temple, but with this difference, that the devil asked Him to throw Himself down ; “ And he set Him on a pinnacle of the temple and he said to Him : If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down from hence.”<sup>1</sup> He did not dare to do any more, and had to content himself with giving this insidious advice. But the Jews went farther. “ They brought Him to the brow of the hill, . . . . that they might cast Him down headlong ; ”<sup>2</sup> their intention was to lay violent hands on Him. The envious man gives vent to his bitterness, like the wicked spirits, against the generosity and paternal decrees of God. Why do you envy your neighbor ? asks St. John Chrysostom, he has done you no harm. It is not his fault that you have less than he. You must go to the Author and Giver of all gifts, and pour out your bitterness against God, for it is He who has so arranged things. God has exalted your neighbor above you, He has given him the riches, wisdom, happiness, and authority, on account of which you are envious and troubled. But, says St. Prosper, what a fearful and more than diabolical malice is that of the envious man, “ who hates and detests the gifts of God in his fellow man.”<sup>3</sup> What else is it but to vie with the devil, who since he cannot injure God, nor lessen His mercy and goodness wreaks all his resentment on men who are the image of God, and who share in His benefits ? That the Lord should open His hand and dispense His blessings freely, that He should cause the sun to shine on the just and unjust is indeed a desirable thing, for which every one feels grateful to Him ; but it is the very thing which the envious man is more displeased at than Satan himself. It is the very thing that afflicts him, because he sees that others receive more than he from their heavenly Father ; nor will he be satisfied until God gives less to others than to him. “ Is thy eye evil, because I am good ? ”<sup>4</sup> Our Lord could say to him, as the master of the vineyard said to the laborers who grumbled because they were not better paid than the others : Am I treating you unjustly because I give others as much or more than you ? Am I not master of my gifts, and can I not dispense them to whom, and how I will ?

<sup>1</sup> Et statuit eum super pinnam templi, et dixit illi : Si Filius Dei es, mitte te hinc deorsum.—Luke. iv. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Duxerunt illum usque ad supercilium montis, . . . ut præcipitarent eum.—Ibid, 29.

<sup>3</sup> Quale hoc malum ? quo invidus donum Dei persequitur in homine.

<sup>4</sup> An oculus tuus nequam est, quia ego bonus sum ?—Matth. xx. 15.

Woe to the envious on the last day. When the Judge shall utter the sentence of condemnation on those who did not do good to others, who did not feed them, nor give them drink, nor clothe them, what will they have to expect who envied their neighbor what he had, who grudged him the clothes on his back, the bread in his mouth, the very eyes in his head? Who if they could, would have prevented God from giving him those things? Certainly they who cannot bear to see others prosper, are not deserving of any blessing from God; and it generally is the case that God allows the envious man to suffer loss in this life, in the very things that most excites his envy against others. How humbly the children of Jacob had to prostrate themselves on the ground and kiss their brother's feet, after they had sold him into slavery, in order to prevent him from becoming their master. Was not Aman hanged on the gibbet that his jealous rage had made him erect for Mardochai? Saul was hurled from the throne and lost his life while he was engaged in persecuting David through jealousy. Unhappy Jews, you are to this moment a living proof that the misfortune you wished to avoid by putting the Son of God to death, has come upon you. Thus by a just judgment of God, the envious man falls into the pit he has dug for another.

Woe to the envious on the last day, as well as in this life.

O my dear Christians, I conclude in the words of St. Augustine: may "God avert this plague from all men, not to say from all Christians,"<sup>1</sup> for it is the worst foe to the precept of charity. Parents, be careful that your affection and favor are equally divided amongst your children and servants, as far as possible, so that by favoritism and undue partiality you may not cause dissension and envy in your household; for if those things once creep in amongst young people, it will be very hard to get rid of them afterwards. Recall often what you have heard of the children of Jacob; how much unhappiness was caused by the preference that Jacob showed for Joseph. You can read in the Book of Genesis what happened to Jacob and Esau: "Isaac loved Esau . . . and Rebecca loved Jacob;"<sup>2</sup> Jacob was a beautiful, amiable and affectionate son, who never left his mother's sight: "Jacob a plain man dwelt in tents."<sup>3</sup> Esau on the other hand was of a harsh and stern disposition, and spent the most of his time wandering about the fields and forests:

Conclusion, and warning to parents.

<sup>1</sup> *Avertam Dominus hanc pestem a cordibus hominum, nedum Christianorum.*

<sup>2</sup> *Isaac amabat Esau . . . et Rebecca diligebat Jacob.—Gen. xxv. 28.*

<sup>3</sup> *Jacob autem vir simplex habitabat in tabernaculis.—Ibid. 27.*

“Esau became a skilful hunter and husbandman.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore the mother fixed all her affections on Jacob, while the father’s preference was for Esau, since the latter was of greater help in supporting the family: “because he eat of his hunting.”<sup>2</sup> But what was the consequence of this partiality? Continual dissension and disunion between the brothers. One of them lost his birth-right, the other was forced to leave his father’s house, for fear of being murdered by his brother; in a word, they could never bear each other. See there, Christian parents, what hatred and envy you can cause amongst your children by favoritism! Therefore, in the training of your children, learn from God Himself, of whom the Prophet David says: “For God loveth mercy and truth,”<sup>3</sup> or, as the Hebrew text has it, “God the sun.”<sup>4</sup> Why is God called the sun? Because it shines on all men alike; it does not take away its light from one who is blind, or whose sight is bad, nor from him who is crippled and feeble, nor from him who is stupid and ignorant; but it gives its light to all alike. So should your love be towards your children, that you may not give rise to hatred and envy amongst them.

To those  
who are  
envied.

But you, who see that others envy your good fortune, do not be annoyed thereat, much less should you give way to secret anger against them; you should rather heartily pity those unfortunate people who are punished enough by their envy. Thank God humbly for what He has given you, whether it is equal to, or greater than that He has bestowed on others, and try to practise Christian charity by doing good to those that hate you, so that, as Our Lord says, you may be children of your Father who is in Heaven.

To others.

If you are sometimes assailed by a thought of envy at hearing others praised, or seeing their good fortune, put away that thought at once, as a temptation to the odious sin of envy; and to prevent your giving consent to it, it would be well for you to practise at once the contrary virtue, that is, to speak in a friendly manner to the person whom you are tempted to envy, or to pray that God may increase his prosperity, and always to speak in his praise; by thus overcoming yourself you will practise Christian charity. Let us all impress deeply on our minds the command of Jesus Christ, “These things I command

<sup>1</sup> Factus est Esau vir gnarus venandi, et homo agricola.—Gen. xiv. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Eo quod de venationibus illius vesceretur.—Ibid. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Misericordiam et veritatem diligit Deus.—Ps. lxxxiii. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Sol Deus.

you that you love one another ;” so that we may not violate it even in thought, much less in word or act ; but that we may all faithfully serve God together here with united hearts, and merit to live in the city of eternal peace hereafter, where there is no envy or jealousy, but peace and joy in the Lord. Amen.

*Another Introduction to the same sermon for the Feast of  
St. Matthew the Apostle.*

**Text.**

*Videntes Pharisei, dicebant discipulis ejus: Quare cum publicanis et peccatoribus manducat Magister vester?—Matth. ix. 11.*

“ And the Pharisees seeing it, said to His disciples : Why doth your Master eat with publicans and sinners ? ”

It was impossible for Our Lord to please the envious Pharisees ; they found fault with everything He did. If He ate and drank with men in order to have an opportunity of instructing them, He was called, “ a wine drinker ;”<sup>1</sup> if He drove the devil out of the possessed, they accused Him of having done it by witchcraft, and the same interpretation they put on the evident miracles by which He healed the sick, cured the blind and lame, cleansed lepers, and raised the dead to life. If He converted sinners, and, as we read in to-day’s Gospel, did them the honor of sitting down to table with them, they said He was a friend and supporter of the wicked. “ And the Pharisees seeing it, said to His disciples : Why doth your Master eat with publicans and sinners ? ” So wicked is envy, that it pours out its poison even on the holiest works of the holiest men. My dear brethren, I have already spoken of the folly of envy, and shown that it is only a source of trouble and annoyance, and that it can bring no profit. To-day I will speak of its malice, and I say, *etc.—continues as before.*

<sup>1</sup> Potator vini.—Matth. xi. 19.

# ON GLUTTONY AND DRUNKENNESS.

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## SEVENTEENTH SERMON.

### ON THE NATURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF GLUTTONY.

#### Subject.

1. In what the vice of gluttony consists. 2. How to know that one is addicted to this vice.—*Preached on the first Sunday in Lent.*

#### Text.

*Cum jejunasset quadraginta diebus et quadraginta noctibus.*—*Matth. iv. 2.*

“And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights.”

#### Introduction.

If fasting and frequent mortification of the desire of eating and drinking is a salutary, nay, necessary means for most men to tame the insolence of the flesh, and to overcome many temptations, as I shall prove on another occasion, if fasting and abstinence from flesh meat is commanded by the Church for the same purpose, at different times of the year, and under pain of grievous sin, what will those Christians have to answer for, who I will not now say, violate the law of the Church regarding fasting, but who are so given to gluttony that they are always gratifying their desire for the pleasures of the table? A vice that is common enough, especially amongst idle people, who spend their time uselessly; for, as St. Augustine says, this vice is one of the consequences of idleness. “By idleness we are inflamed with lust, puffed up with pride, inclined to vanity in

dress, made slothful in rising in the morning, and strongly tempted to gluttony,"<sup>1</sup> I will speak of this vice, my dear brethren, in to-day's instruction.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*In what does the vice of gluttony consist? That I will explain in the first part. How can one know that he is addicted to this vice? That I will show in the second part. The object of this instruction is, that we may learn to mortify our desire for food and drink, at least sufficiently for the observance of the fasts of the Church during Lent.*

Give us Thy grace to this end, O Lord, which we ask of Thee "by Thy holy fasting,"<sup>2</sup> through the intercession of Mary and the holy angels guardian.

In the first place, the vice of gluttony does not consist merely in eating and drinking, for we must eat and drink in order to preserve life, since the natural heat of the human body always causes some consumption of vital energy, and the loss must be supplied by food taken at proper times. To that end food and drink have been given to us by the Almighty God, in the greatest abundance and variety; and as he who, being in sound health, refuses to take a proper amount of nourishment, may be regarded as making an attempt on his own life, and is guilty of a grievous sin, so he who is in the state of grace can make eating and drinking a supernatural work, if he has the proper intention, can serve God thereby, gain merit in Heaven, and increase his glory for all eternity.

The sin of gluttony does not consist in eating and drinking.

In the second place, gluttony does not consist in the quality, excellence, or costliness of the food and drink, provided it is not of a forbidden kind otherwise; for, a poor laborer, who has nothing but a plate of vegetables and a piece of bread, can commit gluttony; while on the other hand, a rich man, who has the most costly and the best prepared viands on his table, may not exceed the bounds of temperance, and so may perform a meritorious work by eating and drinking. Thirdly, gluttony does not always consist in enjoying the taste of good food, as some pious souls imagine, who believe that if they enjoy their food, they are guilty of a venial sin of sensuality. No, it is

Nor in the quality or costliness of food and drink.

<sup>1</sup> Per hanc accendimur ad luxuriam, per hanc animamur ad superbiam, per hanc suffocamur pretiose vestiti, per hanc ad superfluam dormitionem trahimur, per hanc tentamur delicate pasci.—S. Aug. Sermo 10. de Otio.

<sup>2</sup> Per sanctum jejunium tuum.

one thing to eat and drink with relish, and another to eat and drink merely for the sake of the pleasure one has in it ; this latter, as we shall hear presently, is to gratify one's sensuality, and is a sin of gluttony, but not the former. For, just as the eye, when it is in a healthy state, sees the beauty of some object that is presented to it, and cannot take away that beauty from it, so a healthy taste must necessarily find a certain amount of enjoyment in food, and cannot prevent the food from having that quality which gives the enjoyment.

Nor in eating or drinking much.

Finally, gluttony does not always consist in eating and drinking a great deal. For, one man requires more than another to keep up his strength ; so that of two men who are sitting at the same table, one who eats and drinks a great deal may observe the virtue of moderation, while he who eats less may sin by gluttony. Nay, the same man may to-day eat and drink, without sin, because he is in good health, much more than he could on another day, when he is not so well, and when he could commit gluttony, although he consumes a far less quantity of food.

But in an inordinate manner of eating and drinking.

The sin of gluttony consists then in nothing else but an inordinate manner of eating and drinking ; when the action, namely, is not directed to the end for which God created food and drink. The only end for which man should eat and drink, is to support his life, health and strength, so as to be able to serve God all the better and all the longer, since that is the end for which God has created food and drink. From this it follows that I must not eat or drink oftener or more than I believe to be necessary to that end, that is, to the support of the health and strength necessary to serve God according to my condition ; just as medicine, which is used only to recover lost health, or to avert sickness, is never employed but when it is believed necessary for that purpose.

When and how one sins in this respect.

Again, it follows that whenever my intention in eating and drinking cannot be reconciled with that end, or whenever I eat or drink in such a manner as to prevent me from directing my action to that end, I am guilty of gluttony. Thus, I cannot have a good intention, when I eat or drink what is forbidden by the law of God or of the Church ; such as would be the case, if I were to eat meat without a dispensation on the days on which it is prohibited, or if I were to ask for a dispensation without just cause, as many Christians do, or if I were to eat more than is allowed in the collation, etc. For in such circum-

stances, there is no doubt that it is not the will of God for me to indulge myself in that way. That was the sin that our fore-father Adam committed in Paradise, when he ate the fruit of the forbidden tree, that was given him by Eve ; and that sin is the origin and cause of all the evils that the human race has to suffer. Nor could I have a good intention, if I eat or drink what I know by experience, or by the advice of a physician, to be prejudicial to my health. Nor when I eat or drink so much that I overload the stomach, or dull the intellect so that I cannot attend to the duties of my state ; and so on. Every fault and sin that is committed in any of these ways comes from an evil source, that is, from the gratification of the sensual appetites. For, he who seeks that alone, does not care whether the food or drink is wholesome or not, whether it is allowed or forbidden, or whether it is enjoyed with moderation or to excess ; as long as it is pleasing to the palate, he is satisfied. Therefore, theologians generally define gluttony as, “ An inordinate appetite, or desire of food or drink, for the sake of gratifying the sense of taste.”

There we have, my dear brethren, in a few words, the nature and characteristics of this vice, which brutish, as it is, is yet amongst people of all classes, so that few could be found who do not sometimes sin in that way. For, on the one hand, a sad necessity forces us to eat and drink, and to find a gratification of the sense of taste in doing so, a gratification which we cannot dissociate from the use of food and drink ; while on the other hand, our inborn sensuality impels us violently to seek what is pleasing to it, and therefore, even the most pious people find it difficult to avoid all excess in this matter, and to keep their intention pure, and fixed on the only end for which we should eat and drink, according to the laws of Christian moderation.

It is a common vice.

The great St. Augustine publicly acknowledges his shortcomings in this respect, when he thus complains to God : “ Thou hast taught me O Lord, to take food as I would medicine.”<sup>1</sup> But how often am I not deceived herein by my own sensuality, so that I exceed the requirements of necessity ! Besides the intention of supporting my strength, which alone should animate me in eating and drinking, another, that of gratifying my sensuality, also manages to introduce itself ; so that, although I am determined to eat no more than is absolutely necessary, yet

To which even the holiest people are liable to yield sometimes, as St. Augustine testifies of himself.

<sup>1</sup> Hoc me docuisti, ut quemadmodum medicamenta, sic alimenta sumpturus accedam.

sensuality comes in uninvited, and claims its share also. Further, when I believe that I have barely satisfied the wants of nature, I find on examination, that the sensual appetite has committed a theft on me; so that sometimes I do not know what intention I have, nor why I eat and drink, whether it is for my health's sake, or solely for pleasure, or for both together. "Daily have I to fight against these temptations, and I call upon Thee, O Lord my God, to help me, because I am at a loss to know what to do."<sup>1</sup> I hear the voice of God saying: And take heed to yourselves, lest perhaps your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting;<sup>2</sup> and I have heard Thy voice also crying out: Go not after thy lusts, but turn away from thy own will.<sup>3</sup> But in spite of all my care, I find myself often carried away by sensuality. O my God, what miserable mortals we are! Who is there who places a bit and bridle in his mouth, that he may never exceed the bounds of moderation? And who is there who does not sometimes go beyond the requirements of necessity?<sup>4</sup> If there is any one so far advanced in virtue, certainly he is a perfect man, and he may praise and glorify Thy holy name; as for me, I acknowledge that I am only a sinful man, and that I am far from such perfection.<sup>5</sup> Thus far St. Augustine.

And of his  
holy mother  
Monica.

The same Saint writes of his holy mother, Monica, who was brought up as a child in the greatest austerity, so that no matter how thirsty she was, she would not take a drop of water out of the usual times; and yet, when occasion offered, she allowed herself to be conquered by a fondness for wine. Whenever her parents sent her for wine she used at first to taste just a few drops, but as time went on, she grew so accustomed to it, that she could drink it by the glassful. However her parents found her out, and having given her a sharp reproof, cured her of the bad habit.

How much  
more then,  
are sensual  
and worldly  
people lia-  
ble to this  
vice.

From this, my dear brethren, I must conclude, that if such great saints were not freed for this vice, although they constantly endeavored to mortify and overcome themselves, and always took the greatest pains to eat and drink with a good intention, and not to exceed the bounds of Christian mortification, so that they took food as if it were a medicine, what must we think of

<sup>1</sup> His tentationibus quotidie conor resistere, et invoco dexteram tuam ad salutem meam, quia consilium mihi de hac re nondum stat.

<sup>2</sup> Attendite autem vobis, ne forte graventur corda vestra in crapula.—Luke xxi. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Post concupiscentias tuas non eas, et a voluntate tua avertere.—Eccl. xviii. 30.

<sup>4</sup> Quis est Domine, qui non rapitur aliquando extra metas necessitatis?

<sup>5</sup> Quisquis est magnus est; magnificet nomen tuum; ego autem non sum, quia peccator homo sum.—S. Aug. Confess. l. 10, c. 31.

worldly-minded people who deliberately seek their bodily comfort, convenience, and pleasure in all things? Who are shocked at the very name of Christian mortification and penance? Who look upon a fast of forty days, commanded under pain of mortal sin by the Church of God, as an intolerable burden, and think it next to an impossibility to keep it to the end? Do not these people sin by gluttony every day almost? "By their fruits you shall know them,"<sup>1</sup> said Christ of the false prophets. Even so, it may easily be seen whether one is addicted to the vice of gluttony, and whether he seeks his pleasure in eating and drinking, by the following effects of gluttony, which are characteristics, or to speak more correctly, ways and means of gratifying one's sense of taste, as I shall explain in the

### Second Part.

It is not I, but St. Thomas of Aquin, and with him the holy Pope St. Gregory, who have given the following signs of gluttony: *præpropere, laute, nimis, ardentè, studiose*; to eat or drink too early is one sign; to be too delicate in eating or drinking, is another; to eat or drink too much is the third; to eat or drink too eagerly is the fourth; to be too careful about good eating and drinking is the fifth sign that one does not take food or drink for the proper end, but rather to satisfy the sense of taste, and that therefore, one is guilty of gluttony.

First, then, *præpropere*, means, as St. Thomas says, "to eat and drink before necessity obliges."<sup>2</sup> Thus Jonathan was sentenced to death by his father, because he tasted a little honey before the proper time, as St. Gregory says.<sup>3</sup> This sign is to be seen in those who have no proper time fixed for their meals, and who regard their appetite and their desire as their clock, and not hunger or necessity. They are always ready to eat, as often as they find anything that suits their taste. Early or late, morning, noon, or evening, between meals, it is all one to them. There are some who, before they have finished dressing in the morning, nay, immediately on awaking, and while still in bed, must have tea, coffee, a pipe of tobacco, or something else, ready for them; they eat and drink before they hear Mass, or say their morning prayers, nay, before they make the sign of the Cross, or a good intention, or even think of God. An evident

Signs of  
gluttony.

The first is,  
to eat at im-  
proper  
times.

<sup>1</sup> A fructibus eorum cognoscetis eos.—Matth. vii. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Cum quis manducando indigentia tempus prævenit.—D. Thom. r. 2. q. 148. 2-4.

<sup>3</sup> Mortis quippe sententiam patris ore Jonathas meruit, quia in gustu mellis constitutum edendi tempus antecessit.—S. Greg. 30 mor. c. 27.

sign amongst those who are in good health, and have no valid excuse for anticipating the usual time, is, that they eat and drink not through necessity, and for the sake of preserving their strength for the service of God, but merely to satisfy their sense of taste, and that therefore they are guilty of gluttony. Metaphrastes, in the life of St. Pachomius, brings forward a miraculous occurrence to prove that eating in this way outside of the ordinary meal-times is the work of the demon of gluttony. Pachomius, visiting once a certain monastery, saw an evil spirit sitting on the top of a high fig-tree enticing young boys to climb up and eat the fruit; he recognized him at once as the demon of gluttony, and ordered the tree to be cut down, so as to take away the occasion of sin. The gardener was very sorry at this, and begged that the tree might be spared, as it was so fruitful. Pachomius granted his request and allowed the tree to remain, but, behold, on the next morning it was quite withered. "Mark," says St. Humbertus, "those who are fond of eating fruit and the like between meals. Was it not a sin of that kind on the part of our first parents that caused the ruin of the world? Did not that nun who ate lettuce in the convent garden, swallow down the devil with it? as St. Gregory relates in his dialogues."<sup>1</sup> This consideration induced St. Sabbas to make a resolution never to eat fruit; for having once plucked an apple from a tree, when he was on the point of eating it, he remembered the fall of our first parents in paradise, and knowing that the devil was tempting him, he blushed with shame at his weakness and at his intention of committing gluttony, and throwing the apple on the ground, he trampled it under foot, and thus conquered his desire for such things. The holy Abbot Esaias therefore advises his disciples "never to eat the least thing out of meal-times, lest from a small sin of gluttony they might go on to great ones."<sup>2</sup>

The second sign is, to be too delicate in eating.

*Laute*, that is to say, to be too delicate in eating, is the second sign of gluttony, and it is to be observed in those, who, although they do not eat out of meal-times, yet insist on having everything cooked in a particular manner, so as to suit their taste, and if that is not done, they have no words hard enough for the cook; they are never satisfied with common food, no

<sup>1</sup> Nota de his qui extra horam prandii comedunt, quales sunt, qui fructus quoscumque et similia comederent extra mensam. Nonne totus mundus damnatus est, propter hujusmodi comestionem primorum parentum? Nonne monialis transiens in hortum, et comedens lactucam, cum lactuca comedit diabolum, sicut refert Gregorius in dialogo?—Humbert. c. 5-7. in c. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Ne quidquam licet paucillum sit, comede præter tempus, ne paulatim ex minimis ad deteriora prolabare.

matter how good it is ; they must always have the best of everything, no matter what it costs. Amongst other things, the Holy Scripture says of the children of Heli : “ Also before they burnt the fat, the servant of the priest came, and said to the man that sacrificed : Give me flesh to boil for the priest, for I will not take of thee sodden flesh, but raw.”<sup>1</sup> Now why did the wicked priests ask for raw meat ? Would not the cooked meat have been better for them, as it would have saved them the fuel and the labor necessary to cook it ? The commentators of the Sacred Scriptures answer this question by saying that the priests acted thus through gluttony ; “ The sons of Heli,” says St. Isidor, “ took raw meat from those who offered it, contrary to custom, that they might cook it afterwards so as to suit their own taste.”<sup>2</sup> St. Gregory agrees with this : “ The first sin of the Children of Heli consisted in the commanding their servant not to take the cooked meat, according to the established custom, but to ask for uncooked meat, that they might prepare it as they wished.”<sup>3</sup> For according to the law of God, the flesh thus offered should be simply boiled in pure water. The sensual and gluttonous priests were not content with this ; they wished to have the meat roasted, or cooked in some other way, so as to suit their taste better. Therefore, they said ; “ I will not take of thee sodden flesh, but raw ;” and if the man who offered sacrifice, did not give them what they asked, they took it by force ; “ Thou shalt give it me now, or I will take it by force.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, says the Sacred Scripture, “ The sin of the young men was exceeding great before the Lord, because they withdrew men from the sacrifice of the Lord.”<sup>5</sup> See, my dear brethren, how far one may be brought by gluttony. It is in our own days frequently the case that more is given for one dinner, than is earned in a whole week. There are many who consume in one supper all they will make for some days after ; nay, very often the poor children and servants have to go hungry or to content themselves with very coarse food, on account of the gluttony of one man.

<sup>1</sup> Etiam antequam adolerent adipem, veniebat puer sacerdotis, et dicebat immolanti : Da mihi carnem, ut coquam sacerdoti : non enim accipiam a te carnem coctam, sed crudam.—I Kings ii. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Filii Heli extra morem crudam ab offerentibus carnem tollebant, quam sibi accuratius præpararent.—Isid. de diff. Spir. l. 2, c. 35.

<sup>3</sup> Prima filiorum Heli culpa suborta est, quod ex eorum voto sacerdotis puer non antiquo more coctas vellet de sacrificio carnes accipere, sed crudas quæreretur, quas accuratius exhiberet.—S. Greg. l. 30. moral. c. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Nunc enim dabis, alioquin tollam vi.—I Kings ii. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Erat ergo peccatum puerorum grande nimis coram Domino ; quia retraherant homines a sacrificio Domini.—Ibid. 17.

Oh, how many feasts and entertainments the devil will bring forward at the last day, as a testimony against those who gave them, and who, not having paid their debts, were guilty of so many acts of injustice and theft ! Surlius writes that in the year 1511, there was a giant in Venice, who used to eat every day for his dinner a sheep and a calf ;<sup>1</sup> certainly he must have been very fat, and must have had a wonderful appetite, since he was able to eat at one meal as much as would have sufficed to feed a whole family for some time. Yet, my dear brethren, there are some of those delicate eaters who consume even more than that gluttonous giant ; for they eat up all the substance of their children and leave them in poverty. In this class, however, I do not mean to include the sick, or the delicate, or those of high station who place exquisite viands before their guests, according to the requirements of necessity, Christian charity and courtesy. But generally speaking, the satisfying one's self with food of that kind, can hardly be called anything but gluttony and sensuality.

Thirdly :  
eating too  
much.

This ordinarily gives rise to the third sign, *nimis*, that is, eating too much. He who measures the quantity of his food by his appetite and taste, cannot but exceed the bounds of moderation, and will eat more than necessity requires. There are some to whom one might with truth apply those words of the Prophet Isaias : " Most impudent dogs, they never had enough ;"<sup>2</sup> They eat and drink as if they could never satisfy themselves ; as long as they like the food, and have plenty of it, they continue to gorge themselves, until the overloaded stomach refuses to bear any more. These people, says St. Gregory, are worse than oxen, horses and mules, that never eat more than is necessary to satisfy their hunger. This is therefore the most odious and most injurious form of gluttony. Shame, cries out the so-called Author of the Imperfect Work, " One should eat in the day what natural reason requires, and not what sensuality demands."<sup>3</sup>

Fourthly :  
eating too  
greedily.

The fourth sign of gluttony is, *ardenter*, that is, a too great eagerness in eating, the sin that Esau committed, when he so far forgot himself that he sold his birth-right for a mess of pottage ; as St. Gregory says : " Esau lost the glory of his birth-right, because he gave way to his desire for that vile food, for the sake of which he sold his dignity as first-born ; thus

<sup>1</sup> Sur apud kirch, in mundo subter. l. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Canes impudentissimi nescierunt saturitatem. — Isa. lvi. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Tanto quis uno die manducet, quantum ratio naturalis exigit, non quantum lascivia carnis impellit.

showing what an influence gluttony had on him,"<sup>1</sup> From which he concludes, that it is not the costliness of the food, but the too great desire for it which constitutes gluttony. <sup>2</sup> As Hugo of St. Victor remarks, the most remarkable sins of gluttony were caused, not by delicately prepared meats, but by coarse and common food: "The first man was tempted, not by the well-cooked flesh of a swine, but by a raw apple; Esau, by a dish of lentils, not by a roast fowl;" and, he adds, "The devil tempted Our Lord by a piece of dry bread, and not by a well prepared dish."<sup>3</sup> Caesarius writes that there was once a soldier who could never perform his sacramental penance, because he found it too difficult; until at last his confessor asked him if there was anything he would undertake to do instead. Yes, answered the soldier, I have an apple tree, the fruit of which is so bitter that I cannot bear the taste of it; put it upon me as a penance never to eat any of that fruit as long as I live. The priest, who knew well that our corrupt nature is only too much inclined to do what is forbidden, and that the devil would not fail to tempt the soldier to eat that fruit, sour as it was, agreed to the proposal, and imposed the required penance. The soldier went his way rejoicing, and thinking that he would not have any difficulty now in performing his penance. But, wonderful to relate, he never passed by that tree, without feeling a strong inclination to eat some of the fruit; however, he remembered his obligation, and restrained his desire. On one occasion he was standing by the tree, when the temptation came so strong upon him that he actually stretched out his arm to pluck an apple, but he drew it back again at once. This struggle against the temptation lasted nearly the whole day; But he was strengthened by divine grace, and he resisted so valiantly, that the effort cost him his life; he fell down dead under the tree. So true is it, that it is not the quality of the food, but a too great eagerness for it that constitutes gluttony. They sin, who, while they are eating, are so completely absorbed in what they are doing, that their eyes, hands and their whole bodies, as well as their mouths are fully occupied, they swallow down one mouthful after another, as if they were afraid the table would fly away

<sup>1</sup> Primogenitorum gloriam Esau amisit, quia magno aestu desiderii vitem cibum, scilicet lenticulum concepivit, quam dum vendendis etiam primogenitis prætulit, quo in illam appetitu anhelaret, indicavit.—S. Greg. ubi supra.

<sup>2</sup> Neque enim cibus, sed appetitus in vitio est.

<sup>3</sup> Primus homo tentatus est non de porco sed de pomo; Esau non de gallina, sed de lentacula; Salvator noster, non de carne, sed de pane.—Hugo Victorin. in cap. 6. reg. S. Aug.

from them, unless they make haste. An evident sign of gluttony, and indeed of rudeness, which is not only contrary to Christian temperance, but is also very injurious to health. People should remember the warning of the Wise Ecclesiasticus : “ Use as a frugal man the things that are set before thee ; lest if thou eatest much, thou be hated ; ”<sup>1</sup> that is to say, eat with prudence, modesty and decency.

Fifthly :  
to be too  
careful  
about good  
eating and  
drinking.

The fifth sign is, *studiose*, that is, to be too careful about good eating and drinking, as is the case with those who are always feasting, as if they did not eat to preserve life, but were on the earth for no other purpose than to eat and drink. Of such people St. Paul says : “ Whose God is their belly ; ”<sup>2</sup> they are nearly always thinking of eating, drinking and feasting. It was for living in that way that the rich man in the Gospel was condemned to hell ; for the Gospel does not say that he was guilty of any other sin but gluttony ; “ There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and feasted sumptuously every day ; ”<sup>3</sup> This is the way to swallow up one’s yearly income, so that very often one’s heirs have no legacy to expect beyond the trouble and anxiety to find the means of continuing such a luxurious and indolent life. What will be still harder to answer for at the judgment-seat, is that those who live in that way, have hardly anything left wherewith to give alms, although the poor are suffering hunger and thirst. There was a certain French courtier, as Mazarin writes, who had built for himself a magnificent house like a palace ; when the king saw it he could not sufficiently admire the skill of the architect, the beauty of the furniture, etc. But when he went into the kitchen, and saw that it was very small and that it had only one fire-place, he was amazed, and asked how such a mistake was made, to put a small kitchen like that in so large and fine a house. Your majesty, answered the courtier, it was no mistake ; for it was done at my special order ; “ a small kitchen makes a large house, but a large kitchen makes a small house.” It is not hard to understand what he meant by that.

Gluttony  
may be  
committed  
in desire.

Finally, one may be addicted to the vice of gluttony, although one does not eat out of meal-times, nor too delicately, nor too much, nor too greedily, nor too luxuriously. And how is that ?

<sup>1</sup> Utere quasi homo frugi his, quæ tibi apponuntur, ne, cum manducas multum, odio habearis.—EccI. xxxi. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Quorum deus venter est.—Philtpp. iii. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Homo quidam erat dives, qui induebatur purpura et bysso, et epulabatur quotidie splendide.—Luke xvi. 19.

A beggar may be avaricious, although he does not own a farthing ; a poor girl may be proud, although no one has any regard for her ; namely, in heart, and through an inordinate desire of riches and honors. In the same way one may be guilty of gluttony, and many in fact are guilty of it, who have hardly enough to support life, and yet long for good living and envy those who can sit every day at a well-furnished table, while they think themselves unhappy in being deprived of that pleasure.

Like the Israelites in the desert, who longed for the flesh-pots of Egypt, and who were tired of the manna that was sent them daily from heaven : “ Our soul now loatheth this very light food ; ”<sup>1</sup> so these people long for the means of indulging in the pleasures of the table. And how severely the Israelites were punished for their sin ! “ Wherefore the Lord sent amongst the people fiery serpents ; ”<sup>2</sup> to bite and kill them, and to teach them, and us also, how hateful to God is the vice of gluttony.

The Israelites were punished for a gluttony of that kind.

Think of this, my dear brethren, and reason thus with yourselves : if a merciful God punished His chosen people so severely for a gluttony that they committed only in desire, how will not the same God chastise the gluttony that is actually committed in so many ways and daily by Christians living under a holy and perfect law ? What have those tepid and half-hearted Christians to expect, who refuse to mortify their sensuality sufficiently even to observe the Lenten fast in a manner becoming Catholics, and who, for the sake of satisfying their gluttony, eat three full meals every day, without scruple, so that one hardly knows whether it is Lent or carnival time with them ? What have they to expect who look upon it as an intolerable penance to fast even during Holy Week, so that even this short time seems too long for them, and who like the Jews, hanker after their flesh-pots ? What, I ask, have such Christians to expect by way of punishment ? Let that religious tell us, whose gluttony cost him so dear ; he was once wearied after a journey, and, as it was a day of abstinence, his friend, who gave him hospitality, offered him fish to eat ; the religious was not satisfied with it, and asked his friend to have a fowl cooked for him ; his request was granted, but the first bit of the fowl that he took, stuck in his throat and choked him. Oh, how many Christians would die suddenly nowadays, if the first bit of

The gluttony of Christians deserves a more severe punishment.

Anima nostra jam nauseat super cibo isto levissimo.—Num. xxi. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Quamobrem misit Dominus in populum ignitos serpentes.—Ibid. 6.

meat they eat on days of abstinence were to choke them! Therefore, the chief object of my present instruction is to remind you, and myself as well, that we must mortify and overcome gluttony, at least so far as to observe all fasts?

Conclusion  
and exhortation  
to Christian  
temperance.

But, besides this, whenever we enjoy the gifts of God in the shape of food and drink, we must not forget the good intention, nor lose sight of the end for which we should eat and drink, which is to preserve our strength for the service of God; and if we do that we shall at once overcome all gluttony. There are opportunities of mortifying ourselves in that respect, even at a well furnished table; for instance, we might allow one or two morsels of something we are very fond of, to remain untasted, and offer them up to God in thought; or we might now and then abstain altogether from the dish we like best, or what is still better, keep it for Jesus Christ, that is, for the poor, as we read of St. Louis, king of France, whose biographer says of him, that he always kept the best food for the poor, while he himself was contented with the worst; or we might leave the table before having fully satisfied our appetite, etc. Mortifications of this kind, when practised with perseverance, and daily, are of more profit than fasting occasionally for whole days together. Let us often recall those words of the Apostle to the Romans: "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but justice and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in this serveth Christ, pleaseth God."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, according to the example of the same Apostle, who says elsewhere, "I know both how to abound and to suffer need;"<sup>2</sup> let us try to practise temperance that we too may be able to say of ourselves with truth, I know how to eat and to be hungry; I know how to act when I have abundance and when I am in want. They who have to be content with coarse and homely food, must be resigned to the will of God, and thank Him for what He has given them. They who have abundance, must learn how to keep themselves within the bounds of Christian temperance. And with regard to this matter, let us all remember the words of Christ: "The kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away;"<sup>3</sup> and so we shall learn to reserve our greatest appetite for the heavenly banquet which will satiate us for all eternity. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Non est enim regnum Dei esca et potus; sed justitia et pax, et gaudium in Spiritu sancto, qui enim in hoc servit Christo, placet Deo.—Rom. xiv. 17, 18.

<sup>2</sup> Scio et abundare . . . et penuriam pati.—Philipp. iv. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Regnum cœlorum vim patitur, et violenti rapiunt illud.—Math. xi. 12.

*Another Introduction to the same sermon for Sexagesima Sunday.*

Text.

*In fame et siti, in jejuniis multis.*—II. Cor. xi. 27.

“In hunger and thirst, in fastings often.”

If fasting and hunger are so general amongst holy Christians, who thereby subdue the flesh, and keep it in servitude, as we see from to-day's Epistle to have been the case with St. Paul who says of himself that he performed his apostolic office “in hunger and thirst, in fastings often,” if fasting and frequent mortification of the desire of eating and drinking, etc.—*continues as before.*

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EIGHTEENTH SERMON.

ON THE INJURIOUS EFFECTS OF GLUTTONY.

Subject.

Nothing is more injurious to one's bodily health and well-being, than gluttony and an immoderate love of the pleasures of the table ; therefore he who wishes to enjoy a long life and good health must practise Christian temperance.—*Preached on the second Sunday in Lent.*

Text.

*Bonum est nos hic esse*—Matth. xvii. 4.

“It is good for us to be here.”

Introduction.

Most people agree with Peter in wishing to spend their lives where they feel happiest ; still there are not many who would be satisfied with the pleasures of the sense of sight alone, as was the case with Peter, who rejoiced in the sight of the glorified humanity of Our Lord. No, we are not satisfied unless all the senses have their pleasure ; and the greatest of these pleasures, as we imagine, consists in eating and drinking. Hence, whenever we hear a man say that he enjoyed himself, we generally understand that good eating and drinking had something to do with it. Still, my dear brethren, I am of the opinion that they

who are given to gluttony and who seek pleasure in eating, do not at all find what they seek. For, I ask, what is the object of their eating and drinking? Is it not that they may be happy, that they may live long and enjoy themselves? Now the very contrary of this follows on gluttony and immoderate eating and drinking, as I shall now show.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*Nothing is more injurious to one's bodily health and well-being, than gluttony and an immoderate love of the pleasures of the table; for there is nothing which tends more to shorten life. Therefore, he who wishes to enjoy a long life and good health, and to be able to do much good, must practise the virtue of Christian temperance. Such is the whole subject of this sermon.*

Grant us all, O God, through the intercession of Mary and the holy angels guardian, the grace to observe temperance, at least so far as not to break prescribed fasts.

Every excess is injurious.

My proposition may seem strange and contrary to general experience, for it is usually said, that good eating and drinking keep body and soul together; that is, that it lengthens human life, which cannot subsist without a certain amount of food and drink. And in fact, as we have seen already, food and drink are ordained by God to keep up the health and life of the body. How then can gluttony, which consists in the enjoyment of those things, be injurious to health and shorten life? Still, my dear brethren, there is no doubt that it does so. Medicine is taken, either to cure a sickness from which one is actually suffering, or to avert the danger of it; is not that so? But if the medicine is not taken in the proper quantity, if, for instance, the sick person takes three spoonfuls instead of one, of what good will the medicine be then? It will only make matters worse, and will sometimes even cause death. And is not that equally true? You pour oil into a lamp; to what end? To keep the light burning, which would otherwise go out, through the wick consuming itself. Yet if you pour in too much oil, you will extinguish the light by drowning the wick.

We generally exceed in the use of necessary things.

It is the same with eating and drinking; what oil is to the lamp, and medicine to the sick body, food is to him who is in good health, for it maintains his strength and his life. If we never exceeded the proper quantity, nor took our food too often, then we should have nothing to fear. But we act in this as we do in almost everything; we use the means that God has given

us to support our lives, against the end for which he has instituted it, and we make ourselves guilty of deliberate excess. For instance, we require a certain amount of sleep in order to rest our weary limbs and to relieve ourselves from the many thoughts and cares that oppress us during the day; we require clothing in order to maintain a suitable appearance and to protect ourselves against the cold; we stand in need of days of rest and recreation in order to renew our fervor in the service of God, and to be all the better able to fulfil the duties of our state, etc. But the mistake is that we seldom confine ourselves to what necessity requires in those things; thus, sleep is often abused through sloth and sensuality, so that it is prolonged sometimes far into the day, and as a consequence of that, the understanding is dulled, the head becomes heavy, and one is incapable of cheerfulness. Clothing is made the occasion of useless expense, pride and vanity, nay, it sometimes becomes an occasion of sin and scandal to others. The days of rest are made an excuse for squandering away one's time in idleness and useless pleasure; visits and idle talk are multiplied and prolonged, gambling and other foolish pastimes are made a daily custom, while the duties of house-keeping, the care of children and the most important business of the soul are neglected. Thus, means that are in themselves useful and necessary, are perverted into injurious and unlawful abuses, which are contrary to the end for which God instituted those means, and that, because moderation is not observed in the use of them.

So it is also with food and drink; our sensuality is not content with what merely satisfies the wants of nature; and, as the old proverb has it, it would be easy to satisfy the stomach, if the eyes were not so big. If gluttony has once taken possession of a man, so that he eats and drinks to gratify his sensuality, he will hardly ever be content with merely satisfying nature; for he will either eat and drink what does not agree with him, or he will eat and drink a number of different things, or he will not observe the proper time for meals, or he will give way to greediness, or to excess, and will eat more than he can digest, as I have already explained.

It is thus that the health suffers so much, and is injured instead of being preserved, while life is shortened. The words of the Holy Ghost in the Book of Ecclesiasticus, must be infallibly true: "Be not greedy in any feasting, and pour not out thyself upon any meat. For in many meats there will be sick-

And in the use of food and drink.

This injures the health, according to the words of the Holy Ghost.

ness, and greediness will turn to choler. By surfeiting many have perished ; but he that is temperate shall prolong life.”<sup>1</sup>

And according to the testimony of medical men.

It is the opinion also of all medical men, that most illnesses are caused by excess in eating and drinking. If a pantry in which different articles of food are stored, is kept closed, it soon becomes full of worms, flies, wasps and all kinds of vermin ; so the stomach that is overloaded with different kinds of food, must necessarily be filled with bad humors arising from indigestion, which lessen and destroy the natural heat of the body. Others compare the stomach to the hopper of a mill, into which the grain is poured in order to be ground ; if the miller does not know his business, and puts in too much at once, the corn will be ground but very imperfectly, so that it will not make good meal, nor good bread. In the same way, if the stomach is overloaded with food and drink, it cannot digest properly ; so that ill health must be the consequence. A bad digestion causes evil humors, in the head, and bad blood in the veins, from which nearly all diseases come. Hence the well-known saying : “ Gluttony kills more than the sword.”<sup>2</sup> That is the reason why the celebrated physician George Huebner gives the following advice to all : “ If you care to be in good health, do not eat with both jaws, like a cat ; but always remember to leave the table before having fully satisfied your appetite, and filled your stomach to repletion ; drink, so as to be still thirsty ; eat, so as to be still hungry.”<sup>3</sup>

Experience shows that this was true in the first ages of the world.

The truth of this is proved by the experience of all ages, which shows that temperance is the best means of prolonging life, according to the testimony of the Holy Ghost : “ He that is temperate shall prolong life.” We know from the Sacred Scriptures that in the first ages of the world, men lived to be four, five, six, seven, eight, and nine hundred years old ; now what kind of food had they in those days ? The word of God assures us that they required nothing but bread and water : “ The chief thing for man’s life is water and bread and clothing.”<sup>4</sup> It is the general teaching of the Holy Fathers, that from the beginning of the world to the Deluge, people who had any fear

<sup>1</sup> Noli avidus esse in omni epulatione, et non te effundas super omnem escam : in multis enim escis erit infirmitas, et aviditas appropinquabit usque ad choleram. Propter crapulam multi obierunt ; qui autem abstinens est, adjicet vitam.—Ecl. xxxvii. 32-34.

<sup>2</sup> Plures occidit gula quam gladius.

<sup>3</sup> Si sanitatem ames, ne voves, ut felis, ambabus maxillis ; sed illud spectes semper, ut mensam deseras appetentia nondum expleta, stomacho nondum plene saturato ; sic pota ut sitas ; sic ede ut esurias.

<sup>4</sup> Initium vitæ hominis aqua et panis, et vestimentum. —Ecl. xxix. 28.

of God, never ate meat, although they had flocks and herds in abundance, but contented themselves with fruits, vegetables and milk-meats; of wine they knew nothing. And yet with such plain food, they were able to live so long! We might think, my dear brethren, that they lived so long in those early days through a special decree of Providence, in order that the world might become peopled all the sooner, and such is really the case. Still, in those days God allowed nature to take its course, as He does now, so that we must necessarily come to the conclusion that excessive and costly food is not required to preserve life and strength.

Be that as it may, however, we shall now come a little nearer to our own time. Celius Rodiginus writes of Galen, the prince of physicians: "It is said that Galen, the philosopher and physician, lived to be a hundred and forty years old."<sup>1</sup> How did he manage that? Had he discovered some wonderful medicine, which he kept for himself alone in order to prolong his life? There is no doubt he had. And what was it? One that all can use without the trouble of sending to the apothecary's for it; "He was so temperate in eating and drinking, that he never satisfied his appetite at table;" he managed so that he always felt some desire to eat; "Thus he died of old age alone, without suffering any other malady."<sup>2</sup> Luigi Cornaro, a Venetian noble, in his book on temperance, proposes himself as an example to the world: "Believe me, dear reader, for I speak from experience, from my youth up to my thirty-fifth year, during which time I was accustomed to indulge my appetite, I was never in good health; so that the food and drink with which I used to satisfy my appetite, occasioned me much discomfort and illness, and so did me more harm than good. But at last I resolved to live more temperately, and although it cost me a great deal at first to keep that resolution and overcome my sensuality, yet I succeeded at last. Since then I am never sick; I am now eighty years old, and am so healthy and strong that I expect to live a long time yet." And his prophecy turned out true, for when he was in his ninety-fifth year he received a serious injury from a fall; but he was so strong and robust that he recovered without difficulty, as there were no evil humors in his body to interfere

And also in  
our own  
time.

<sup>1</sup> Proditum est Galenum, philosophum et medicum singularem, centum quadraginta annos vixisse.

<sup>2</sup> Tanta in cibo et potu abstinentia utebatur, ut ad satietatem nunquam comederit, sicque citra ullam affectionem sola defecit senectute.

with the working of the medicines used to cure him. There is another proof that he who is temperate prolongs his life.

Saints became very old, in spite of their austerities.

If I said anything of those holy servants of God who lived in the greatest austerity and mortification, and yet reached a ripe old age, you would say, as people generally do in such cases : Oh, they were saints ! Certainly they were saints, but what if they were ? Does holiness of life change human nature, and serve as food and drink ? By no means. Paul, Anthony, Hilarion and many other hermits, who lived in the desert, in holes and caves in the mountains, practising the greatest austerities and mortifications, allowing themselves only a very short sleep on the bare ground, and spending all their time in prayer and meditation, were human beings the same as we are, and like us they required food and drink to sustain life ; nay, many of them, according to Cassian, were of noble birth and delicate constitution, and had been brought up in luxury ; and how long did they live amidst the austerities of the desert ? Hilarion, as St. Jerome says, went into the desert when he was fifteen years old and lived to be over eighty. Anthony, according to St. Athanasius, lived to be a hundred and twenty years old, although he entered the desert in his youth. Paul, the first hermit, as St. Jerome testifies, spent ninety years in the desert, and was over a hundred and thirteen when he died. During all that time, these holy men were always in good health, they were never in need of a physician ; they never required medicine. How did they manage that ? What strengthening, nutritious and costly food and drink they must have had to be able to preserve their health so long and to live to such a miraculous old age ! No doubt their food and drink were very healthy, or they would not have lived so long, nor have been so free from illness. Do you wish to know in what it consisted ? Wild herbs, roots, and the buds of trees, were the usual evening meal of St. Hilarion ; salt, bread and water, that of St. Anthony ; they never ate at mid-day, or took more meals than one. Once a day St. Paul used to eat dates and drink water, until the raven brought him half a loaf daily. They all looked on it as a sin even to desire flesh-meat. Such was the medicine of those great servants of God. They were always in good health and reached a ripe old age, in spite of the austerity of their lives, because they were so temperate in eating and drinking. “ He that is temperate shall prolong life.”

While they

This is well worth the consideration of those self-indulgent

Christians, who, blinded by gluttony and sensuality, imagine that they cannot observe the forty days fast of Lent, and persuade themselves that they must have meat, or else they will get sick. (Poor people, how I pity you ! ) Nor should it be forgotten by those half-hearted Catholics, who having a dispensation to eat meat once a day in Lent, or who, after having made a good dinner with other nutritious food, are not satisfied unless they eat a good supper also, so that they may not go to bed hungry. How many of those people act thus in order to preserve their health ; they lead such self-indulgent lives, and gratify their palates whenever they can ; they would not think on any account of suffering the least hunger, although they can sleep in their comfortable beds till sunrise : they are unwearied in the search after pleasures and pastimes ; they most carefully avoid all labor, difficulty and annoyance that could in the least injure their health ; how many of them, I ask, live in constant enjoyment of good health to a ripe old age, like the hermits of old, whose only food was bread and water once a day ? Not many ; for if we were to ask, who are they who are most in need of the physician ; who are they who have to patch up their health with all sorts of medicine ; who are the most profitable customers of the apothecary ; who complain oftenest when they feel a draught, or a breath of cold air ; who are most in the habit of dispensing themselves from going to church, especially in winter time, on account of actual weakness or the fear of getting ill ? Where are we most likely to find these people ? Amongst poor laborers and mechanics, who have to work hard every day to gain a poor and scanty living ? No, certainly not ; no sensible person would seek them amongst that class, or at all events, he would find very few. They are to be found amongst those who are given to gluttony, and who are intent on gratifying their sensuality in eating and drinking.

who indulge in gluttony, are generally weak and sickly.

How does it happen that so many men in the prime of life, nay, in the very bloom of youth, are subject to catarrh, vertigo, chest-diseases, dropsy and similar complaints, from which they die prematurely ? It is true that these diseases may come from other causes ; but, would they be so frequent, if gluttony were not so common, and if food and drink were always taken in proper quantities, for the proper end, and only as far as necessity requires to sustain health ? We need not puzzle much over this ; what the Holy Ghost says is and must be true : “ By surfeiting many have perished, but he that is temperate, shall prolong life.”

Nearly all diseases come from excess in eating and drinking.

How foolish it is, to give way to gluttony, and what a responsibility is incurred thereby.

Are we not foolish mortals? There is nothing we desire more than bodily health; nothing that we wish more heartily for ourselves and our friends than a long and happy life, and yet, we are so misled by gluttony that we do our very best to destroy our health and shorten our lives, as if death, which we naturally fear and dread, were a most welcome guest, whom we eagerly invite, and urge to hasten his steps in our direction! If we are ill, we spare neither trouble nor money, we weary Heaven, so to speak, with our prayers, we get others to pray, we have Masses said, and practise different devotions, for the sole purpose of being free from our illness and recovering our former health. If we are in good health, we do all we can by excessive eating and drinking, and by indulging our gluttony, to destroy our health. Could there be any greater folly or madness than this? Alas, what a strict account we shall have to render at the judgment seat of God for the precious time of life of which we are not masters and owners, so that we can spend it as we wish; for that time is given to us by the Providence of God, that we may keep it as best we can, and use it for the sole purpose of serving God longer, increasing our merit daily, and laying up a greater reward for ourselves in Heaven. Christians, think of what a responsibility it must be to shorten this precious time by wilful gluttony and intemperance!

Gluttony destroys not only the health of the body, but also that of the soul.

I have said that we must lay up a greater reward for ourselves in Heaven, for I do not intend to say much now of the harm that gluttony does to our spiritual health, nor to show how it prevents us from going to Heaven. Let it suffice to remind you that a life of luxurious indulgence does not lead to Heaven, for there is no other way thither but the way of penance, the way of the Cross. Read the works of the Holy Fathers, and you will see what names they give to the fruits of gluttony. St. Thomas Aquinas asks if gluttony is worse than other sins, and he gives the following answer: The enormity of a vice may consist in the matter of the sin, and in that way, gluttony is a small sin, because its matter is eating and drinking; or it may consist in the person who sins, and so, a rich man who commits a theft, is more guilty than a poor man who commits the same theft, because the former had far less reason for stealing, than the latter. In this way too, the sin of gluttony is not great, because every one is in need of food and drink, in order to sustain life. Or else it may consist in the effects which follow from the sin. "And in this sense," says the Angelic Doctor, "the sin of

gluttony is certainly a great one, because it gives rise to many different kinds of sins." <sup>1</sup> "How many evil effects follow from gluttony and intemperance," says St. Laurence Justinian, "it stirs up concupiscence and is the arch-enemy of chastity, it occasions loquacity, calumny and detraction, etc. ; in a word, it is the mother of all vices." <sup>2</sup> But enough of this for the present.

Why then, one might ask, has God created so many different kinds of animals, fowls and fishes, and other articles of food in such pleasing and almost endless variety, if the enjoyment of them is so hurtful to soul and body? Would it not be better to have but one or two kinds of food, and not to have so many temptations and occasions for gluttony? We see that other animals, although they may be much larger than man, yet have generally only one kind of food; some eat nothing but grass, etc., others nothing but a certain kind of fruit, and so on, while nearly all without exception drink nothing but water. On the other hand all the elements, earth, air and water, supply food to man. Why is that? When a king or prince invites a foreign potentate to dinner, he has his table loaded with the most costly dishes and the rarest wines; for what reason? Does he expect his guest to taste all the dishes and drink of all the different kinds of wine? No, he does not expect any thing of the sort. His only object is to show how rich he is, and at the same time to prove how he esteems his guest, since he provides him with an abundance of food, from which he may select what is most pleasing to him. So it is also with the great King of Heaven. We men are placed on earth as princes and lords, so to speak, over all unreasoning creatures; He is the great Sovereign who entertains us as His guests, and in order to show His endless glory and the great love He has for men, who are made to His image, He is pleased to prepare for them a richly furnished table, and so he has created a vast quantity of different kinds of food and drink, for our enjoyment and support, not that we should use them all to excess, but that we should take as much of them as is helpful and necessary to preserve life.

Besides, as God created a most beautiful tree whose fruit was most pleasing to the taste, in order to give our first parents,

Therefore, we must use for our sustenance the different articles of food that God has given us.

And also for the purpose of increasing our virtue.

<sup>1</sup> Et secundum hoc vitium gulæ quædam habet magnitudinem, in quantum ex ea occasionentur diversa peccata.—D. Thom. 2. 2. q. 148. a. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Quid namque mali ex gulæ inordinatione et ventris repletione oritur; est enim fomes libidinis, naufragium castitatis, tempestas linguæ, etc.; flagitiorum omnium mater.—S. Laur. Justin. de ligno vitæ, c. 10.

Adam and Eve, an opportunity of practising self-denial and obedience in Paradise, so He has also, with the greatest liberality, given us many kinds of food and drink, that we may find thereby an opportunity of practising virtue. Thus the poor, who cannot have abundant or nutritious food, and who see the forbidden tree only from afar, as it were, have the opportunity of practising patience and resignation to the divine will; the rich can practise mortification, self-denial and charity towards the poor; while all can thus gain greater merit by temperance, since it is most meritorious to deny one's self the gratification that it is in one's power to have. Such is the intention of our heavenly Father.

Conclusion  
and exhortation  
to  
temperance.

Let our conclusion then be, to act according to this intention, my dear brethren. You who are poor, remember the words of St. Paul: "But having food and wherewith to be covered, with these we are content;"<sup>1</sup> No matter how poor you are, you must thank God that He has freed you from many temptations to gluttony and from the evils that follow on that vice both for soul and body, and you must console yourselves with the promise of Jesus Christ: "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall have their fill;"<sup>2</sup> you will be filled with the eternal joys of Heaven. You, who are rich and wealthy, never forget the advice of St. Peter: "Be sober and watch; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour;"<sup>3</sup> Never allow yourselves to be misled by gluttony so far as to violate the fasts of the Church. Help Jesus Christ in His poor out of your abundance, so that they may one day receive you into eternal tabernacles, where every want of body and soul will be perfectly satisfied, and where you will be able to say to your great joy and contentment: "Lord, it is good for us to be here." Amen.

*Another Introduction to the same sermon for the sixth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

*Ecce jam triduo sustinent me, nec habent, quod manducent.*—Mark viii. 2.

"For behold they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat."

<sup>1</sup> Habentes autem alimenta, et quibus tegamur, his contenti sumus.—I. Tim. vi. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Beati, qui esuriunt et sitiunt justitiam, quoniam ipsi saturabuntur.—Matth. v. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Sobrii estote et vigilate, quia adversarius vester diabolus tanquam leo rugiens circuit, quaerens quem devoret.—I Pet. v. 8.

How these poor people put us Christians to shame ! They followed Christ everywhere over mountain and valley in order to hear His doctrine and preaching, so that they forgot to eat and drink ; for three whole days they remained with the Lord in spite of the hunger they suffered, until Christ, taking pity on them, relieved them by a miracle. How do we act, my dear brethren, we who profess to be followers of Christ ? How often do we not depart from Him and from the teaching of His Gospel for the sake of eating and drinking ? Nay, how many there are who give up His friendship and the salvation of their souls, that they may eat what is forbidden at certain times, or else gratify their gluttony by excessive eating and drinking. And why do they act thus ? What is the object to which their eating and drinking tends ?—*continues as before.*

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NINETEENTH SERMON.

ON HOW THE FASTS OF THE CHURCH WHICH ARE VIOLATED  
BY GLUTTONY, ARE TO BE OBSERVED.

Subject.

We are all bound to fast in the manner prescribed by the law, a duty which is neglected by many Christians.—*Preached on the first Sunday in Lent.*

Text.

*Cum jejunasset quadraginta diebus et quadraginta noctibus, postea esuriit.*—Matth. iv. 2.

“And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards He was hungry.”

Introduction.

To do penance, to deny one's self, and to mortify the flesh is most necessary ; necessary, because we are sinners who have inherited the sin of our forefather Adam, and who are banished to this vale of tears, that we may regain the Heaven we have lost, by doing penance and following the rugged way of the Cross ; necessary, because we are sinners who after having received baptism, have often offended God by sin, and must atone for our sin by penance ; necessary, even if we are

innocent, because it is still possible for us to sin, so that we must strive by penance to keep ourselves in innocence and in the state of grace ; necessary, because we are living under a Head who was crowned with thorns, and we must be like Him, if we hope to be with Him in Heaven. A truth, my dear brethren, which I will explain more in detail on another occasion. The Gospel of to-day reminds us of a special manner of doing penance, of which Jesus Christ, the Son of God, gives us an example : “ When he had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards He was hungry.” The example of Jesus Christ is there to encourage all Christians to fast, abstain and endure hunger ; and it is to that, that the Catholic Church binds her children during this season under pain of sin, that they may imitate Christ to a certain extent. Are we then bound to fast ? Certainly. And how ? That is what I am now about to explain.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*We are all bound to fast in the manner prescribed by the law, a duty which is neglected by many Christians ; such is the whole subject of the present instruction and exhortation.*

Jesus Christ, Model and Pattern for all who fast, help us to imitate Thee, at least in this respect, with Christian zeal, though at a long distance ; this grace we beg of Thee through the merits of Thy mother who suffered with Thee, and through the intercession of the holy angels guardian.

Man is  
bound to  
fast.

If I had to deal with heretics, or with so-called liberal Catholics, I should divide my sermon otherwise, and first prove that we are bound to fast, and then explain how we are to fast. For that is the very thing that our opponents are most determined on denying ; they do not refuse to acknowledge that Our Lord fasted forty days, but they maintain that it is impossible, or at least useless, or even superstitious to imitate Him according to our ability, in that respect. That it is, which liberal Catholics, or half-atheists who are unfortunately numerous enough, can not get into their heads, because it does not suit their stomachs. Why should we fast, they say ? Why should we not eat and drink what is set before us, as long as we have a good appetite for it ? God has given His gifts to men, that they may use them at pleasure. Does He not say : “ Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man.”<sup>1</sup> But they interpret that

<sup>1</sup> Non quod intrat in os, inquinat hominem.—Matth. xv. 11.

text falsely, and in an arbitrary manner, and if I had to deal with them, I should show that there is not one, but many laws which bind all under pain of sin, to fasting and abstinence at certain times.

For, in the first place, there is the natural law. Are you a human being? I would ask. Then if you are, you are often bound to fast. And why? I will tell you. 'The fire in your stove is burning so brightly, that the flame is going up the chimney; if you let it go on like that, it will set fire to the house. What will you do in order to avert that danger? You do not think long about it; you at once take away the wood which feeds the flame. You have a horse in your stable, says St. Augustine, which you require now and then to go to another town on business; but you feed him very well, and leave him a long time idle, so that he has become quite stubborn, and rears, and plunges if any one attempts to mount him. What is to be done? There is not much difficulty in the matter. Shut up your corn-bin; do not give him so much to eat;' Let him suffer hunger for a few days, and then give him nothing but a little hay and some green stuff, and he will soon become tame enough. My body, continues St. Augustine, is my horse, which must carry the soul about; my intention is to use it to reach the heavenly Jerusalem; but when it is too well fed, it becomes restive, like an untamed horse; and God Himself warns us not to allow that to happen; "Do not become like the horse and the mule who have no understanding."<sup>2</sup> It revolts against the spirit and refuses to obey reason in many things; so that there is nothing left but to take away its food, to be more moderate in eating and drinking, and to subdue it by fasting and abstinence; otherwise it will leave the road which leads to Heaven, and enter on the broad path which leads to hell. The concupiscence of the flesh is like a blazing fire, which threatens to consume the beautiful and precious soul with its impure flame. How is that mischief to be prevented? Take away the fuel, the nourishment of that flame; the body must learn to fast, it must be subdued by hunger and thirst, or else it will bring the soul to eternal flames.

Another question I might ask is this: are you a Christian? Do you adore the true God? If so then you must often fast, because the divine law makes fasting obligatory. The first com-

Proved  
by the nat-  
ural law

By the  
divine law  
in the Old  
Testament.

<sup>1</sup> Ferocenti pabulum subtrahas.

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

mand that God gave to man, was that of fasting and abstinence; for immediately after having created our forefather Adam, He told him that he was not to eat the fruit of a certain tree, under pain of death. Thus, says St. John Chrysostom, the law of fasting is as old as the world. Ah, Adam, if thou hadst observed that abstinence better, we, thy unhappy descendants, would not now have to fast for forty days, and would be free also from many crosses and trials; but because thou hast hearkened to thy appetite more than to the voice of God, we must do penance to this day for thy gluttony! Hence Tertullian concludes that on account of the gluttony alone which was the cause of all our misfortunes, we should be bound to fast, even if there was no law to that effect. For if God obliged Adam to abstain while he was still innocent, how much greater must not our obligation be, since we have so often offended God? If fasting and abstinence were necessary in the earthly Paradise, in order to show the necessary obedience to God, how much more necessary are they not in this miserable vale of tears? If fasting was prescribed as a medicine to keep Adam in good health, while he was still in a state of innocence and justice and had no sickness to fear, how much more necessary is it not for us, who are exposed to as many sicknesses, as we have evil inclinations and desires? If fasting and abstinence were a safeguard in the time of peace when no enemy dared show himself, how much more necessary is it not for us to have recourse to them now, when we have to sustain at all hours the attacks of formidable enemies? Therefore, God says by the Prophet Joel: "Sanctify ye a fast." <sup>1</sup> Therefore the Jews had appointed days on which it was unlawful for them to eat the least thing until late in the evening, when the stars had risen in the sky.

And by the  
New Testa-  
ment.

It will not take long to find this command in the New Testament. Jesus Christ, the Lawgiver, goes before us by His example; He tells His followers what they must do after His death. "The days will come," He says in the Gospel of St. Matthew, "when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they shall fast."<sup>2</sup> In the time of the Apostles the rule was to live "in hunger and thirst, in fastings often;"<sup>3</sup> Theophilus of Alexandria, a very ancient writer, says of the Christians who came after the Apostles: "We observe a forty days

<sup>1</sup> Sanctificate jejnium.—Joel i. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Venient autem dies, cum auferetur a eis sponsus, et tunc jejnabunt.—Matth. ix. 15.

<sup>3</sup> In fame et siti, in jejuniis multis.—II Cor. xi. 27.

fast as ordered and appointed by the Apostles.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, our custom of fasting is not an erroneous and superstitious invention of the “Romish” Popes and Bishops, as our adversaries falsely assert ; but a law which Jesus Christ has instituted and imposed on His followers.

Finally, I would ask a liberal Catholic : Are you a Catholic ? And by the law of the Church. At least you profess to be one, and so you are bound to fast. There is no doubt of the law of the Church in this respect ; it is promulgated throughout the whole world, and is constantly observed ; it has always been a mark and sign of the true religion and of the true faith in Jesus Christ, and fasting is still a means of distinguishing in our days, a Catholic from a Lutheran, or a Calvinist. Hence he who, without a dispensation justly obtained, does not observe the fast, is not only disobedient to the Church, but he also denies her in a certain sense ; for, if I see a man who is in good health, eating meat on forbidden days, I look upon him at once, if he is unknown to me, as a Lutheran or a Calvinist. But why should I take so much trouble, my dear brethren, to prove what I said I could pass over in silence ? There are none but Catholics present here ; we are all bound to fast ; none of you will deny that, and we are bound to fast under pain of sin. This law we all acknowledge.

But do we all fast in the manner prescribed by that law ? The manner of fasting consists, first, in abstinence from flesh-meat. Every Catholic knows how the fast is to be observed ; namely (with the exception of those who are excused by weakness or illness, or convalescence, or poverty, so that they have nothing except forbidden food to eat, or have a justly obtained dispensation), all Catholics of every class and condition are bound under pain of grievous sin, first, to abstain from flesh-meat, and then to eat a full meal only once a day, besides a small collation in the evening, (those being again excepted who are too young or too old, or who have to work very hard, or who are exempted by weakness or illness, etc.) See, that is all that is required. That is the forty days’ fast, which seems so difficult to many Christians, that they are terrified at the very name of it, and look upon it almost as a sentence of death.<sup>2</sup>

How many abuses and acts of disobedience are caused by this imaginary difficulty, even amongst Catholics who seem to be All sorts of excuses are in-

<sup>1</sup> *Habemus Quadragesimam ab Apostolis institutam et ordinatam.*

<sup>2</sup> It is needless to observe that the manner of keeping the fast is very different now from what it was in the author’s time, and also that it varies in different countries.—*Translator’s note.*

vented to obtain a dispensation from this.

fervent enough in other respects ! All kinds of pretexts and excuses are sought for, to obtain a dispensation privately from the ecclesiastical authorities, if the Church has not granted a general and public one. Health is endangered by fasting ; the stomach cannot bear fish ; the constitution is so delicate that it can not keep such a long fast ; the head suffers from it ; the night's rest is disturbed by unpleasant dreams ; fasting makes one so weak, that it is impossible to attend to one's duties, etc. These pretexts are suggested by gluttony and sensuality, and yet they must suffice to obtain an exemption from the general law of the Church ! Of what value they are in the sight of God, will appear before the whole world on the last day.

These excuses are valid in some cases, but not in most.

I know that there are many who are so delicate in health, or who are otherwise so circumstanced that they can and must in justice be dispensed from the obligation of abstaining from flesh-meat ; and therefore those pious and over-anxious souls, who are told by the doctor, and advised by a prudent confessor, and who consequently obtain a dispensation from the proper authority, need not fear that they commit a sin by eating meat, no matter how much inclined they are to that groundless fear. They must rather humbly submit their judgment, and obey those who understand the matter better than they, and not be obstinate in following their own opinion. Our holy Founder, St. Ignatius, as you have often heard, was once, after having strictly observed the Lenten fasts, taken ill in Holy Week ; the doctor told him that he must eat meat, he obeyed without a murmur, and at once ordered a fowl to be prepared for him. Now I see, said the doctor, that Ignatius must be a holy man. There is no doubt, then, that instead of being a sin, it is a good thing to eat what is otherwise forbidden on fast days, when necessity requires it. Nor is it a sin to make use of a general dispensation granted by ecclesiastical authority ; but I do not think that there is sufficient cause for many of the private dispensations that are asked for, in default of a general dispensation ; for in most cases the excuses alleged are merely imaginary. To be afraid of weakness or illness without reason, is to take counsel from one's sensuality, and gluttony, and not from the will of God.

The excuse of weakness which is alleged, is invalid.

Delicate constitution, weakness, headache, interrupted sleep, who thinks of you, when there is question of spending whole nights in gambling, dancing and other amusements ? We do not want to rest from those things, nor do we complain of not

being strong enough for them, although it may sometimes take us days to recover after them. But when it becomes necessary to do anything for God, to atone for one's sins, to mortify and chastise the flesh, and to fast and abstain according to the custom observed in the Church for so many centuries, oh, then the weakness appears at once, and the strength vanishes! If one were to say to those delicate people who try to avoid the fast without sufficient cause: See, I will give you two dollars for every day that you abstain from meat, on condition that you give one dollar to the poor when you do not abstain; is it likely that there would be many cases of weakness then? I think not; on the contrary there would be a great deal of competition in a fast of that kind. And yet, it is not a vile piece of money that is promised as a reward for fasting, but the kingdom of Heaven, that God Himself will give. Oh, but that is another matter altogether; we are too weak to earn Heaven by fasting! However that may be, it would be well to remember the warning of the Holy Ghost in the Book of Proverbs: "If thou say: I have not strength enough;" I am too weak, even if you persuade your doctor or your confessor to agree with you, "He that seeth into the heart, He understandeth, and nothing deceiveth the Keeper of thy soul;" God will know well enough the value of your excuses, "and He shall render to a man according to his works."<sup>1</sup> With reason, then, do ecclesiastical superiors refer to their parish-priests and confessors, those who seek to be dispensed from the law of fasting.

Others again say: My stomach cannot bear fish; my health does not permit me to fast, I should surely become ill. What a pity that would be! But what becomes of this great anxiety about their health with those who often drink to excess, either because they have got into a habit of it, or because they do so through sheer conviviality, although they know that it injures their health, and as experience tells them, even shortens their lives? Oh, they do not trouble much about their health in such a case as that, they must keep up their old habits! But when there is question of practising temperance, of abstaining from unnecessary food and drink, and of fasting according to the Christian law, then they begin to fear for their health, then is the time to look out for a dispensation. What becomes of this great anxiety about their health with those women, who gratify

And also  
that of fear  
for one's  
health.

<sup>1</sup> Si dixeris: Vires non suppetunt; qui inspector est cordis, ipse intelligit, et servatorem animæ tuæ nihîl fallit, reddetque homini juxta opera sua.—Prov. xxiv. 12.

their sensuality whenever they get a chance on the occasion of a visit, and spend their time in drinking tea, coffee or chocolate, although the doctor has forbidden them to do so? What becomes of it with those who do not hesitate to conform to the most scandalous fashions, even in the depth of winter, and thus to open the way to diseases and complaints of different kinds? These are almost the only ones who have to look after their health, and who cannot bear to eat fish, when Lent comes on. And what are we to say of those business men, who risk all kinds of dangers by sea and land, for the sake of a temporal gain? They think nothing of their lives even, not to speak of their health. But to abstain from meat for forty days, and to eat nothing but fish during that time, oh, that is altogether too dangerous for the health.

The majority of men preserve their health without eating meat.

Ye poor beggars and laborers, who in so many countries constitute the bulk of the population, with all your hard work, you can get a bit of meat only once or twice a year, while you never get fish at all, and some of you have nothing but a little dry bread and water even for your Easter dinner; oh, how I pity you; how can you preserve your health? How is it that you are still alive? If you had some of that fish which others, as they say, cannot bear, what a grand meal you would make of it! And yet, in spite of your continual abstinence from meat, and your poor diet, which consists of vegetables, bread and water the whole year round, you are strong and healthy. Holy hermits, Paul, Anthony, Macarius, Simeon, Hilarion, you lived to be eighty, ninety and a hundred years old, and even more; did you always eat meat in order to preserve your health, and to live so long? Bring, I beg you some of your food to the tables of those delicate Christians of our day, and see how they will look at it! Herbs and roots, peas and carrots boiled without seasoning or salt, and that only once a day, and on the occasion of some great feast: such was the food on which you lived so long! Holy servants of God, who have bound yourselves to Him in the religious life, and have taken a vow never to eat meat as long as you live, and who in addition to this, wear a rough hair shirt, often take the discipline, and are content with the coarsest kind of clothing; who sleep at night on a hard bed, and often interrupt your sleep in order to pray and sing the divine praises in choir; how can you be in good health? And yet among you there are weak and delicate virgins who often live to be seventy or eighty years old! And still they who are in the prime of

life, and are of a strong and robust constitution, and who have nothing to do but to idle about and amuse themselves, find it a terrible thing to abstain from meat for a few days, and say that it would injure their health!

It is not right then, for you to say that fasting injures your health; you should say rather that it is disagreeable to your comfort and sensuality. Martial one day felt the pulse of a young man named Tangilius, who said that he was sick, in order to get better food. Oh, said Martial, I know what is the matter with you; doctors might probably say that it is fever, but it is gluttony that ails you.<sup>1</sup> The same might be said with truth to those delicate Christians, who pretend that the state of their health excuses them from fasting; it is not your health; it is sheer gluttony and a desire of satisfying your sensuality that makes you ask to be exempted from the fast.

Therefore it is only on account of gluttony that they try to excuse themselves.

How many there are who cannot get rid of the complaints and diseases from which they suffer, but by temperance, abstinence and fasting? Besides, as God has promised a long life to those who honor their parents and are obedient to them: "Honor thy father and thy mother that thou mayest be long-lived upon the land;"<sup>2</sup> how could the same God allow our health to be injured and our lives to be shortened by our obedience to our holy Mother, the Catholic Church, when we submit to her law of fasting without seeking to be excused from it, and thereby prove ourselves her obedient, dutiful and zealous children?

Generally, fasting does not injure, but benefits the health.

In the first chapter of the Book of Daniel you will find the history of those young men who were chosen to wait upon King Nabuchodonosor, and who had first to be fed for some years on food from the king's own table. Four of them, amongst whom was Daniel, begged to be excused from taking that food, as it was unlawful for them to touch it, according to the Jewish law. "And the prince of the eunuchs said to Daniel: I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed you meat and drink; and if he should see your faces leaner than those of the other youths, your equals, you shall endanger my head to the king."<sup>3</sup> Do not be afraid, said Daniel, try it only for ten days, and give us during that time nothing but vegetables and water, and you will see whether we

Proved by Holy Scripture.

<sup>1</sup> Novi hominis mores, febrim creditis esse? gula est.

<sup>2</sup> Honora patrem tuum et matrem tuam, ut sis longævus super terram.—Exod. xx. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Et ait princeps eunuchorum ad Danielelem: Timeo ego dominum meum regem, qui constituit vobis cibum et potum, qui si viderit vultus vestros macilentiores præ ceteris adolescentibus cœvis vestris, condemnabit caput meum regi.—Dan. i. 10.

shall be thinner.<sup>1</sup> “And after ten days,” says the Holy Scripture, “their faces appeared fairer and fatter than all the children that ate of the king’s meat.”<sup>2</sup> And they continued that mode of life for three years longer.

Therefore others also can and must preserve their health, although they abstain.

Delicate Christians, you are afraid that Lent will injure your health and strength, although it does not condemn you to live on vegetables and water, and merely requires you to abstain, according to our Christian law, from flesh-meat. Do not fear, I say to you ; try fasting for once, and see whether you cannot hold out for the forty days ; see whether the Almighty God, who gives nourishing properties to all kinds of food, cannot also enable you to preserve your health by means of the fasting diet, as well as by the flesh-meat that is forbidden to you during those days. That is what the Church prayed for last Saturday : “That this solemn fast, which is instituted for the good, not only of the soul, but also of the body, etc.”<sup>3</sup> If so many servants of God, and so many pious citizens of this city, can fast, and at the same time preserve their health, why can you not do the same ? Try it, I repeat, and leave the care of your health to the fatherly Providence of God. Think of death, which you perhaps imagine you can keep off longer by eating meat ; remember that the body which you now pamper will one day be the food of worms ; think while you are enjoying an abundance of food and drink, that you may perhaps be with the rich man in the flames of hell, and that like him, you may ask for a drop of water, and not be able to get it. These thoughts will make a fast easier for you, so that, as is unfortunately too often the case nowadays, fasting will not be turned away from every door, and be forced to take refuge in convents, and in the houses of the poor. Still, if there is a general dispensation given to eat meat as is now the case on account of the pressing necessity of the troublous times in which we live, well and good then ; you commit no sin, as I said before, if you all avail yourselves of this dispensation, provided you practise other works of penance and devotion, as is prescribed ; but I must also tell you that it is not a mortal, nay, not even a venial sin, although the dispensation is given, to abstain from meat for God’s sake. Therefore, good and pious Christians do their best to conform to the general law

<sup>1</sup> Dentur nobis legumina ad vescendum, et aqua ad bibendum.—Dan. i. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Post dies autem decem apparuerunt vultus eorum meliores et corpulentiores præ omnibus pueris, qui vescebantur cibo regio.—Ibid, 15.

<sup>3</sup> Ut hoc solempne jejunium, quod animabus corporibusque sanandis salubriter institutum est, etc.

of the Church, and that with all the greater merit for themselves, since they are not bound to do so under pain of sin. It is well to do a good thing, but better still to do a better thing. Still, this is not to my subject just now. What I mean to say is, that all are bound to abstain from forbidden food, at least on those days for which there is no dispensation.

The second point, besides the abstinence from meat, which the Church wishes her children to observe, is, that on all days during Lent, Sundays excepted, they eat only one full meal besides a small collation in the evening. Is that observed faithfully by all Catholics, who are not excused by some of the causes mentioned before? I fear not, and I fear too that they are even less observant of this point, than of the other. How many there are who entertain the erroneous opinion that, if they overcome themselves so far as not to eat meat, they have done enough, and it makes no matter if they eat two meals a day! How many there are who have a number of dishes placed on their tables in the evening, and take a bit of this, and a bit of that, until in the end, they have eaten what would make a hearty meal for many a poor, hungry man? How many there are who contrive to make the one meal of dinner and collation, by having dish after dish brought in, and sitting at table all the time from mid-day till evening? Oh, they say, we eat only one full meal! That is true; but they remain eating so long that they are not at all hungry when the time comes for the collation. It is not my purpose now to explain whether those people sin grievously against the law of fasting. I only ask any sensible man if he thinks that that is the way to fast according to the intention of the Church? For in what other way could they eat to satiety on days when there is no fast?

The manner of fasting consists, secondly, in eating but one meal in the day. This is even less observed than the first point.

Oh, holy Christianity, which flourished in the early ages of the Church, where art thou gone? I dare not say now how exactly this law of fasting was then observed. But if some of the early Christians were to appear amongst us, and to compare our lawful way of fasting with theirs, what would they think and say? Do you call that fasting? they would ask. If so, the law was far too strict in our days. We could eat only once a day, and that after sundown, that is, three or four hours after midday; we knew nothing of a collation (and St. Bernard testifies that, in his time, that was the ordinary manner of fasting amongst Christians of all classes) we were forbidden to use wine, as well as meat; we could eat nothing but vegetables and pulse boiled in

How strict the law of fasting was in early times.

oil : nay, as long as this penitential season lasted, most of us were not content with merely observing that strict law, but we added other austerities of our own. Read St. John Chrysostom and he will give you an idea of our zeal in this respect ; he will tell you that in his time, in Constantinople, where he used to preach, the Christians were accustomed to vie with each other in fasting. Some of them ate only once in two days, others every day, but nothing except a small piece of bread and water ; and so they continued for the whole Lent. Read what St. Augustine says about the custom in his time, and he will tell you, that it was not unusual for men, women, and even tender maidens to remain for three days, and even longer without food or drink.<sup>1</sup> Read in the seventeenth chapter of the Ecclesiastical History of Nicephorus, what happened at Constantinople in the reign of the emperor Justinian ; that city suffered from famine to such an extent that the people could hardly find bread ; and on the approach of Lent, the emperor caused the butchers' stalls to be thrown open, and told the people that, since there was no other food, they could eat meat. And what use did they make of the permission so justly accorded by the emperor ? O happy times ! Would that we had only a spark of the fervor that characterised them ! In that vast and populous city, in the midst of a terrible famine, there was not one Christian who made use of the permission granted by the emperor ; nay, the people went in a body to the palace and begged him with tears in their eyes to recall it, and to command the old custom to be observed ; and they protested that they would rather die of hunger, than depart in the least from the general and holy practice of the Catholic Church.

They put  
the Chris-  
tians of the  
present day  
to shame.

Ah, Christians of our own day, have we not reason to be ashamed of ourselves ? The Church, like an indulgent mother, has been forced to mitigate the ancient severity of the law of fasting, on account of the decrease of fervor and charity on the part of her children. She concedes now as much to our weakness, as if she tried to adapt herself to our sensuality. The way in which we fast, according to which we are allowed to use wine, and to make a full meal every day on eggs, butter, and milk-meats, along with all kinds of fish, and besides that a collation in the evening, ought to be called rather a means of preserving health, than a work of penance. And yet we make such a difficulty of it, we seek to avoid it in every possible way ; easy as the law is, we refuse to obey God and the Church of Christ, or

<sup>1</sup> Totum triduum et amplius sæpissime sine cibo et potu.

at least we do not obey fully, as we ought. Now we have in addition, a dispensation, according to which it is allowed to eat meat once a day; is there any one then, who will refuse to observe a strict abstinence on those days on which meat is forbidden, and to observe every day the law regarding the collation? What are we thinking of? Does our religion teach us to adore a crucified God, or does it not?

Ah! my dear brethren, let us show that we have at least some of this religion left. If we think we have reason to make use of the dispensation accorded to us let us do so in God's name; but in other things let us observe strictly what the Church prescribes. With regard to the collation, there is no fixed rule, as to whether we are allowed to use warm meats, or several kinds of cold meats; every country has prescribed different customs contrary to the law of the Church. The best thing for us to do, is to follow the example of the majority of good and pious Christians; if we do so, we shall not go wrong. But in any case, let us fast in such a manner, that the words of the Preface in the Holy Mass during this season, may be verified in us: "O Lord, who by our corporal fast, destroyest vice, raisest our minds to Thee, and grantest us virtue and its reward."<sup>1</sup> Let us fast, I say, so that we may thereby do penance for our sins, avert from us the anger of God and His just punishments, raise our hearts to Heaven, increase our merit, and earn the reward of eternal glory. Amen.

Conclusion and exhortation to observe the law of fasting strictly.

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*TWENTIETH SERMON.*

**ON THE END AND OBJECT OF FASTING, WHICH IS FRUSTRATED BY GLUTTONY.**

Subject.

We are all bound to fast in the way prescribed by the law of the Church; an obligation which is fulfilled by very few.—*Preached on the second Sunday in Lent.*

Text.

*Hic est Filius meus dilectus, in quo mihi bene complacui: ipsum audite.*—Matth. xvii. 5.

"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye Him."

<sup>1</sup> Qui corporali jejunito vitia comprimis, mentem elevas, virtutem largiris et præmia.

## Introduction.

These are the words in which the Eternal Father proposed His Incarnate Son, on a lofty mountain, as an example to the whole world, whom men must imitate and resemble, if they wish to share in His glory; as St. Paul writes: "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."<sup>1</sup> "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye Him;" be attentive to His words, and follow His example. What does Jesus Christ teach us by words? Hear what He says in the Gospel of St. Luke: "And He said to all: if any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."<sup>2</sup> What does He teach by example? We find nothing in His whole life, but a poor, humble, patient, suffering, dying God. "Hear ye Him;" follow His example. What does this Divine Son teach us during this season of Lent, my dear brethren? We have already heard it in the Gospel of last Sunday; He fasted forty days and forty nights, and suffered hunger; hear ye Him; we are Christians and children of God, and we hope to have a part with Him in eternal glory, therefore we must hear Him and follow His example. Mortification, fasting, abstinence, hunger, that is what we must learn from Him, and that too in the manner prescribed by the law of the Church. This I have explained last Sunday; but there is still another point to consider.

## Plan of Discourse.

*We are all bound to fast in the way prescribed by the law of the Church; an obligation which is fulfilled by very few. Such is the whole subject of the present instruction.*

O Divine Son, whose life we are bound to imitate, help us to attain the proper end by our fasting. This we beg of Thee through the merits of Thy Mother Mary, and through the holy angels guardian.

The principal end of the Lenten fast is partly the mortification of

The first and principal end for which our holy Mother, the Catholic Church, has instituted the forty days' fast, is to mortify the flesh and do penance, partly as a solemn remembrance of the bitter passion and death of Jesus Christ, Our Saviour, and partly

<sup>1</sup> Nam quos præcivit et prædestinavit conformes fieri imaginis Filii sui, ut sit ipse primogenitus in multis fratribus.—Rom. viii. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Dicebat autem ad omnes: Si quis vult post me venire, abneget semetipsum, et tollat crucem suam quotidie, et sequatur me.—Luke ix. 23.

as an atonement for our sins, for which Christ had to suffer and die. Hence as a sign of general mourning, in all the churches throughout the Catholic world, the altars and tabernacles are veiled during this time, and Lent is known as a season of sorrow, of tears and of penance. Go to the widow clothed in mourning, who is lamenting the loss of her husband on the anniversary of his death, because she loved him as her own heart, and ask her to take part in a banquet, or to appear in company and enjoy herself; the mere invitation to do so in her present circumstances, is a fresh pang for her heart, and renews her grief. No, this is no time for her to make merry; she must be left in peace with her sorrow; entertainments, dancing, laughing, feasting, are out of place for her now; the bare thought of them is insupportable to her; tears and sighs are her only consolation. In the same way, let the vain world, according to its wont, speak to the Church of God, or to a pious and obedient child of the Church, during the holy season of Lent, when she is celebrating the anniversary of the death of her Spouse, Jesus Christ, on the cross; let it speak to her, I say, of forbidden meats, of sumptuous repasts, of gluttony and drunkenness, of amusements and pastimes, of creature comforts and luxuries; oh, all these things are now out of place! they are not at all suited to this time of mourning.

With regard to the atonement for past sins; you remember, my dear brethren, the fable of the fox, who with great difficulty crept through a narrow hole into a hen-coop. Ha, he thought, this is the place for me; I shall not easily find such a good opportunity again; and he began without loss of time to devour one fowl after the other, until he could eat no more. He then thought it was time to go home, but when he tried to get out at the hole, he found that he had grown too fat, and could not manage it; so he began to cry and moan, and shout for help. Another fox happening to pass by, and hearing the noise inside, asked what was the matter. Ah, said the other, I am a prisoner here; I have eaten so much that I cannot get out, and if the owner of the fowls catches me here he will surely kill me; try to help me out. There is no use in my trying, was the answer, there is nothing else for it but to remain where you are, and fast until you are as thin as you were before, and then you will have no difficulty in getting out. Christians, many of us have grown fat during the year on forbidden meat, that is, we have committed different sins against the commandments of God. Some are

Partly in  
atonement  
for our past  
sins.

still held captive by the devil in bonds of sin, and are in danger of eternal death. If the Master were to come and call them away while they are in that state, what would become of their souls? There are others who have already obtained forgiveness of their sins in the Sacrament of Penance, and have bewailed them with a true sorrow; still, if they were now surprised by death, they would have many an old debt to pay off, and a long punishment to endure. What is to be done? We must mortify ourselves and do penance so as to free ourselves from the captivity in which the devil holds us, and to satisfy the divine justice. This is the time that the Catholic Church has appointed for that purpose; now it is that she commands us to bewail our sins with a supernatural sorrow, and to subdue the flesh by fasting and abstinence, that we may appease the anger of God, and make satisfaction for our sins. There you have the first end and object of the forty days fast, according to SS. Theodoret, Augustine, John Chrysostom, and others.

Therefore the excuses of those who complain that they are weakened by fasting, are unavailing.

Where are you now you faint-hearted cowards, with your vain excuses? I cannot fast; I must eat meat, or if I manage to overcome myself sufficiently to abstain from it, I cannot go to bed hungry; I must have something to eat, or else I shall grow weak; I feel that my strength is leaving me, and I shall become quite sad and melancholy; I suffer from stomach-ache during the day, and I cannot sleep well at night; in a word, I find fasting altogether too difficult. Well then, granted that what you say is true; is not that the reason why fasting was instituted? It must be difficult; it must be disagreeable to the stomach; it must moderate superfluous sleep; it must disturb and interfere with vain pleasures and comforts; it must weary the body and lessen the strength of the unruly flesh; that is the reason why you have to fast. If you had no difficulty in fasting, if it left you just as comfortable as before, how could it chastise and mortify you? What good would it be as a penance? What satisfaction could it make for sin? How could it help you to a compassionate sorrow with your suffering and dying Saviour? Would it be an imitation of the forty days fast and hunger that He endured for your sake? You say that you cannot eat fish; well, do not eat it then! Nobody compels you to do so; there are other things that you can eat. But you say, it is not easy for you to be satisfied with them. I quite agree with you; but that is the proper way for you to fast; the reason why abstinence is commanded is that the body may feel some inconvenience. If you were

commanded to eat nothing for the forty days, but dry bread, and to drink nothing but water, as many poor people must do their whole lives long, who would be glad indeed if they were always sure of having enough even of such food, would that be too much to do for a God, who for your sake died an ignominious death on the cross? Would it be too much to do, in order to escape the eternal fire of hell, and to atone for your sins? Our Fathers in the faith, who had to observe such severe fasts, as you have heard in my last sermon, were also tired and worn out by fasting; but they did not complain on that account, nor did they ever dream of asking for, or accepting a dispensation, or mitigation of the law. But now we are so faint-hearted, that we make a difficulty of doing even the little that is required of us. We are willing to do penance, but on condition that it does not hurt us; we are ready to fast, but in such a way that will cause us no discomfort. Is that fasting for the proper end and object, to subdue the flesh, to do penance and to imitate the sufferings of Our Lord?

Again, we see from this, how far they fall short of the proper end of fasting, who, in order to avoid discomfort, remain so long at dinner, and eat so many different things, that they are not at all hungry in the evening, so that the smallest collation is no mortification to them. They act, says St. John Chrysostom, like the commandant of a fortress who makes provisions for a siege; he has victuals enough brought into the fortress to enable him to stand the siege without the garrison having to suffer hunger. Many Christians act in the same way nowadays; I must fast this evening, they think, and shall not be able to make a full meal; I will therefore eat as much now as will enable me to fast without inconvenience. There was a laborer once who said that he never fasted as much during the whole year as he did on Ash-Wednesday, because he had eaten so much on the three days previous, that he actually felt a disgust for all kinds of food. Thirdly, we see that they fail to attain the end of fasting, who to avoid or lessen the slight inconvenience it causes, make up for the abstinence from meat and the evening collation by entertaining others, or gambling, or other amusements, while they take some warm, nourishing drink in the morning, and indulge too freely in wine in the afternoon. "Command that these stones be made bread,"<sup>1</sup> said Satan to Our Lord;

Many faults  
are com-  
mitted  
against the  
end of fast-  
ing.

<sup>1</sup> Dic, ut lapides isti panes fiant.—Matth. iv. 3.

command that these fishes be turned into meat, think those over-delicate Christians ; if we must abstain from meat, then we must try to satisfy our sensuality in some other way, so as to avoid the inconvenience of fasting. “That is not the way to fast and to mortify the body,” says St. Augustine, “it is only changing one excess for another.”<sup>1</sup> At all events, it is not according to the end of the law of fasting, which is the mortification of the body and of sensuality. What have pleasures and amusements of all kinds to do with a time of sorrow and repentance ?

How unbecoming that is.

A disciple of the holy Abbot Palaemon once prepared for his master, at the end of Lent, a dish of vegetables cooked in oil ; the holy man turned to him with tearful eyes, and said : “How is this ? My Lord Jesus Christ was crucified, and must I eat oil with my food?”<sup>2</sup> Christians, as I have said, Lent is a season of repentance and sorrowful remembrance of the bitter passion and death of Christ ; let us then try to recollect these few words until Easter, and whenever gluttony tempts us to forbidden meats, or sensuality to dainties, or greediness to eat too much, or worldliness to pleasure, let us say those beautiful words to ourselves : My Lord Jesus Christ was crucified, how then can I give way to my sensual desires ? The sin that Adam committed by eating the forbidden fruit, cost my Saviour His life ; can I then have the heart to eat of what the Church has forbidden during this season ? My Saviour fasted from all food for forty days ; can I not at least abstain, as a good Catholic should, from flesh meat, when I am not in want of it, although I am permitted to use it ? My God died for me ; how can I indulge my sensuality, during the time fixed for the solemn recollection of His death ? My God died to atone for my sins, which He could never have committed ; ought I not at least to atone for my own sins by a little fasting and abstinence ? The Church mourns and does penance during this time ; shall not I, who boast of being her child, sympathize with her sorrow ? Jesus Christ allowed His innocent flesh to be torn with scourges, in order to tame the rebellious tendencies of mine ; and shall I now pamper this flesh with all kinds of delicacies ?

Resolution to observe the end of fasting.

No, my dearest Saviour, we owe Thee much more than that, for many reasons ! We do not wish to be delicate members under a thorn-crowned Head ; we will show by observing the fast, that we are zealous Catholics, and we will encourage

<sup>1</sup> Non enim est hoc suscipere abstinentiam, sed mutare luxuriam.

<sup>2</sup> Dominus meus Jesus Christus crucifixus est, et ego nunc oleum comedam ?

others to the same zeal by our example ! Thou, O Lord, wilt give a blessing to the meagre diet that, out of love to Thee and obedience to the Church, we prefer to the most delicate food ; so that we may learn by our own experience that Thy yoke is not so heavy as is imagined ; Thou wilt sweeten our penance and mortification by Thy inward grace and consolation, as is Thy wont with Thy faithful servants ; so that when Easter comes round, we shall be able to say that we never found the fast easier, than when we kept it fully, and in the proper manner, for the proper end, as Christians ought.

The second end and object of fasting is shown in the prayer of the Church, that I quoted in my last sermon, *qui corporali jejuni*o, etc., it consists namely in destroying the vices that we should otherwise be subject to, in raising up our minds to heavenly things, and in acquiring and increasing virtue and heavenly glory. The Church in this way, acts like a physician who cures a disease by a remedy that is altogether opposed to it ; thus heat is cured by cooling medicines, and cold by those that are apt to stimulate the natural heat. Now there is nothing which so much inclines one to vice, especially to the vice of impurity, as excess in eating and drinking. Diogenes once met a young man about midday, who was dressed up very carefully and was apparently going out of town ; Diogenes asked him where he was going. To a banquet, answered the other. Oh, said Diogenes, go, but you will be worse when you come back. <sup>1</sup> The mere light of reason taught this heathen that a single sin of excess in eating or drinking was fatal to virtue ; how, then, is it possible that Christian virtue and perfection will not suffer, when one feasts the whole year round and drinks wine to excess ? But why do I go to a heathen philosopher for a proof of this ? God Himself says by the Psalmist : “ Their iniquity hath come forth, as it were from fatness.” <sup>2</sup> “ The beloved grew fat and kicked ; he grew fat, and thick and gross, he forsook God who made him, and departed from God his Saviour.” <sup>3</sup>

Besides, there is nothing which so degrades and brutalizes the human mind, and makes it so incapable of spiritual thoughts, as gluttony. No matter how sharp and clever a young man is, even though he is looked upon as the hope of his family, and great things are expected of him, if he indulges in excessive

Excess in eating and drinking leads to impurity.

And degrades and brutalizes the mind.

<sup>1</sup> Vade, sed deterior reverteris.

<sup>2</sup> Prodiit quasi ex adipe iniquitas eorum—Ps. lxxii. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Incrassatus est dilectus, et recalcitravit : incrassatus, impinguatus, dilatatus, derelinquit Deum factorem suum, et recessit a Deo salutari suo.—Deut. xxxii. 15.

eating and drinking, it will be the ruin of him ; his brain will soon get fogged, the best part of his time will be spent in sleep and indolence, and he will be incapable of study or reflection. “ In the same way too,” says St. Jerome, “ the soul will be made incapable of raising itself to sublime and heavenly things, when the body is surfeited by food and drink.”<sup>1</sup> It will be like those birds which cannot fly when they have eaten too much. When Adam gave way to gluttony and ate of the forbidden fruit, the Scripture says that he hid himself from the face of the Lord, because he could not bear it after the sin he had committed. When the Israelites grew tired of the manna in the desert, they took no thought of its being a heavenly food, and they longed for the onions and garlic of Egypt. Finally it follows from this, that there is nothing more hostile to merit and virtue, than gluttony ; for when the door is opened to vice and the mind becomes incapable of spiritual thoughts, there is an end to true virtue and piety.

On the contrary, vicious inclinations are subdued by fasting and abstinence.

All these evils we can and must heal by the contrary remedy of fasting and abstinence, which deprives the body of superfluous food and drink. “ Fasting,” says St. Thomas of Aquin, “ not only blots out past sin, but also guards against the sins that we might commit in the future.”<sup>2</sup> No matter how deep-rooted our evil habits, how violent our bad inclinations, they will be tamed and kept in check by fasting. Diodorus Siculus relates that in former times some hunters once caught a huge dragon and brought it to king Ptolemy in Alexandria, as a present. It was a fearful thing to look at ; its flaming eyes, its sharp teeth, its open jaws inspired all who beheld it with fear. Whatever came within reach of its chain, was at once devoured ; it spared neither man nor beast. And yet, this terrible monster became so tame that it would lick the hand of the man who brought it its food. How was this wonderful change effected ? “ He was gradually deprived of his food,” says the historian, “ and thus his strength was lessened and his ferocity subdued to such a degree, that all were amazed at his tameness.”<sup>3</sup> It was fasting alone that wrought such a surprising change in him ; the gradual deprivation of food reduced his strength, and with his strength, his ferocity disappeared ; when he began to fast, he began to grow

<sup>1</sup> Ad nihil subtile ac celeste assurgere possunt.

<sup>2</sup> Jejunium non solum delet peccata præterita, sed et repellit futura, quæ committere poteramus. — Diodor. Sicul. l. 4, c. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Deducto paulatim ad conterendas vires cibo, feritas ejus remissior reddita est, ut ejus omnes mansuetudinem obstupescerent.

tame, and when he felt the pangs of hunger, he learned how to fawn and caress. Fasting can work the same change in a human being ; there is no passion so violent, as to be able to resist the deprivation of nourishment, and thus the flesh is subdued, the desires are restrained, and all inclination to sin disappears. So true is it, that "Fasting not only blots out past sin, but also guards against the sins that we might commit in the future."

To these words of St. Thomas I add, that fasting not only prevents sin, but also protects and strengthens us against the attacks of the devil. Even the Son of God, says St. Ambrose, although He could not sin, and therefore required no such protection against His enemy, yet chose to make use of this salutary means, "before He allowed Himself to be tempted by the devil in the wilderness ;"<sup>1</sup> in order to teach us, poor mortals, who are exposed on all sides to the attacks of enemies both visible and invisible, how we must have recourse to fasting, as a shield to protect ourselves against, and to defeat all the temptations of the devil. "Fasting is the fortress in which we can defend ourselves against the attacks of the devil."<sup>2</sup> Fasting and temperance, says St. John Chrysostom, keep us always cheerful, they prepare the soul to receive heavenly gifts, and they are the true support of all virtue ; therefore, he gives this advice to all : "Fast because you have sinned ; fast, that you may not sin ; fast, that you may receive ; fast, that you may keep what you have received."<sup>3</sup> See there, my dear brethren, you have the end and object of the Lenten fast, which consists partly in the sorrowful recollection of the sufferings and death which Our Saviour endured for us, and in doing penance for our sins ; and partly in guarding against future sin, and in acquiring virtue.

It strengthens us against the attacks of the devil.

Further, in order to attain this two fold object, it is not enough to mortify merely the mouth and stomach by fasting and abstinence ; our whole being must have its part in the fast. St. Bernard explains this beautifully : "If your mouth and your stomach," he says, "have sinned by eating and drinking, make them fast and do penance, and you will do well ; but if the other members of your body have sinned, why should not they also fast ?"<sup>4</sup> Make them fast therefore ; "Make your eyes fast,

To attain the twofold object, the whole man must fast.

<sup>1</sup> Contra dæmonem pugnaturus longo se armavit jejunió.

<sup>2</sup> Castra nobis sunt nostra jejunia, quæ nos a diabolica impugnatione defendunt.

<sup>3</sup> Jejuna quia peccasti ; jejuna ut non pecces ; jejuna ut accipias ; jejuna ut permaneat quæ accepisti.

<sup>4</sup> Cur non jejument et ipsa ? S. Bern. Serm. 3, in Quadrag.

because they have robbed the soul.”<sup>1</sup> Make your ears, hands, feet, tongue and your soul itself fast, because they all have frequently transgressed the divine commands, and might again lead you into sin. Make them fast; let every member do its own separate penance, by being forced to abstain from that which is agreeable to it, and which could be to it an occasion of sin. Your eyes have often sinned by dangerous and impure looks; make them fast; forbid them to look, not merely on dangerous and sinful, but even on pleasing objects. Your ears have often sinned by listening to uncharitable and impure conversation and songs; make them fast, so that in future they will be deaf to all vain and idle talk. Your loquacious tongue has often brought you into sin, and into grievous sin, by cursing and swearing, by contumely and abusive language, by criticising the faults of others, by lying and deceit, by dangerous and scandalous words; make it fast, and learn to keep still and silent. Your hands and feet have often sinned, the former by impure touches, the latter by dancing and idle gadding about in company, and in places which are highly dangerous to the soul; make them fast, keep them in retirement at home. Your body has sinned by vanity in dress, and thereby acted in an unchristian manner, and given scandal; let it fast; make it now, at least during this season of penance, when pious Christians are often accustomed to chastise it by disciplines and hair-shirts, make it observe the laws of modesty. It has sinned too, by idleness and unnecessary sleep and thereby lost much precious time; make it fast; make it rise early in the morning to praise God, as the Church exhorts us in the Divine Office during Lent: “Let us then be more temperate in words, in eating and drinking, in sleep and amusements.”<sup>2</sup>

No fasting will be of much good unless the soul abstains from sin.

“But,” says St. Bernard, “much more should the soul fast and keep itself free from all sin,”<sup>3</sup> for otherwise, all our fasting will be of little avail. It is useless to bind up the wound, while the sharp knife is still sticking in it; not the best medicine in the world is of any good, as long as one continues to take poison. “What does it avail,” says St. Augustine, “to keep the body empty of food, if the soul is full of sin?”<sup>4</sup> What does it

<sup>1</sup> Jejunet ergo oculus qui depredatus est animam.

<sup>2</sup> Utamur ergo parcius verbis, cibis et potibus, somno, jocis, et acrius perstemus in custodia.

<sup>3</sup> Sed et multo magis anima ipsa jejunet a vitis.

<sup>4</sup> Quid prodest vacuare corpus ab escis et animam replere peccatis?—S. Aug. tract. 17, in Joan.

avail you to have your face grow pallid from fasting, if your heart is swollen with impure love, with hatred and envy, with rage and vindictiveness? What does it avail to abstain from excess in the use of wine, when you are almost drunk with anger and jealousy? What does it avail you to abstain from meat, which is at all events created by God for your sustenance, if your sharp tongue tears at and destroys your neighbor's good name? What does it profit you to abstain from the flesh of an animal, in order to observe the Lenten fast, if you do not hesitate to insult the Lamb of God by cursing and blasphemy? What good is it to you not even to allow a piece of meat to be seen in your house, for fear of giving scandal, if you dress so immodestly that you are an occasion of sin to others? Many a one says: I cannot fast, nor can I bear to eat fish; well and good; God will accept your excuse, if it really is as you say, if you are really ill and delicate. But if you forgive from your heart, according to the divine law, him who has offended you, and meet and speak to him in a friendly manner, will that injure your health? Will it give you headache, disorder your stomach, or make you sick? Another says, I cannot fast properly because I am poor and must eat what others give me out of charity; I cannot fast, says a third, because I must work hard to earn my daily bread. Very well then, God does not require it of you; but this much he insists on, that you restrain your wicked and talkative tongue, that you do not spend the greater part of what you have earned during the week, in drinking on Sundays and holydays; this you can do; it is a fast that you are bound to observe. In a word, if we are bound during Lent to keep from many things that are quite lawful at other times, are we not much more bound to abstain from that which can never be lawful for us at any time?

Therefore, you should resolve with St. Augustine: "So let us abstain from food, that we may all the better keep from sin."<sup>1</sup> This latter fast is the end and object of the first, and is the reason why the Church has instituted it. The Church now cries out to us in the words of the Apostle; "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold now is the day of salvation."<sup>2</sup> Woe to us Christians, if we turn those days of grace and salvation into days of wrath and condemnation, either by breaking the fast in the matter of food and drink, or by not fasting spir-

Conclusion and exhortation to observe the fast for the proper end.

<sup>1</sup> Ergo sic jejunemus a cibis, ut multo magis jejunemus a vitis.

<sup>2</sup> Ecce, nunc tempus acceptabile: ecce, nunc dies salutis.—II Cor. vi. 2.

itually from sin and vice ! When we were told at Shrove-tide that we must range ourselves under the banner of Jesus Christ and be steadfast in observing temperance and purity, there were not a few who came forward with the usual excuse : Oh, it is Shrove-tide, it is a time for merry-making, we must do like the rest of the world, and eat, drink, dance and amuse ourselves. But what a false and empty excuse that is, on the part of the vain and frivolous world ! As if there were any time in the year at which it is allowed to forget God and religion ! Still, vain as that excuse is, I will now make use of it for my conclusion ; for, if it helps, poor as it is, to give an appearance of lawfulness to the sinful customs of the children of the world, they must admit it as valid for my purpose. You say, we must live as others do ; we must conform to the customs of our time. Very good, then ; let us do so now ; let us all conform our lives to this holy time.

That is to  
fast with  
Christ, and  
do pen-  
ance.

Lent, is, as I have said, a time for sorrow, and for recollecting the passion and death of Christ ; let it be then for us a time of penance, of tears and of mortification of the flesh ; let us observe all this as we ought, exactly. It is a time at which we should die with Christ in a moral sense, by extirpating our vices, raising our hearts to God and practising virtue. If we must live according to the time, let us observe what this time requires of us. Is it right for us to conform to the customs of a season that may be to us an occasion of sin, and to neglect the custom of that time which prescribes penance and mortification ? Why should we be more willing to observe practices that will lead on to the broad road to hell, than to do what will bring us on the narrow way to Heaven ? Therefore, I repeat, let us live according to this time of salvation, according to this favorable time, according to the end and object which the Church proposes to us. Let us fast honestly, as well as we can, by abstaining from food and drink, so as to mortify the body ; but especially by abstaining from sin, that we may save our souls, and after this life of sorrow, and fasting, and penance, rise gloriously with Christ, and celebrate our happy Easter in Heaven, amidst eternal joys. Amen.

TWENTY-FIRST SERMON.

ON THE UNACCOUNTABLE FOLLY OF THOSE WHO INJURE  
THEIR HEALTH BY EXCESSIVE DRINKING.

Subject.

Many deliberately injure their health, and shorten their lives by excessive drinking; what folly, what wickedness.—*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.

The fasts of Christians, says St. Ambrose, are our fortresses and bulwarks, with which we defend ourselves from the attacks of our hellish foes, and keep our souls in peace.<sup>1</sup> We have already seen that, my dear brethren, as far as fasting and abstinence in food especially are concerned. But as fasting is useful, nay, even necessary to all in order to restrain gluttony in food, so, in my opinion, temperance in the matter of drink is even more necessary to most people, in order to avoid excess in that respect; because excess in drink is more fruitful of evil, than excess in eating. But I am afraid, at the very outset, that I will do little good by speaking of this matter; so very many of you are accustomed to excessive drinking, that no amount of preaching will help you to overcome it. Therefore, as there is no use in asking you to abstain from drink, I will not do so; but one thing I will ask, and you will not, I hope, refuse me, and that is, that none of you will drink more than he is able. But what a strange thing to say, you will think? Who ever drank more than he was able to drink? From an act we may well conclude its possibility, as philosophers say:<sup>2</sup> I drink, therefore I can drink.

Ah, my dear brethren, would to God that the conclusion were always true in the right sense! How many of those who are addicted to excessive drinking, nay, almost all of them with-

<sup>1</sup> *Castra nobis sunt nostra jejunia, quæ nos a diabolica impugnatione defendunt.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ab actu ad potentiam bona est argumentatio.*

out exception, drink more than they can ; that is, more than their health can bear, more than their income can bear, more than their honor and good name can bear, more than their souls' salvation and the divine law can bear ? Whatever way we look at it, we must acknowledge that they are guilty of great folly and wickedness. To day I will confine myself to the first point, and I say—

#### Plan of Discourse.

*What an unaccountable folly it is to drink more than one's health can bear, as most people do. Such is the whole subject of to-day's sermon.*

O my God, forgive me for using such an apparently merely natural argument in explaining Thy holy word ! Yet I should rejoice at having done much for Thy honor and glory if, even by such an argument as that, I succeeded in converting a single soul from the habit of excessive drinking, and thus saving him from the many evils that follow from it. Thou, O Lord, art the Ruler of hearts ; effect this by Thy grace, which we beg of Thee through the intercession of Mary and the holy angels guardian. Those women who are present, and who think that this subject does not apply to them, can profit by it with regard to the refreshments they indulge in at morning and midday when paying or receiving visits, by which they sometimes injure their health, interfere with their house-keeping, and even ruin their souls. Still there are also drunken women to be found ; what a shame !

Of all natural gifts, there is none more useful to man than health.

Of all the natural gifts that a man can possess on earth, there is none so precious, so useful, and agreeable as health and strength, and there is none God has so strictly commanded man to be careful of. There is nothing more useful, because, what better am I for being rich, and owning all the treasures of earth, if I have lost my health and must lie ill in bed, and so cannot enjoy my riches ? What would it avail me to be a great lord, or king, and to rule over many lands, if I am weak and sickly, and have to suffer pain day and night ? What pleasure can I have in agreeable company, in exquisite food, in the delights of friendship, or in the beauty of creatures, if my health is gone, and illness turns everything to bitterness for me ? No, a piece of dry bread gives more pleasure and satisfaction to a poor man who is in good health, than the daintiest food to a rich man, who is ill and suffering.

Nothing is more desirable in this mortal life, than health, as is evident from the great care we take of it. How cautious we are about going into a house in which there is a person sick of a contagious disease ! If it is not absolutely necessary to go there, we prefer to remain away, so great is our dread of breathing an infected atmosphere, and carrying the germs of disease away with us. How we dread exposing ourselves to the cold, damp air ! That fear is sometimes so great, that we dread going to church to hear a sermon, or to assist at devotions, lest we should catch cold and be laid up. What a common thing it is to ask for leave to eat meat during Lent, for fear of injuring the health by eating fish. There is nothing more precious in the natural order than health, as we see at once when we begin to lose it. What mourning and lamentation, what wishing and desiring ! And what is it all about ? Oh, about the health we have lost, and wish to regain ! Money, silver, gold and anything that can be called wealth, is so dear to the man of the world, that no journey is too long for him, no mountain too high, no sea too dangerous for him to cross in search of it. No watchings and labors are esteemed too difficult, as long as he can add to his treasures by means of them. Lawsuits and contentions, hatred and enmity, arise amongst near relations solely on account of the difference between mine and thine. But when there is question of regaining health, although there may be only the faintest spark of hope, all these things are sacrificed without hesitation ; if it takes twenty coffers of gold to buy the necessary medicines, they are sent to the apothecary's at once ; no matter how bitter the medicine is, the patient readily overcomes his dislike and swallows it. Blood-letting, thirst, burning, cutting, all are endured without a murmur, despite the pain they cause ; and even he who inflicts those torments is paid for doing so, and thanked into the bargain. And why ? Solely for the sake of regaining health. So much do men value that blessing.

Besides, there is nothing which God has commanded us to look after more carefully than our health and strength. He has even renounced the right He has to our service, when we cannot serve Him without injuring our health. All the laws of His Church are suspended, when one cannot observe them, either on account of actual illness, or through a reasonable fear of it. All Christians are bound under pain of grievous sin to hear Mass on Sundays and holydays ; but if you are sick, although you might manage to get as far as the church, or if you are recover-

Nothing more desirable than health.

God has commanded man to look most carefully after his health.

ing from illness, but still so weak that the cold air might bring on a relapse, then you may remain at home ; the law does not bind you ; nay, you would even displease God and do wrong by going to Mass under the circumstances. On certain days all Christians are bound under pain of grievous sin to abstain from flesh-meat, and they who have attained the required age, are obliged moreover to eat only one full meal in the day ; but if you are sick, and your health really requires it, you may eat whatever, and as often as you please ; you are not obliged to fast ; the law does not bind you under those circumstances. I, and all priests are obliged under pain of mortal sin to say the Divine Office every day, and in fact they who have a benefice must make restitution for that day on which they have culpably omitted their office. But if I am ill, if my health is likely to suffer, if I would get a violent headache by reciting the office, I am not bound to do so ; I may put my breviary away ; God does not wish me to say it ; my health has to be considered before His service ; even if I have made a vow to recite the office, I am not bound to keep it. In the same way, as theologians teach, those religious who make a vow never to eat meat, are not bound to keep it in case of sickness, when there is a necessity for eating meat in order to regain health. Nay, many maintain that there is an obligation under pain of sin to eat meat, in such a case, when it is required to prolong life ; although that obligation can rarely be enforced, on account of the difficulty of deciding with certainty that the use of meat is necessary. However that may be, there is no doubt that God has commanded us most strictly to preserve our health and strength.

Yet it is  
wantonly  
injured by  
excessive  
drinking.  
Shown from  
the Holy  
Fathers and  
Scriptures

And yet, O precious health, so useful to man, so important in the sight of God, how many there are who recklessly ruin and destroy thee ! By what ? By frequent and excessive drinking. The life that is so precious, and that would not otherwise be readily exposed to danger by any one, is deliberately and wilfully shortened and brought to a premature end by drunkenness. I do not imagine that it will require much to prove that excessive drinking ruins the health, and thereby shortens life. Holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church, you could not understand how it could be possible for one who is addicted to drinking too much, to remain healthy for a long time ; and therefore you ask with St. Basil “ How can a body be healthy, when it is filled with too much drink ? ”<sup>1</sup> And with St. Ambrose you say :

<sup>1</sup> Quomodo corpus multa potatione plenum sanum poterit existere ?

“Drukenness is most injurious to the bodily health;”<sup>1</sup> Therefore with Tertullian, you call drunkenness “A premature old age, and a sudden death.”<sup>2</sup> But I am not in need of your testimony. O Sacred Scripture, thy words are infallible; what dost thou say? “It goeth in pleasantly,” I read in the Book of Proverbs, “but in the end it will bite like a snake, and will spread abroad poison like a basilisk.”<sup>3</sup> “By surfeiting many have perished,” says the Wise Ecclesiasticus, “but he that is temperate shall prolong life.”<sup>4</sup>

I appeal to reason itself and daily experience. Most, nay nearly all diseases come from ill-digested humors in the stomach; these humors must necessarily arise frequently in a stomach that is constantly surcharged with wine and other strong drinks, which are of their nature apt to heat the blood, and to render the work of digestion very difficult and tedious. Hence the dumb beast, that will not drink unless it is thirsty, and poor people who are not accustomed to exceed in this particular, are not subject to near so many diseases, as those who are wont to gratify their sensuality on every occasion. How must it then be with those who drink to excess, and even intoxicate themselves every day? All sorts of fevers, diseases of the chest and lungs, dropsy, consumption, palsy, apoplexy, gout, trembling of the limbs and impurity of the blood, although they may in some cases have a different origin, are mostly the effects of excessive eating and drinking, and temperate people are not apt to be subject to them.

Petrarch explains this in a poem: The gout, he says, and a spider once met in the street; the spider ran along quickly, but the gout with its lame legs had to hobble along on crutches. They asked each other where they were going. I, said the spider, am going out of town in despair; I cannot stop there any more, I used to live in the house of a rich man, who was accustomed to sleep till midday, in order to get rid of the effects of the wine he had drunk over night, and every evening he would repeat his potations, so that I was in hopes that, since he was thus occupied the whole day, he would let me weave my web in peace; unfortunately, he has such a number of servants, that every morning, when their master is asleep, they go around with brooms and

From experience.

Shown by a fable.

<sup>1</sup> *Noxia res est salutis corporis ebrietas.*

<sup>2</sup> *Senectus immatura, mors momentanea.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ingreditur blande, sed in novissimo mordebit ut coluber, et sicut regulus venena diffundet.*—Prov. xxiii. 31, 32.

<sup>4</sup> *Propter crapulam multi obierunt; qui autem abstinentes est, adjectet vitam.*—Ecc. xxxvii. 34.

sweep away every vestige of my work they find, so that I am not even sure of my life ; therefore I have to seek another home. It is the very same thing with me, said the gout ; I tried to live with a poor laboring man, but like you I fared badly. Bread and water at noon, bread and water in the evening, bread and water from one week's end to the other, and hard work besides ; I assure you, I nearly died of hunger and thirst, and had to leave. Very good, then, said the spider, I know what we can do ; let us change ; do you go to the rich man, who will give you enough to eat and drink every day, and I will find peace with your former host. And they acted on this advice. Therefore, concludes the poet, the gout and similar maladies are at home with those who pass their days in eating and drinking to excess, and thus shorten their lives. They themselves acknowledge this to be the case. They often complain of being indisposed ; sometimes they have a headache, at other times they complain of the stomach, or of loss of appetite ; there is always something wrong with them. And no wonder ! If you keep a kettle always on the boil you must not be surprised to see steam coming from it.

Neverthe-  
less many  
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The Providence of God has wisely ordained that excessive drinking should be its own punishment, and should cause all those evils to those who are addicted to it, in order that, if they are still capable of using their reason and following its dictates they may be deterred from indulging in that evil habit. Yet how many there are who are utterly uninfluenced by this consideration ! If we drink too much, they say, what else can we expect but to suffer for it ? And so they go on drinking down disease after disease, if not at once, at least little by little. Father Drexelius writes in his Prodomus that he once saw in a certain church-yard in Germany two graves that had the same inscription ; one was that of an old man, and over it were written the words ; *Et mortuus est* : “ And he died ; ” the other was that of a young man who died in the bloom of youth, it had the same inscription as the first, but there was a note of interrogation placed after it, so that it read ; *Et mortuus est ?* “ And did he die ? ” In my opinion they might have left out the note of interrogation, or else have placed it in the inscription over the grave of the old man ; for what happens often is not by any means astonishing or wonderful, and it is a well known fact that more people die young, than old. The astonishing thing is that they who are anxious to live long, and to reach a ripe old age, should not have patience to

await the arrival of death, but must hurry it on and shorten their lives in their best years by excessive drinking.

What unaccountable folly that is; nay how wicked it is! <sup>What unaccountable malice this is!</sup> Food and drink are given to us by our bountiful Creator for the sole purpose of preserving our health and strength, and they are abused through intemperance, and made the means of destroying health and shortening life. How will they who thus become their own murderers, answer to God for what they have done? What is the difference between killing a man with one thrust of a dagger, and taking his life by slow poison, when death is sure to follow in either case? Is it a lesser crime to drink one's self to death, than to commit suicide by drowning? Edward IV., king of England, had condemned his brother George, Duke of Clarence, to death; the latter when he heard the sentence, begged as a last favor, that he might be put to death by being drowned in a butt of Malmsey wine. His request was granted; he was put into a large butt filled with his favorite drink, and was drowned therein. What an extraordinary choice he made! Did he lose his life the less in that way, than if he had been executed in the ordinary manner? Still, death was not voluntary on his part; he was put into the wine by force, and kept there until he lost his life. How great then is the malice of those who will not wait until sentence of death is passed upon them by God, who is the Master of our lives, but of their own free will drown themselves in wine, that is, drink to such excess, that a premature death must necessarily follow? Worldly-minded people sometimes accuse poor religious of cruelty, because they shorten their lives by all kinds of austerities, by fasting, and disciplines, by watching and prayer; but it is one thing to mortify one's self and to keep the flesh in subjection to the spirit, for the love of God, and another to pamper the body and so make the spirit subject to it. And if the religious commits a sin, if he must render an account to God for having injured his health and shortened his life by his indiscreet austerities; what kind of a sin is he guilty of, what sort of an account will he have to render, who ruins his health and destroys his life by excessive drinking, solely for the purpose of gratifying his passions?

Further, what blindness it is, to drink more than one's health can bear! <sup>What great blindness!</sup> Tell me, why do you drink so much? Is it not to satisfy the sense of taste? But do you not see that by your excesses, you are lessening the pleasure that this sense is capable

of feeling, that you are ruining your head and stomach, and that you will have little pleasure left when your health is gone? Put a cask of wine in the public market-place, and let it be well guarded by strong men armed with good cudgels; let every one who wishes, drink of it to his heart's content, but on condition, that after every glass, he must get a good drubbing with a cudgel; I think you would not find many anxious to drink on such a condition as that. Yet it is exactly the case of the drunkard, who has to pay for his excesses by a disordered head and stomach. How can one then continue in such folly? The servant, says St. Basil, runs when he sees his master coming after him with a stick, "but you will not run away from wine, although it gives you many a knock on the head."<sup>1</sup> What greater folly can there be?

How wrong it is to force others to drink too much.

And here I cannot refrain from expressing my astonishment at an extraordinary custom prevalent in Germany; a man invites a number of friends to a feast, and compels them to drink more than they are able to bear, and if any of them refuse to do so, they immediately draw down upon themselves the displeasure and ridicule of the others. So that the unfortunate people are obliged to drink until they incur all the disagreeable consequences of perfect ebriety! There is no respite granted, all must drink till they can drink no more. I must say that I am quite at a loss to understand this. Can you give me any intelligible reason for it? Why do you invite your friends? Is it not to give them pleasure and to show your esteem for them? But how can it please them to be compelled to drink against their will, and to fill themselves up with wine, until they become sick? What sort of friendship is that which shows itself by forcing a man to get drunk, and taking from him the most precious natural good he has, namely, his health? You invite your friend to a feast, says St. Ambrose, and then make him take away his life. You ask him to sit at your table, and then force him to drink as if your greatest wish were to see him carried off to his grave! You offer him the best wine you have, but in such excess, that you convert it into a virulent poison which will destroy body and soul! You call him your dearest friend, and wish him many happy years as you drink his health, and at the same time you sow in him the seeds of a premature death! This is called drinking his health!

To do that, is to shorten

"He who compels another to drink more than is good for

<sup>1</sup> Tu vero non recedis a vino, quod quotidie contundit caput tuum.

him," says St. Augustine, "does him more harm than if he were to wound him with a sword;"<sup>1</sup> for he thus compels him to lose the health of body and soul. What thanks do you expect from your friend next morning, when he awakens with a splitting headache, for which he knows you are to blame? How can you expect him to be grateful to you, when you have made him sick by dint of drinking his health? In olden times there was a law in Lombardy which forbade the drinking of healths, *annos socii nequis bibat*. The reason of that law, as Paulus Diaconus writes, was the sudden death of four people at once. These four were drinking together, and they agreed that, as a mark of friendship, each one should drink as many glasses, as his neighbor was years old; they were all pretty well advanced in age, and of course they had to drink a great many glasses. They all held out until they had drunk the prescribed amount; but with the last glass the four of them drank in death, for they died that very day. A fine way that, of showing friendship, whereby a man takes away his own life along with that of his friend! In former times there was a laudable custom in Germany of offering what one was about to drink to another, that he might bless it, with the words, "I offer it to you," whereupon the other answered, "God bless it for you." How different that from the present custom which compels a man to drink to intoxication! Would it not be a thousand times, I will not say more edifying and Christian-like, but more courteous, pleasant and agreeable, to allow every one full liberty as regards drinking, so that no one need drink more than he cares for? In the Book of Esther we read of the great feast of King Assuerus; "Wine also in abundance and of the best was presented, as was worthy of a king's magnificence. Neither was there any one to compel them to drink, that were not willing, but as the king had appointed, who set over every table one of his nobles, that every man might take what he would;"<sup>2</sup> Was not that a better way of enjoying one's self at a feast? In that manner every one could please himself, and show friendship and love to his neighbor; but as for the other custom, if a man compels me to drink more than I care for, I am not inclined to think much of his friendship.

the lives of others, on the pretence of wishing them happiness.

<sup>1</sup> Qui alterum cogit ut se plusquam opus bibendo inebriet, minus malum ei erat, si carnem ejus vulneret gladius.—S. Aug. serm. 231, de temp.

<sup>2</sup> Vinum quoque, ut magnificentia regia dignum erat, abundans, et præceptum ponebatur. Nec erat, qui nolentes cogeret ad bibendum, sed sicut rex statuerat, præponens mensis singulos de principibus suis, ut sumeret unusquisque, quod vellet.—Esth. i. 7-8.

How foolishly they act who allow themselves to be persuaded to drink too much.

Finally, how great the folly of those who allow themselves to be persuaded into drinking more than they can bear, to their own great discomfort, and to the detriment of the health that is so precious to themselves and to their families! Oh, they say, I must do as others do; I do not wish to be the first to interfere with an established custom; I would be ashamed to acknowledge that I could not drink any more, and if I did so, I should be laughed at. But what a senseless excuse that is! Let fools laugh, if they will; you have no reason to be ashamed of acting wisely. Place a piece of iron of some thousand pounds weight on your servant's back, and tell him to carry it, and when he finds it too heavy and says, Sir, I am not able to carry it, laugh at him; tell him it is a shame for him to be so weak; and see whether your laughing will make him any stronger! No, he still gives you the same answer: he is still unable to carry the heavy weight. And is that any shame for him? Why then should you be ashamed if you are unable or unwilling to drink as much as others? Is it an honor to be able to drink more than others? If so, it is an honor which belongs also to a large wine-cask, which holds more than a smaller one. If it were not so large, it would have nothing to boast about more than the smaller one. It is, as Demosthenes says, an honor that a sponge might claim, because it can absorb a great deal of water.

It is a vain excuse to say that one must drink to the health of one's friend, or employer.

But, they answer, I cannot refuse to drink the health of my friend, of my employer, etc.; and I must drink it in a brimming bumper in order to show my respect for them. What a ridiculous thing! How foolish the customs of the world are! Tell me, what good do you do your friend thereby? What honor or respect do you show your master by pouring wine down your throat? How does it help his health, if you injure yours by drinking more than you can bear? Prince Radziwill relates, that in his pilgrimage to Jerusalem, a Turk holding a knife in his hand, and with the upper part of his body bare, and covered with cuts and bleeding wounds, met him, and offered to cut himself with the knife in honor of the Roman emperor, for one Turkish penny. The prince took pity on the poor barbarian, and gave him a piece of money, telling him that he need not perform that act of savagery, as it would do no good to the emperor. But when the foolish man got the money, he persisted in showing his respect for the emperor by cutting and hacking at himself until he was covered with blood. Who would not be shocked at such madness, my dear brethren? And yet, the man was

only a heathen and a barbarian. Far greater is the madness of a Christian, born and bred under the mild law of Jesus Christ, who, to show honor to a mere mortal, fills himself to excess with wine, and so inflicts a grievous wound on both body and soul ; thereby showing, in reality, as little honor to the other, as the Turk showed the emperor by mangling his body. Nay, it very often happens that the wine thus swallowed in honor of another, has to be rejected again, as the stomach cannot digest it. A nice way indeed of showing respect ! If instead of drinking to excess, one prayed for one's friends, or gave the superfluous wine to the poor, much more good would be done for their souls.

Again, if it were the custom to eat to a person's health, as it is the custom to drink to it (and I do not see any reason for one, more than for the other) would you show great respect for a man, by eating too much in his honor? Suppose that after you have eaten enough, a man were to bring you a large plateful of porridge, and tell you that you have to eat it up in honor of some great man ; would you do it, think you ? I do not believe you would be so foolish. And if the other tried to compel you, you would say at once I am not able. Why then do you not say so when you are asked to drink more than you can bear? No reasonable man will be offended at your refusing to eat more than you are able, nor can any one find cause for offence if you do not drink what you know is not good for you. Father Faber tells us of a certain Pole who acted in this manner ; this Pole was once invited to a German feast, at which, according to custom, one health after another was drunk ; he drank the healths as well as he could, until at last, he began to think : If it goes on like this all the evening, what will be the end of it? Gentlemen, he cried out, I beg of you to excuse me, I cannot drink any more. Hereupon one of the guests filled a large glass with wine, and offered it to him, saying that he should drink it to the health of a certain prince in whose service he was. The Pole, finding no other way out of the difficulty, took up an enormous cheese, and holding it out to the other, said : There, eat that to my prince's health ! But what do you mean ? answered the other, I am not a wolf to be able to eat so much. Neither am I an ox, replied the Pole ; so that I cannot drink as much as you ask me ; and why should you try to force me to drink to my prince's health, when you refuse to eat to his health ?

Just as foolish as to eat to a person's health.

Conclusion  
and resolution  
not to  
drink more  
than is good  
for the  
health.

A clever and sensible answer truly! Do not forget it, you who are likely to have occasion to profit by it. If ever an attempt is made to compel you to drink, relate at once what you heard in the sermon about the Pole; think, and say: you may bring me as much as you like, I will not drink more than is good for me. My health and strength are too precious and useful to be thrown away in that unchristian fashion, and against my will too. I often allege my health as an excuse when the law of the Church obliges me to fast, when the bell rings for Mass on a cold winter's morning, or when devotions are held in the church at such an early hour that I fear to injure my health by going. Why then should not the same excuse avail me, when there is question, not of devotion, or of the divine service, but of being compelled to indulge in drunkenness and intemperance contrary to the law of God? Therefore, I will in the future act on that, and no sensible man can think the worse of me for so doing; rather will I, as St. Augustin advises me, be a martyr of temperance, although I thus incur the ridicule of foolish men, than ruin my health and become a torment to myself, through a foolish desire of excelling others in drunken excess. Thus I shall preserve not only the health of my body, but also that of my immortal soul; thus I shall avoid much evil, and what should be of much greater importance to me, I shall observe Thy law, O God, and fulfil Thy will. Give me Thy grace to keep this resolution. Amen.

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*TWENTY-SECOND SERMON.*

**ON THE SHAMEFUL MALICE OF THOSE WHO IMPOVERISH  
THEMSELVES AND INJURE THEIR GOOD NAME BY  
EXCESSIVE DRINKING.**

**Subject.**

There are many who drink more than their incomes allow; what folly and wickedness. 2. More than is good for their honor and reputation; what a shame and disgrace.

**Text.**

*Unde ememus panes, ut manducent hi?*—John vi. 5.  
“Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?”

### Introduction.

Poor people, who were reduced to such extremities that they were hungry and had not bread to eat ! as we read of the crowd in to-day's Gospel ; and yet, it was their zeal in following Christ in order to hear His word, that brought them to such a pass ; therefore, our Lord, who never abandons His servants who trust in Him, took pity on them, and wrought a miracle to supply them with food. My dear brethren, how many there are nowadays, who bring themselves to the direst poverty, so that they must cry out : “ Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat,” not through zeal in following Christ, but through a wilful desire of satisfying their inordinate appetites, through which they and their families must often suffer the pangs of hunger ! Certainly God will not work a miracle to help such people ! I allude to those inveterate drunkards who drink until they reduce themselves and those belonging to them to beggary. Last Sunday I spoke of the folly of drinking so as to injure the health ; to-day I will speak of the second evil effect of drunkenness, and I say—

### Plan of Discourse.

*There are many who drink more than their incomes allow ; what folly and wickedness. Such will be the first part, to which I shall briefly add the third evil effect, namely, that many drink more than is good for their honor and reputation ; what a shame and disgrace. Such will be the second part ; my object is to deter all decent people who are here present, from this abominable habit.*

Strengthen my words to this effect, O Lord, and give us all Thy light and grace through the intercession of Mary Thy Mother, and our holy angels guardian. The first point may be applied to all, even women, who ruin their families by idleness, luxury in dress, and other superfluities, and also to parents who bring up their daughters in idleness and do not teach them housekeeping, so that when the latter get married they are unable to look after their domestic affairs, through want of experience, and thus cause their families much harm, and do a great deal of injury besides.

It is a well known fact that an industrious and diligent father of a family, who lives decently according to his condition, but practises due economy, can save a great deal and support him-

Excessive  
drinking  
leads to

poverty, as  
the Holy  
Scripture  
teaches.

self and those who depend on him with very little expense. It is quite the contrary with inveterate drunkards and those who spend their time in idleness; they squander away all they have, until they are not able to meet their household expenses, and have to be satisfied with very poor fare in the end. There is no proof required to show the truth of this; "Be not in the feasts of great drinkers," says the Holy Ghost in the Book of Proverbs, "nor in their revelings who contribute flesh to eat: Because they that give themselves to drinking, and that club together, shall be consumed, and drowsiness shall be clothed with rags."<sup>1</sup> And again in the twenty-first chapter: "He that loveth good cheer shall be in want; he that loveth wine and fat things shall not be rich."<sup>2</sup>

Reason  
shows this  
clearly.

The reason of this is clear and patent to all; for he who drinks frequently and copiously, must often pull out his purse, as he cannot expect the wine to flow into his house for nothing. Or, if he has a vineyard of his own, he still consumes money's worth, and so makes away with his property as if he were a sieve, which lets out all the more, the more is poured into it. Besides, a drunkard can never repair his losses; because, even if he got his drink for nothing, he makes himself incapable of attending to his business by which he has to support himself and his family. No matter how successful a shopkeeper is in business, if he once gets fond of drink, then, good-bye to his prosperity; he will not keep his books properly, his customers will begin to desert him, his clerks will have it all their own way, he will neglect to push his business and will lose his credit, in a word, he will not be long in ruining himself. How can an official, or a lawyer, attend properly the cases entrusted to him, if his brains are always muddled with wine? And who would give an important case to such a man? Oh, no, people would say, I am not going to leave myself in the hands of a drunkard like that! No one would even venture to ask his advice, or to intrust him with a secret; for according to the proverb, "When the wine is in, the wit is out." What can a laborer do to support himself and his family, if he is addicted to drink? The work is neglected, the fields are untilled, the last penny is spent for drink, and his house is falling to pieces for want of repairs. In a word, as St. John

<sup>1</sup> Noli esse in convivis potatorum, nec in comessationibus eorum, qui carnes ad vescendum conferunt, quia vacantes potibus et dantes symbola consumentur, et vestietur pannis dormitatio.—Prov. xxiii. 20, 21.

<sup>2</sup> Qui diligit epulas, in egestate erit; qui amat vinum et pingula, non ditabitur.—Ibid. xxi. 17.

Chrysostom says, "The drunkard is unfit for any kind of business;"<sup>1</sup> he is good for nothing but drinking and spending money. What can this lead to but ruin? No matter how great a treasure is, if there is something taken out of it every day, and nothing added to it, it must soon be exhausted.

The worst of this wretched vice is, that the more one indulges in it, the more inveterate the habit becomes, and the stronger the desire for drink. There are many other ways of being extravagant and of spending money, such as dressing too expensively, having showy and costly furniture, giving unnecessary entertainments, spending one's time in gaming, idleness, etc., all these things bring nothing in, and make away with a great deal; still, it is not difficult to remedy the mischief they cause in that way; one can be more economical in dress, more cautious of gambling, more sparing of entertainments, more diligent in looking after one's domestic concerns. But when a man has once become addicted to the wretched vice of drunkenness, his cure is almost hopeless. His carousing over night makes him thirsty again in the morning, because it affects the liver and the stomach, and he is like one who has swallowed sea-water, which increases instead of taking away thirst, as the Holy Ghost says in the Book of Proverbs: "Look not upon the wine when it is yellow, when the color thereof shineth in the glass. Thou shalt be as one sleeping in the midst of the sea; . . . And thou shalt say: When shall I awake, and find wine again?"<sup>2</sup> This is the case even with those women who indulge too much in dainties and hot drinks; the next morning they feel quite unwell, and their first thought is for the tea-pot, although they have not yet made their morning offering, or the sign of the cross, or said their prayers: so great is their hurry to get something to drink. Thus the desire for drink is preferred, not merely to one's household duties, but even to God Himself; and as one day ends in drinking, the following day is commenced in the same way. Have you ever seen a dog, says Seneca, standing by while his master is eating? His mouth waters, and his eyes are always fixed on his master; if the latter throws him a bit of bread, he snaps at it and swallows it down in a moment, and just as greedy as before, he stands there waiting for another bit. The same

And also the nature of the vice, which grows stronger, the more it is indulged in.

<sup>1</sup> Ebricusus ad omnia negotia ineptus.

<sup>2</sup> Ne intuearis vinum, quando flavescit, cum splenderit in vitro color ejus. Eris sicut dormiens in medio mari . . . Et dices: quando evigilabo, et rursus vina reperiam?—Prov xxiii. 31, 34, 35.

thing, continues the philosopher, occurs with the drunkard ; he is never satisfied ; what he drinks to-day lasts only until he has slept it off, and when he has done so, he longs for more. Thus, one fit of drunkenness succeeds another, so that it is impossible to find him sober except in the forenoon, or early in the morning. What, I ask again, can be the result of that, but extravagance, ruin and poverty, which will eventually compel the drunkard to give up his bad habit for want of means ?

And experience too.

Diogenes once saw an acquaintance of his, who had formerly been in good circumstances, but had brought himself to poverty by hard drinking, sitting at a table in an inn, and eating a few dried olives. "Oh," he said, "if you had always dined like that, you would not now have to be content with such a poor supper."<sup>1</sup> On another occasion he passed by an empty house that was offered for sale ; "Aha," said he, "I knew long ago, that this house, being always full of wine, would soon vomit forth its owner ;"<sup>2</sup> The saying, "this man has been plucked by wine"<sup>3</sup> derives its origin from an Athenian who spent all he had in drink, so that at last, he was forced to go half naked. Oh, how many there are nowadays, who deserve the same reproach, who from masters have become servants, and beggars from rich men ! How many sons there are, who inherited a rich property from their thrifty parents, and who now have to go about in rags like the prodigal son ! To give instances of this in order to prove that there are such people, would be like opening the graves in order to show that people die. Of all such people we may say with truth, that they are plucked by wine, for drunkenness has brought them to poverty.

What folly this is.

What madness it is, says St. Augustine, to pour down one's throat in a day, what should suffice to supply one decently with food and drink for three or four days, and to exhaust in a few years by excessive drinking, what could have supported one's self and family for a whole life-time ! And here I must express my heartfelt pity for those citizens and workmen, who have a wife and family to support, and have no other means of doing so but their daily labor, but who being given to drink, send the few pence they earn to the public-house and generally drink in one Sunday all they have earned for the week ; as St. Ambrose says : "They drink in one day the labor and sweat of

<sup>1</sup> Si sic prandisses, non ita cœnares.—Diogenes apud Laërtium. l. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Sciebam domum istam, vino ebriam, dominum evomituram.

<sup>3</sup> Hic a vino deplumatus est.

many days ;”<sup>1</sup> meanwhile they have hardly a decent coat to their backs, or bread and water enough to keep body and soul together during the week : and when they come to old age, or sickness comes on, so that they are unable to work, they have not a penny in their pockets to buy a piece of bread for themselves and their families.

But far greater is my pity for the unfortunate wives and families who are brought to extreme poverty by those drunken men, and who have to suffer hunger and thirst at home, while those who should provide for them, are swilling wine or beer in the tavern, thus verifying the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians : “ And one indeed is hungry, and another is drunk ;”<sup>2</sup> What a crying injustice that is ! They to whom God has intrusted a wife and children, to be supported as well as possible according to their condition, are the very ones who make away with what belongs to their wives and children, and reduce them to beggary ! And unfortunately, that is of only too common occurrence ! It is a sin of injustice to steal even the least thing from a rich man, who would not miss it ; what a fearful sin it must be for a father thus to rob his own children, whom he has begotten, and his wife, with whom he should be one body and one soul !

How great the wickedness of those who spend in drink what should go to the support of their families.

The early Christians were horrified at the cruelty of the pagans, who used to sacrifice their own children at their feasts, and drink their blood out of goblets. An enormity of that kind is most revolting to our nature. But you, drunken Christians, act far more cruelly to your children ! You have found a way of gnawing at your children’s flesh and drinking their blood, not only without horror and disgust, but actually with joy and pleasure, when you spend in drinking and carousing what should be devoted to their support. Do not think that I am saying too much, or speaking too severely. It is the Holy Ghost who uses the same expressions, and calls those unnatural fathers murderers of their own children : “ Merciless murderers of their own children, and eaters of men’s bowels, and devourers of blood ;”<sup>3</sup> Cruel fathers, if you gave to the poor the money that is necessary for the decent support of your wives and children, you would commit a grievous sin against charity and justice, which bind you to provide for them before you give

What cruelty they are guilty of.

<sup>1</sup> Uno die bibunt multorum dierum labores.

<sup>2</sup> Alius quidem esurit ; alius autem ebrius est.—I. Cor. xi. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Filiorum suorum necatores sine misericordia, et comestores viscerum hominum, et devoratores sanguinis.—Wisdom. xii. 5.

anything even to Christ Himself in the persons of the poor ! But you spend in sinful excess, in drinking and carousing, that which should go to support, and clothe and educate your families. What wickedness that is !

They are the occasion of much sin to their families.

Even if temporal poverty and distress were the only evils you cause, it would not matter so much. But your cruelty goes farther than that ; you bring eternal death on your families and occasion the loss of their souls. a not unfrequent result of your drunken excesses. I do not speak now of the scandal you give when you come home in a state of intoxication, and curse and swear and ill-treat your wives and children ; nor of the sins into which your children are led by your neglecting to give them a proper Christian training ; I speak only of the contempt that they must feel for you, although they are bound to honor you ; of the hatred they must have for you, although they are bound to love you ; of the curses they call down on your heads, although they ought to pray for you ; of the little care they will take of you, when they have succeeded in raising themselves by their diligence, out of the poverty into which they were plunged by your drunkenness and intemperance. For how could they have any affection for a father who has shown so little love and tenderness to his own flesh and blood ? How can they act as children to him, who has not been as a father to them ? How can they acknowledge their obligation to support and help him, who by his drunkenness has left them nothing but poverty and misery as their portion ?

And sometimes drive them to despair. Shown by an example.

Nor do I speak of other terrible sins, such as despair, to which they are often driven by the poverty caused through your intemperance. Father Ambrose Cataneus relates a terrible example of this. There was once a poor young woman who had three children, two of whom were just able to walk, while the third was still in the cradle. She had nothing for them to eat, because her husband used to spend all his earnings in drink. The poor woman, driven to extremity, ventured once into the tavern where her husband was, and falling down on her knees, said to him: Oh, my dear husband, I beg of you to take pity on us ; your children and I have not eaten anything for two days, and we are dying of hunger. Her husband, already half intoxicated, grew furious at being thus addressed, and drove his wife away. The poor woman was in a worse state than before. When she reached home, her children ran out to meet her, thinking she had brought them something to eat ; they caught

hold of her apron and felt her pockets, but they found nothing. The poor woman was heart-broken at the sight ; she knew not what to do ; until at last, unable to bear the sight of their misery any longer, she took a knife and cut the throats of her three children. In the same state of desperation, she awaited the arrival of her husband, who as usual came home drunk, and cut his throat, too, during his sleep. The straits to which she was reduced might well have excused her desperate act ; still she was arrested and condemned to death, according to law. She heard her sentence pronounced with the greatest composure, and when she arrived at the place of execution, she spoke so forcibly against those husbands who indulge in excessive drinking, that there was a remarkable improvement noticed afterwards amongst the people in that respect. Ah, would that my words, too, had power to wean drunkards from their evil ways ! I trust I have no drunkards before me now ; but in case any such are here present, who are not deterred from their evil habit by fear of losing their health, or their money, I ask them at least, not to drink more than is good for their honor and reputation, which are seriously injured by excessive drinking, as we shall see in the

### Second Part.

Honor and life are generally looked upon as of the same value ; nay, many a one values his good name more than his life, so that he is ready to expose the latter to a thousand dangers, for the sake of preserving, or gaining the former. Many heathens have deliberately sacrificed, nay, taken away their lives that their names might descend to posterity untarnished. No one, unless he is the most degraded of men, will allow the least stain to affect his honor.

A good name is generally more valued than life itself.

And yet, this honor is utterly ruined by excessive drinking ; for what is more disgraceful than to have the name of being a drunkard ? What more loathsome object is there than a drunken man ? St. Gregory Nazianzen says that there was once a beautiful girl who used to amuse herself by playing on the flute, but one day happening to catch the reflection of her face in a pond of clear water, and seeing how it was disfigured by the flute, she became so disgusted with that instrument, that she gave it up altogether. I think, my dear brethren, that if one who is created to the image and likeness of God, and who therefore, is made only for heavenly things, could see himself and the actions he does when

Drunkards lose it by their indecent and disgraceful conduct.

in a state of intoxication, clearly reflected in a mirror, he would be ashamed of himself, and if he had a spark of honorable feeling left, would give up drinking at once. Anacharsis being asked the best means of practising temperance, replied that it was to see how people act who are intoxicated. It was in that way that the Lacedaemonians tried to deter their children from drunkenness, they used to make a slave drunk and let him go staggering about in that condition, in presence of their children; so that the latter seeing how unbecomingly he acted, and how unworthy of a reasoning being, might have a horror and dread of excessive drinking. And, in fact, if one who knew nothing of this vice, were suddenly to see a drunken man, he would take him for a wild beast; or at least for a madman. And after all, what difference is there between a drunken man and a madman; unless that the latter was involuntarily deprived of the use of reason, while the former deliberately deprives himself of it?

The Holy Fathers compare them to senseless things.

St. Basil compares them to dumb idols; "What else are drunken men, but idols such as the heathens adore? They have eyes and see not; they have ears and hear not; hands, and feel not; feet, and cannot walk; tongues, and cannot speak."<sup>1</sup>

"I see men as it were trees walking," said the blind man, when Christ first restored his sight, and he was enabled to distinguish objects faintly. If he had seen a drunken man, even after his sight was fully restored, I think he would have made the same remark; "I see men as it were trees walking," I see them swaying from side to side, like trees in a storm, as if they could not keep their feet; they stagger about and fall down almost as often as they get up; they are a nuisance to all decent people, and objects of scorn and ridicule to their own friends, children and servants.

They call them a disgrace to human nature and say they are worse than beasts.

St. John Chrysostom says that a drunkard is "A disgrace to humanity."<sup>2</sup> And what greater shame can there be, than to degrade human nature from its dignity? Man is created to the image and likeness of God; he is only a little inferior to the angels and princes of Heaven in dignity: "Thou hast made him a little less than the angels,"<sup>3</sup> says the Psalmist. But when he is drunk, what becomes of the dignity of his nature? What trace of the divine image can be discerned in

<sup>1</sup> Quid, quæso sunt ebrii aliquid quam gentium idola? Oculos habent et non vident; aures habent et non audiunt; pedes habent et non ambulant; linguas habent et non loquuntur.—S. Basil. hom. in ebriet.

<sup>2</sup> Opprobrium generis humani.

<sup>3</sup> Minutisti eum paulo minus ab Angelis.—Ps. viii. 6.

him? He is, so to speak, no longer a man; he is not a whit better than a beast. As St. Basil says, "Drunkenness turns a man into a beast."<sup>1</sup> For while he is in that condition, how can he be distinguished from a beast? By his eyes, ears, hands or feet? But wild beasts have all these, too, and they make far better use of them than a drunken man does. It is reason alone, by which we think, and judge, and discern, that raises our nature almost immeasurably above that of the brute creation. If we lose our reason as is the case with the drunkard, we are no better than the beasts. Nay, one could wish that the drunkard were as good! "How much better," says St. Chrysostom, "is an ass, or a dog, than a drunken man."<sup>2</sup> And why? Because those animals will not drink more than is necessary to slake their thirst; you may beat an ass as long as you please, once he has had enough he will not drink a drop more. "You, therefore, oh drunkards, are worse than beasts;"<sup>3</sup> for you drink six times, ten times more than your necessity requires, or your means allow. What a shame and disgrace to an honorable name!

That is true, they will say; but the vice is so common nowadays, that there is no disgrace in it; we are all in the one boat. They even make a boast of it, and think it a fine thing to be drunk. Alas, that the wickedness of the world should go so far, as to make a boast of a vice that is condemned by God and by nature, and abhorred by unreasoning animals; and that even Christians, should not hesitate to boast of it! It may easily happen that a respectable man once or twice in company gets a little overcome by drink, on account of bodily weakness, or because he is off his guard; he does not thereby disgrace himself, he rather deserves to be pitied; but I am not speaking of such cases as that. I speak only of those who are habitual drunkards, and who are seldom to be seen sober. There is no respectable man who will tell me that those are men of honor and worthy of esteem; and there is no one who will deny that all decent people look on them as disgraced. No matter how pious, how learned, how clever, how experienced a man is if he once gets the name of being a drunkard, all his good qualities are of no use to him; he sinks at once in the estimation of every one. Thus we often hear people say in a pitying tone:

Although drunkenness is a common vice, all sensible men look upon it as disgraceful

<sup>1</sup> *Ebrietas ex hominibus facit belluas.*

<sup>2</sup> *Quanto melior ebriosis est asinus et canis.*—S. Chrys. hom. 71 ad populum.

<sup>3</sup> *Vos ergo brutis deteriores estis.*—*Ibid.*

Such a one is a good man ; but unfortunately he is too fond of drink ; what a pity it is ! If it were not for that he would be one of the best fellows in the world ; and so on. When the Pharisees failed to find any other accusation against Our Lord, they said that He was a drunkard, in spite of His perfect sobriety and temperance ; when they saw Him at the marriage feast at Cana, at the house of Martha in Bethania, with Matthew and Zacheus, who were public sinners, with the rich Pharisee, and many others ; they took occasion from His presence at those feasts to try to ruin His character. “ Behold,” said they, “ this man is a glutton and a wine-drinker.”<sup>1</sup> This false accusation of theirs was the means they made use of to lessen at least His reputation, if they could not take it away altogether. Therefore, he who is habitually addicted to intemperance, cannot be esteemed by any one, except perhaps by the companions of his carousals ; and that is an esteem such as thieves have for the most daring and lawless of their gang. Although the judgments of the world are mostly vain and false, yet there is no one of common sense, who does not at once condemn and look down upon him who has the reputation of being a drunkard.

It is most  
shameful  
and dis-  
graceful in  
women.

“ A drunkard,” I have said ; that is, a drunken man ; for I do not dare to suggest even the possibility of that vice being found amongst women. A drunken woman ! What a horrible thing even to imagine ! There is nothing so disgraceful to a woman as to say that she is given to drink. For, if she is addicted to that vice, what is to become of her household duties, of the education of her children, and of the necessary watchfulness over her servants ? How can the mistress of a family perform these duties if she is given to intemperance ? Every one sees at once, without further proof, that under the circumstances, the ruin of the family is certain, and hence amongst many nations it was the custom to interdict the use of wine to women under the severest penalties. The ancient Romans punished a woman who had drunk but one glass of wine, as severely as if she had committed adultery. Pliny relates that a certain noble matron, who in obedience to her physician’s orders, took a small quantity of wine, was deprived of her dowry by the judge, Oneius Domitius, because she slightly exceeded the exact quantity that was necessary for her. Mezennius once caught his wife in the act of drinking wine, and he was so enraged thereat, that he beat her

<sup>1</sup> *Ecce, homo vorax et potator vini.*—*Matth. xi. 19.*

to death; and not only did he go unpunished for this act, but he was even praised for it. More than that; Fabius Pictor writes that a noble lady was once condemned to be starved to death, for merely opening the chest in which the keys of the wine-cellar were kept. So abominable in the eyes of heathens was not merely actual drunkenness, but even the bare suspicion of it on the part of a woman. Christian women, I cannot, nor is it my intention to forbid you to drink wine; I know well that the law of those ancient people was much too severe, and their anxiety to prevent drunkenness amongst women too great. But if you are determined to enjoy the good things that God has given you, do so, in God's name, without forgetting the temperance that becomes a Christian woman. My only object is to show that all, men and women, who exceed in the use of intoxicating drinks, destroy their health, ruin their families, and bring disgrace upon themselves. What folly, what wickedness that is.

Pardon me, my dear brethren, for having said so much of this shameful vice to you. Perhaps (and God grant that it may be the case) among all who are here present, there may be hardly one who requires admonition or warning on this point. At least my opinion is, that they who are most guilty do not often come to hear a sermon. But my wish is to deter all from this shameful habit, by bringing forward natural reasons to induce them to avoid it, which are often far more cogent than supernatural ones. They are the same reasons that you, who are masters and mistresses of families, often adduce, with threats and punishments in addition, to deter your servants, your relatives and acquaintances, especially when the latter are married, and your children also, from indulging in drunkenness. But you must never forget to enforce by your own example what you preach by words.

I conclude with the warning of St. Peter, the prince of the Apostles, in his first Epistle, a warning that we read daily in the Divine Office: "Be sober and watch, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour;"<sup>1</sup> therefore be on your guard, all of you, and let your reason keep awake. Prudent and foreseeing parents, whose sons are away at college, do not give them all at once the money they require for the year; but send it to them every month, little by little, so that they may not be tempted to

<sup>1</sup> Sobrii estote et vigilate, quia adversarius vester diabolus tanquam leo rugiens circuit, querens quem devoret.—I. Pet. v. 8.

squander it away all at once, and then have to suffer want afterwards. It is the same with these bodies of ours that we have to support ; if the salvation of our souls is not a sufficient motive for us to avoid drunkenness, let us, at least, if we are wise, give the necessary refection to our bodies in such a way, that our incomes will not suffer from it, and that we may always be able to do our duty to ourselves and to those belonging to us. Prudent parents, no matter how rich they are, never send their sons more than the latter are actually in need of, lest they become spendthrifts and bring disgrace on the family. It is so, I repeat, with these bodies of ours ; if the salvation of our souls is not a sufficient motive to keep us from excessive drinking, let us at least consider our honor and good name, and not take more than is good for our reputation. And still, these should be the least motives to induce us to practise temperance and sobriety. Transitory goods, empty honor, it is not for your sake that I wish to practise virtue ! Thou, O God, to whom all love and honor are due, Thou hast commanded us to provide for our families as well as we can, in temporal things, and to keep up our good name for the general edification of all, and therefore to lead a sober and temperate life as becomes Christians ! This we will do for Thy sake, and with Thy grace. Amen.

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TWENTY-THIRD SERMON.

ON THE GUILT AND SINFUL EFFECTS OF HABITUAL  
DRUNKENNESS.

Subject.

1. Deliberate drunkenness is always a mortal sin. 2. The habit of drinking much, although not to actual drunkenness, is very often a mortal sin.—*Preached on 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.

To drink more than one's health, or income, or reputation can bear, what folly, what wickedness, what a shame ! And

yet, it is an ordinary consequence of excessive drinking, as we have seen in the preceding sermons. Yet, important as this consideration is, it would not matter much if the salvation of the soul and the law of God were not concerned also. For the worst of all the evil consequences of excessive drinking, which should be most effective in deterring Christians from that vice, is, that most people drink more than is consistent with the salvation of their souls and the observance of the divine law. Here it seems to me that some are inclined to say, like our Lord in to-day's Gospel, "which of you shall convince me of sin?" What nonsense to say that it is a sin to drink a drop too much now and then! So common has this vice become, that it is no longer looked upon as sinful. And my object now is to show, by way of concluding this matter, how false and wrong that idea is. I will convince you of sin.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*Deliberate drunkenness is always a mortal sin. Such will be the first and longer part. The habit of drinking much, although not to actual drunkenness, is very often a mortal sin; as I shall show in the second part.*

Help me to do this, O God, through the intercession of Mary and the holy angels guardian.

By perfect drunkenness I mean such a darkening of the reason through excessive drinking that one is incapable of doing a reasonable act. It is defined by theologians as, "An excess in drinking, without just and grievous cause, by which a man knowingly and willingly deprives himself by violence and fully of the use of reason." Mark these words, my dear brethren. In the first place it is called an excess in drinking, which is to be understood according to the capacity of each individual to bear a greater or smaller quantity of intoxicating drink. Father Bidermann says that there was a noted drinker in his time who was able to consume nearly eight gallons of wine at a sitting, without suffering the least inconvenience. How he managed it, I know not; but if such was really the case, although that man certainly drank a great deal, yet he was not guilty of any excess which would result in intoxication. That quantity, therefore, whether it be great or small, is to be considered as excessive and as the cause of drunkenness, which in any individual case, completely obscures the reason. Secondly, it must be without just cause; thus it is not a sin to take a medicine

What is meant by perfect drunkenness.

which deprives one for a time of the use of reason, or according to the opinion of many theologians, to get drunk if the doctor thinks it necessary for the recovery of health, because such a deprivation of reason arises from a just cause, namely, the avoidance of illness, or the recovery of health. Thirdly, the deprivation of reason must be wilful and deliberate; therefore, if a man, either because it is the first time, or because he has good reason for so judging from past experience, thinks that what he is about to drink will not hurt him, although through illness, or the strength of the wine of which he knew nothing, or through coming out suddenly into the fresh air, his reason is actually affected, as frequently happens, such a man is not guilty, because he did not foresee nor intend that drunkenness should follow from his act. Fourthly, I have said, "by violence." He who lies down to sleep at night also deprives himself of the use of reason, not however violently, but in the manner appointed by the Author of nature, so that when he awakes he is at once ready to use his reason again. Fifthly, I have said that one must deprive himself "fully" of the use of reason; therefore, although the imagination is somewhat disturbed, and the tongue stammers and the eyes see double, and the feet are rather uncertain, nay, even though the stomach is forced to reject the wine that one has drunk as long as the reason is capable of acting and reflecting, there is not perfect and mortally sinful drunkenness, provided there has been no wish or intention of getting drunk. I speak of the matter as it is, my dear brethren; there are sins enough already without making new ones through a false conscience. Drunkenness, then, consists in the total deprivation of the use of reason deliberately and wilfully caused, or foreseen; a sin that is unfortunately only too common in this country of ours!

It is a grievous sin because it turns a man into a beast.

Now it is easy to prove that this is a grievous sin, even if there was no divine law forbidding it; for the light of reason alone enables us to see that it is unlawful. For, in the first place, drunkenness goes directly against the love, reverence and respect that man owes his Creator and himself, by inflicting a grievous injury on himself and offering a gross insult to God. Because, what greater harm could man do his own dignity, which consists in his reason, that enables him to raise himself to the throne of the Most High, and to bear the likeness of his Maker; what greater harm could he do himself than of his own accord, to make himself a drivelling idiot, and to lower himself

to the level of a beast? It is undoubtedly a grievous sin for a man to deprive another of his reason even for a single day, or to transform him into a beast by magic arts, as we read of the celebrated Sorceress who changed the companions of Ulysses into swine; is it not then, a much greater crime for a man deliberately to take away his own reason, and as it were, to bewitch himself

The Holy Fathers consider that the names of fool and wild beast are too honorable to be applied to drunkards. St. Basil, St. John Chrysostom and others call the drunkard, "one who turns himself into a devil."<sup>1</sup> Because just as Lucifer by his pride and rebellion changed himself from an angel of light into an angel of darkness, so also the drunkard deliberately obscures his reason and makes himself a beast, instead of a reasoning being. Lucifer deprived himself of his supernatural gifts, but his natural gifts still remain to him, such as his intellect, his knowledge and his power of discernment. By drunkenness, therefore, a man does himself much more harm, because he destroys not only the inward supernatural beauty of the soul, which consists in sanctifying grace, but also his natural gifts, his understanding, his memory, his reason; and even his very outward appearance sometimes becomes brutalized. Unhappy is the man who is possessed by the devil! While in that state, he has not the power of acting or speaking as he wills, for the evil spirit uses his tongue as an instrument, and it very often happens that the possessed person, although he never learned any language but his mother tongue, speaks all kinds of languages, such as Latin, French, Greek and Hebrew with the greatest ease. How could he learn all those tongues so quickly? Alas, poor wretch, it is not he who is speaking, but the evil spirit that is in him! He is no longer master of his hands, feet, or head; the demon moves his body about at pleasure; he can lift it high in the air, and cast it down to earth again. Unfortunate, indeed, such a man must be, and well deserving of our pity, since God has allowed him to be so grievously tormented! But what would you think of one, my dear brethren, who deliberately invokes a demon and invites him to take possession of his body? Would not that be a fearful crime? Could it be excused from mortal sin? Yet that is what the drunkard does. He has no longer power over the members of his body; if no one takes the trouble of looking after him, and

May, even  
into a de-  
mon.

<sup>1</sup> *Dæmonem voluntarium.*

bringing him home, he falls in the mud like an unclean animal ; he speaks inarticulately, without knowing what he says, and without being able to make himself intelligible to others ; he does things that he would otherwise abhor, and that he must be heartily ashamed of when he comes to himself again. How is it that he behaves in such an unusual and unbecoming manner ? Ah, it is not himself, it is the wine, the evil spirit that has taken possession of him, that is the cause of all the mischief ! Still, he does not excite pity, but rather disgust ; because he has wilfully swallowed down the spirit that possesses him. And he is in a far worse state too, than the demoniac, for the miserable condition of the latter cannot be attributed to his own free will, and he may be freed from the evil spirit by the prayers and exorcisms of the Catholic Church ; but no exorcisms can help a drunken man ; he must remain in his unreasoning state until the effects of the strong drink have worn off. Can any sensible man maintain that drunkenness is not a mortal sin, when by it one inflicts such a grievous injury on one's self ?

And also offers a great insult to the Creator, because it is looked upon as an insult to dishonor the image of a king.

Still greater is the injury done to God. It is a great crime in the eyes of the world, to dishonor publicly the image of an emperor or a king, and it is looked upon as a kind of treason and punished with death. I remember very well a circumstance that occurred in a certain town in which I was studying. The students of the town, in their indiscreet zeal for the Catholic faith, destroyed the escutcheon of the king, who was not a Catholic. But how dearly had the town to pay for their rashness, although it was innocent ! It had to pay a heavy fine in money, and was made to suffer in many ways besides, in order to atone for the insult. Yet it was only a piece of carved wood that was dishonored. No matter ; it was the sign of a sovereign, who took to himself any disrespect shown to it. How much greater would not the insult be, if a favorite servant of the king were to dishonor and trample under foot an image of his master, which he had just received from the latter's hand, as a sign of special favor ?

The human soul is the image of God.

Now, my dear brethren, man always carries about with him a very precious image, namely, his reason. What a beautiful and costly image it is ! And whose is it ? It is that of the Lord of lords, and King of kings, of Him who is Master of all the potentates of Heaven and earth. It is the image of the Almighty God, who has given it to man with His own hands, as a token of His love. Now, if earthly lords are justly offended, when an insult is

offered to their coat-of-arms, although it is made only of wood or stone, do you think that the great God, who is so jealous of His honor and glory, and who cannot bear to see men offering the flesh of an animal to an idol, can see without displeasure His own living image wantonly disgraced and dishonored ?

And could a greater insult be offered to that image, than to degrade it to the condition of a senseless creature, or of a beast, by drunkenness ? Musonius asks, “ What can be more degrading to a man, than to bear the likeness of an irrational animal ? ”<sup>1</sup> I will make a slight change in this expression in order to inspire you with a greater horror of the vice of intemperance, and I ask, “ What can be more degrading to the image of God, than to turn it into the image of a beast ? ” Is it likely that God will allow this injury to go unavenged ? And is that a mere trifling sin, and one that we need not think much of ?

It is shamefully disgraced by drunkenness.

Not without cause has God in His anger threatened woes and maledictions by the Prophet Isaias : “ Wo to you that rise up early in the morning to follow drunkenness, and to drink till the evening to be inflamed with wine.” “ Therefore hath hell enlarged her soul, and opened her mouth without any bounds. ”<sup>2</sup> Not without cause does he ask in the Book of Proverbs : “ Who hath wo ? Surely they that pass their time in wine, and study to drink off their cups.”<sup>3</sup> Not without cause has He pronounced the final sentence by St. Paul ; “ Nor shall drunkards possess the kingdom of God.”<sup>4</sup>

A disgrace that is most displeasing to God.

There is still another characteristic in drunkenness which distinguishes it from other sins, and brings out its gravity more clearly ; and it is this, that it makes man incapable of doing penance and being converted to God, and thus places the soul in certain danger of eternal damnation, when the time comes for her to leave this life. Suppose that a drunken man is overtaken by a mortal illness, or that he is grievously wounded, or otherwise reduced to the last extremity ; for we are not safe from death for a moment, nor can we have the least idea of the time of his approach, and therefore Our Lord warns us to be always on the watch ; how could a drunken man prepare for death and

Besides, when in a state of intoxication, one is in danger of eternal damnation.

<sup>1</sup> Quid foedius quam ut homo bruti animalis image sit ?

<sup>2</sup> Væ, qui consurgitis mane ad ebrietatem sectandam, et potandum usque ad vesperam, ut vino aestuetis. Propterea dilatavit infernus animam suam, et aperuit os suum absque ullo termino.—Isa. v. 11, 14.

<sup>3</sup> Cui vae ? Nonne his, qui commorantur in vino, et student calicibus epotandis ?—Prov. xxiii. 29, 30.

<sup>4</sup> Neque ebriosi regnum Dei possidebunt.—1 Cor. vi. 10.

the journey into eternity? In any other circumstances, when the Lord knocks at the door, if, like the foolish virgins, we have no oil in our lamps, as long as there is a spark of life left we have time to go and buy some; that is to say, if a mortal illness were to surprise us when engaged in the commission of any other sin, we might at least make an act of contrition with the heart, if we are not able to make our confession, and thus obtain pardon, though it is not likely that we should do so under the circumstances, and hardly one in a thousand finds pardon for his sins in that way, when he defers repentance. But when a man is intoxicated what can he do for himself? He cannot make his confession because he is unable to speak, nor can he repent of his sins, because he cannot use his reason. He is utterly incapable of receiving any sacraments, as long as he is in that state, and of course if he dies before becoming sober, there is no place for his soul but hell. And this is the reason why it is not lawful to drink to excess before going to bed at night, when one foresees that complete drunkenness is likely to ensue during sleep; because thereby one deprives himself wilfully of the use of reason, and consequently is not able under all circumstances to attend to the salvation of his soul.

Drunkards especially have to dread dying impenitent.

O drunkards, if any one has to dread dying impenitent, you certainly must! Hear how God threatens you by the Prophet Jeremias: "In their heart I will set them drink, and I will make them drunk that they may slumber, and sleep an everlasting sleep, and awake no more, saith the Lord."<sup>1</sup> According to the literal sense these words are to be understood of Balthasar and the Chaldeans, who were to be surprised and massacred in their drunken sleep by Cyrus, as we read in the fifth Chapter of the Book of Daniel. Still they may be applied to all who are given to drunkenness, because the longer they indulge in this vice, the more they become attached to it; so that they refuse to give it up, and are generally hurried into eternity by a sudden and unprovided death, without true sorrow and repentance for their sins.

Shown by an example.

It is sad to read what the Venerable Bede relates of his own experience. I will tell it to you in his own words. "I once knew a Brother whose name I will keep secret; would that I had never known him! He lived in a noble convent, but not in a noble manner, for he often drank to excess. When he was overtaken

<sup>1</sup> In calore eorum ponam potus eorum, et inebriabo eos, ut soplantur, et dormiant somnum sempiternum, et non consurgant, dicit Dominus.—Jer. li. 39.

by his last illness he called in his brethren, and in their presence began to rave and howl like a damned soul, and to cry out that he saw hell opened for him and a place prepared, in which he was to suffer eternal hunger and thirst. The bystanders tried to encourage him by reminding him that there was still time, and that as long as he had life, he could repent and ask God to forgive him ; but all to no purpose. ‘ No,’ he cried, ‘ there is no time for me any longer ; my sentence is already pronounced ; I am going to hell.’ And having said these words he died, without giving the least sign of contrition.” Oh, if God were to command all the dying thus to make known their sentences, how clearly should we not see the infallible truth of the words of the Apostle, “ Drunkards shall not possess the kingdom of God.”

For God’s sake then, let no one say that drunkenness does not matter much, that it is a general failing, and that it cannot be a great sin ! Is it not a great sin, when God excludes men from Heaven on account of it ? If it is a general custom, and is therefore regarded as a trivial fault, so much the worse, so much the more is the evil to be deplored. It is not the civil or the ecclesiastical law against which a long continued prescription might avail, that forbids drunkenness ; but the natural and divine laws, against which no prescription is ever admissible. If all the people in the world were to act against that law, it still would be a sin for each individual. And the same is to be said of every custom and usage of the world which is of itself sinful, or apt to lead to sin. You say that you are not the only one who drinks too much ; is your sin any less on that account ? Is that a reason why you should expect to be punished less severely for it ? A soldier deserts, and induces twenty of his comrades to follow his example. If he is caught he will certainly be hung. Oh, he thinks, what does it matter ? I am not the only one. No, you are not the only one ; but you will see whether death will be any easier for you, because you have twenty companions hanging on the gallows beside you !

Yes, says another, I grant that wilful drunkenness is a grievous sin ; but I do not drink for the purpose of getting drunk ; my only object is to enjoy myself, and not to deprive myself of the use of reason. But what sort of an excuse is that ? An adulterer might say that his object is not to offend God, but to enjoy himself, does that lessen his sin ? You do not wish to take away your reason ; but you drink so much for the purpose of enjoying yourself, that drunkenness is sure to follow. I thought,

Custom does not excuse this sin.

Nor any other pretext whatsoever.

says the third, that I could bear more ; but I found afterwards, to my surprise, that I was drunk. Very good ; if it is the first time, or if it is to be attributed to accident, your excuse is valid. But if you know by experience that you generally get drunk when you go to the tavern, or into company, your excuse is worth nothing ! you are guilty of deliberate drunkenness. That is all very fine talk, says a fourth ; but if you only knew the occasions and temptations that one is exposed to in the world ; I am forced to drink against my will ; healths are proposed, and I have to drink them till I am drunk. I will let St. Augustine answer this objection. “ Drunkards,” he says, excuse themselves by saying that they were compelled to drink by a stronger man. But if you were subjected to such violence, that you had to drink or die, it would be better for you to kill your body by practising temperance, than to kill your soul by deliberate drunkenness.”<sup>1</sup> From this language on the part of such a learned and holy Doctor of the Church, we can see how grievous is the sin of drunkenness.

From this we may see how grievously they sin, who provoke others to get drunk.

From what we have seen hitherto, it is evident that you are guilty of a great sin against God and your neighbor, who provoke others to drink to excess, often with no other intention but that of making them drunk, or at least foreseeing that they are sure to get drunk. It is a mortal sin, as theologians teach, to make an enemy drunk, as long as the intoxication is involuntary on his part, even if a town was to be freed, or taken thereby. How then can it be lawful to lead another on to perfect intoxication, out of mere wantonness ? Against you especially is that woe uttered by the Prophet Isaias : “ Woe to you that are mighty to drink wine, and stout men at drunkenness ; ”<sup>2</sup> But enough of this. There are many who flatter themselves, and think : God be praised that I am free from that sin at any rate ; I am not such a beast as to get really drunk, although I take a drop too much, still I never get so bad as not to know what I am doing. But hear what a celebrated author and theologian says : “ Drunkenness is a mortal sin, although it does not fully take away the use of reason.”<sup>3</sup> I do not dare, my dear brethren, to say that this holds good always and for every one ; but I do main-

<sup>1</sup> Solent ebriosi ita se excusare, ut dicant, persona potens coegit me. Etiamsi ad hoc veniretur, aut bibas, aut moriaris, melius erat ut caro tua sobria occideretur, quam ut per ebrietatem anima moreretur.—S. Aug. Serm. 232. de temp.

<sup>2</sup> Væ qui potentes estis ad bibendum vinum, et viri fortes ad miscendam ebrietatem.—Isa. v. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Ebrietas etiam citra deliquum rationis est peccatum mortale.—Esius in c. 5. I Cor.

tain that the habit of excessive drinking, although not to complete drunkenness, is in most cases not to be easily excused from mortal sin. I will briefly prove that in the

### Second Part.

To place one's self deliberately in the proximate occasion and danger of sin, is the same thing as to commit the sin; although in reality the sin is not committed. No theologian denies this. But the proximate occasion consists of those circumstances in which certain individuals know by experience that they always, or at least very often, fall into sin. Now there is very little doubt that excessive drinking, although it does not take away the use of reason, is yet a fruitful source of many sins; as daily experience teaches, nor do we want a better proof than that. Wine tells on different people in different ways, according to their dispositions and inclinations. Some are most devout when they have a drop too much. I once knew a man who always wept tears of sorrow for his sins, when he was a little tipsy. Would that this was the only effect of wine; but as it is the best, so also it is the rarest! But what a number of sins arise from excessive drinking. St. John Chrysostom and other Fathers of the Church call it "The mother of all vice;"<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine says that he who is given to immoderate drinking, does not merely commit one sin, for, "he is sin itself altogether;"<sup>2</sup> the devil is never more pleased than when he can lead a man into this vice, for he knows well that it is sure to be the occasion of many sins.

Even the habit of drinking to excess, although not to actual drunkenness, is to most people a proximate occasion of many sins.

And he has already had proof of this from experience. Read the Holy Scriptures and you will find examples enough of the sad effects of excessive drinking, even among those who were otherwise faithful servants of God. The Patriarch Noe kept himself free from sin during the Deluge which destroyed the world, but when he drank too much wine, what scandal he gave to his own children! Lot escaped unhurt from the flames of Sodom, and had not as yet defiled the purity of the marriage-bed; but when he took too much wine, did he not commit a most shameful incest? Herod, wicked as he was, had a great respect for St. John the Baptist, listened to his sermons with pleasure and followed his advice in many things, but on the occasion of the festival, when he was warmed with wine, he caused St. John to

Proved from the Old Testament.

<sup>1</sup> *Omnium mater vitiorum.*

<sup>2</sup> *Sed totus est peccatum.*

be beheaded, although he knew him to be innocent, merely to satisfy the whim of a dancing girl, who knew well that she could not find a better opportunity of glutting her cruelty. The vessels that Nabuchodonosor brought away from Jerusalem had always been kept in a place that the idolatrous priests looked upon as sacred; Balthasar, who had hitherto respected them, profaned them when he was excited by wine at a banquet, and drank out of them with his own concubines. The Israelites in the desert, after they had eaten and drunk, took to idolatry as a pastime: "And the people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play."<sup>1</sup>

From daily  
experience.  
For drink  
leads to im-  
purity.

But why should we rake up those old histories? What happens in our own day? We can use our own eyes and ears, and learn from our own experience. There are some, and in fact very many who become quite friendly when they have drunk too much; but they are a great deal too friendly and too free in their conversation, far more so than is consistent with Christian modesty, or virginal or conjugal purity. With reason does St. Augustine say that wine, taken to excess, is "the shipwreck of chastity."<sup>2</sup> Where are you most likely to hear unchaste jests, filthy talk and immodest songs, if not in drinking-houses? Many a town would be freed from a great deal of impurity, seduction of the innocent, scandal, and adultery, if wine were not so much used; so that it would be a very good thing for those towns if God were to refuse to bless the wine-crop.

To sinful  
loquacity.

Others grow quite talkative when tipsy, and reveal what was told them in confidence, thus doing much harm; nor do they hesitate to say boldly what they think of others, thereby injuring their neighbor's reputation. In fact, loquacity is so usual in a tipsy man, that it would be a wonder indeed if one who is in that state could manage to keep his unruly tongue in order. In olden times there was a public banquet once given in Athens to the ambassadors of King Ptolemy, to which Zeno the philosopher was invited. The latter appeared, but during the whole banquet he never opened his lips to say a word, nor did he even answer the questions that were addressed to him. When all was over, one of the ambassadors took up a goblet full of wine, and drank it off to the philosopher's health. Now, said he, O wisest of men, deign to give me an answer. What shall I say to my king when he asks me about you? Zeno

<sup>1</sup> Sedit populus manducare, et bibere, et surrexerunt ludere.—Exod. xxxii. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Est naufragium castitatis.

at last opened his mouth. Tell your king, said he, that you have seen at Athens a man who could keep silence while wine-drinking was going on. His meaning was, that it was a wonderful thing for a man to be able to do that.

There are others who grow abusive when drunk. They curse and swear, and use all sorts of hard words against their neighbor, and worse than all, they blaspheme their Creator. Others again become prodigal; they give away all they have; and drink and gamble until they have spent what ought to go to the support of their families, as we have seen in the last sermon. Others become irascible and quarrelsome, and are not easy until they have succeeded in picking a quarrel with some one, they have not a friendly word for any one, and thus give rise to hatred, enmity, and often murder. Others become so cruel and heartless, that they ill-treat their parents, wives and children, so that very often, the poor wife has to sit trembling at home, while her husband is drinking in the tavern, knowing well that when he comes home, he will beat and abuse her, as if she were a naughty child who deserves punishment. It is clear that these, and many other effects of excessive drinking are sinful, and mortally sinful. Therefore, he who knows by experience that immoderate drinking causes those effects in him, is bound under pain of mortal sin, to avoid excessive drinking, although he does not intend to deprive himself fully of the use of reason. The conclusion is evident, because the premises are certain.

To anger,  
cruelty and  
prodigality.

Unhappy wives, who have to suffer poverty, or ill-treatment, through your drunken husbands, how I pity your wretched state! Still, hard as it is for you, it is not that which most excites my pity; for it is a cross that God has laid on your shoulders to the salvation of your souls, and that you may earn much glory in Heaven, if you only make use of the opportunity, and practise patience and resignation to the divine will. But there is one thought which could make me shed tears of blood, and that is, that you turn this occasion of gaining merit for your souls into an occasion of eternal damnation to yourselves, by your excessive impatience and despair; and thus it often happens that you go from temporal into eternal suffering! For, how do you sometimes act, when your husbands come home, half, or wholly drunk? Do you not often abuse and curse them, and call them drunken beasts, and call down all sorts of imprecations on them, and give utterance to everything that your anger inspires you with? Is not that the case?

Instruction  
for wives  
who have  
drunken  
husbands.

And what do you gain by such conduct? Your husbands who are already ill able to bear the least word of contradiction, on account of the state in which they are, return you curse for curse, and abuse for abuse; and so you become an occasion of additional sin. And what better are you for it? You get a sound drubbing, and, sooth to say, you richly deserve it! Do you know how you should act? That is no time for reproof or remonstrance; as the saying is, if a man meets a wagon loaded with hay, he has nothing to do but to get out of its way; and so also you should give way to your husbands when they are too full of wine. You must hold your tongues, give way, return soft answers, say that it is a good thing to take a drop now and then, and bear ill-treatment with patience; there is no better plan for you to adopt. The next day, when the fumes of the wine have disappeared, and you think your husbands are in a better humor, you can remonstrate with them with humility, modesty and love, and beg of them to amend, and to cease causing you such suffering. If that does not help you, then you must pray earnestly to the Lord of hearts, that He may give your husbands the grace of conversion. Resign yourselves humbly and patiently to every decree of the Almighty; unite your trials with the bitter passion and death of Jesus Christ, recall your past lives and see whether you have not perhaps committed some grievous sins, and accept your sufferings as a punishment for them from the hands of God. Think and say; Lord, Thy will be done! Thou chastisest me for the good of my soul, and in order to bring me to Heaven! The punishment is hard and I feel it keenly, still I accept it from Thy fatherly hand! Do Thou give me grace to bear it patiently! O eternal joys of Heaven, you are well worth all that I can suffer here! In that way you will have no part in the sins of your husbands; if they wish to lose their souls, it is their own fault; you will have done your duty. I am often forced to console myself in the same manner, when I try to exhort others to amend their lives, and find that my preaching has been fruitless; I have done my duty, I say to myself, if they do not wish to profit by what I have said, I cannot help them; they will have to answer to God for it. If you do that, you will at least find that God will console you in your trials; if you neglect it, then you will have a twofold trial to bear; that is, you will have to suffer without consolation either from God or man, and generally speaking, your hard lot in this life will only be the forerunner of a still harder one in the next

life. If I knew of any better advice to give you, I would give it with all my heart ; but I can find no other.

“Awake, ye that are drunk,” I say to you, O drunkards, for the last time, “and weep and mourn all ye that take delight in drinking sweet wine ; for it is cut off from your mouth.”<sup>1</sup>

Conclusion  
and threats  
to drunk-  
ards.

Weep and mourn over your unhappy and almost desperate state! Acknowledge and bewail the madness with which you ruin your health, your fortunes and your good name ! Bemoan your wickedness with tears of repentance, and atone for the many sins you have committed by intemperance ! Weep as Esau did, when he satisfied his gluttony by selling his birthright for a mess of pottage ; for you have given up your eternal inheritance in Heaven, that you may indulge your inordinate desires. Weep and beg of God with all humility to avert the woes that will surely fall upon your heads, unless you repent !

My dear brethren, let us try to serve God in temperance and sobriety during this short and uncertain life of ours. Let us use our understanding and our will to the end for which our Creator gave them to us, namely, to know, to love and to honor Him, whom we hope one day to see and to love in Heaven ; and let us keep all our desires for that heavenly banquet, the thought of which so much consoled the Prophet David, when he cried out : “I shall be satisfied when Thy glory shall appear ;”<sup>2</sup> in that heavenly country in which, as Thou hast promised, Thou wilt inebriate “Thy elect with the plenty of Thy house.”<sup>3</sup> We shall console ourselves in this vale of tears with the hope of this blissful intoxication. Amen.

Warning  
for others:

<sup>1</sup> *Expergiscimini ebril, et flete, et utulate omnes qui bibitis vinum in dulcedine, quoniam perit ab ore vestro.*—Joel i. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Satiabor cum apparuerit gloria tua.*—Ps. xvi. 15.

<sup>3</sup> *Inebriabuntur ab ubertate domus tue.*—*Ibid*, xxxv. 9.

# ON ANGER AND VINDICTIVENESS.

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## TWENTY-FOURTH SERMON.

### ON THE UNREASONABLENESS OF GIVING WAY TO ANGER, AND THE BEST MEANS OF CONTROLLING IT.

#### Subject.

1. Anger is a vice which is contrary to sound reason. 2. How one may and must control and repress the movements of anger, as well in himself as in others.—*Preached on the twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost.*

#### Text.

*Et iratus Dominus ejus.*—Matth. xviii. 34.  
“And his Lord being angry.”

#### Introduction.

Just and righteous cause had this lord to be angry with his wicked servant; for, would not even the mildest of men be displeased at seeing, that, although the servant was forgiven the enormous debt of ten thousand talents, yet he acted so harshly with his fellow-servant, who owed him but a hundred pence, and who begged him in the most humble manner to have patience with him, that he had him cast into prison for the trifling debt. “And his lord being angry.” Just indeed was that anger! How often, my dear brethren, do not Christians give way to anger and resentment against their fellow-men, without the least cause, and without having ever suffered anything at their hands? How many there are who, when things do not go according to their wishes, at once give expression to the bitterest feelings against those whom they suspect to be the cause of their failure! Oh, woe to such people, if the Almighty were to deal in a sim-

ilar manner with them, every time they offend Him by sin, which they do daily ! For, as Our Lord says in to-day's Gospel : " So also shall my heavenly Father do to you, if you forgive not everyone his brother from your hearts." <sup>1</sup> If that threat is uttered against all who refuse to forgive those who have injured them, what will they have to expect who give way to anger against their neighbor on the least provocation, and make use of injurious and insulting words towards him ? I will now speak of this anger through which most men commit sin nearly every day, and which is a fruitful cause of other sins.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*Anger is a vice which is most contrary to sound reason. This I will show in the first part. How one may and must control and repress the movements of anger as well in himself as in others. This I will show in the second part.*

Give us Thy powerful grace, O Jesus, that we may all learn to practise patience and meekness, and thus be true children of our heavenly Father ; this we ask of Thee through the intercession of Mary, Thy Mother, and our holy angels guardian.

As I told you on a former occasion, when speaking of drunkenness, Lacedaemonians, in order to deter their children from this abominable vice, used to make their slaves drunk, and bring their children in, to see them in that state. Their disgusting appearance, their unbecoming gestures, their uncertain gait, their incoherent speech, and the other effects of intoxication that were observable in them, made the children look on them as a strange kind of wild animal. Thus from their very childhood, the Lacedaemonians were filled with horror for a vice so unbecoming a reasoning being. In the same way, my dear brethren, in order to see how anger is opposed to reason, we need only imagine that we see an angry man giving vent to his feelings. See how disturbed he looks ; with his face alternately red and pale and swollen with passion, his eyes darting forth fire, his teeth grinding with rage, his lips compressed, his whole body trembling, his fist clenched, his tongue full of gall ; his silence is a continued discordant growl, his speech nothing but invective ! Would not one have reason to think that he is completely mad and out of his mind, or else that he has been transformed into a wild beast ? In fact he is called a fool by the Holy Ghost in the

An angry man is like a beast.

<sup>1</sup> Sic et Pater meus caelestis faciet vobis, si non remisertis unusquisque fratri suo de cordibus vestris.—Matth. xviii. 35.

Book of Ecclesiastes ; “ Be not quickly angry ; for anger resteth in the bosom of a fool ; ”<sup>1</sup> and a savage and unreasoning beast, in the Book of Proverbs : “ As the roaring of a lion, so is the anger of a king.”<sup>2</sup>

All that he says and does is unreasonable.

And in fact, while his anger lasts, are any of his actions such as could be said to proceed from sound reason ? No ; everything he does seems strange and unreasonable ; he appears to have lost all power over himself ; he speaks whatever his passion suggests to him, without knowing what he says. All kinds of curses and oaths come forth from his mouth ; he blasphemes God and man, and says things that he would never dream of otherwise. He gets into quarrels and disputes that he repents of and is heartily sorry for when he comes to himself. He strikes out blindly, not knowing whom he has before him, whether it is a friend or enemy, a stranger or an intimate. Those who have never injured him, even his own wife and children must keep out of his way. In a word, as the Holy Ghost says : “ The impatient man shall work folly.”<sup>3</sup>

The cause of his anger is generally some worthless thing.

If we consider the causes which generally excite to anger, we shall see still clearer, how unreasonable it is to give way to that passion. Amongst the mountains of Switzerland there was discovered a small lake, which was of very insignificant size, but it was so sensitive that if the least thing were thrown into it, its waters would at once begin to boil and bubble up with the greatest fury ; a stone thrown into it would cause such a commotion, that the sky would be darkened by the vapor rising from the lake, and a fearful thunderstorm would be sure to follow. Kircher says that a certain Margrave of Baden, wished to have ocular proof of this wonder ; he threw a small stone in the lake, and a thunderstorm arose that lasted for seven whole days, and threatened to destroy the whole country. It is not my purpose to trace this strange occurrence to its cause. But I am firmly convinced that they who are excited to anger by a mere nothing, may trace their passion to the devil, who is fond of hiding himself in the troubled waters of a passionate man's heart. A harmless joke, a ludicrous gesture, a word of contradiction are so many small stones ; but they are big enough to

<sup>1</sup> Ne sis velox ad frascendum, quia ira in sinu stulti requiescit.—Eccles. vii. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Sicut fremitus leonis, ita et regis ira.—Prov. xix. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Impatiens operabitur stultitiam.—Ibid. xiv. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Si quis lapidem injicit, tonitrua horrendamque tempestatem illico spectat.—Athan. Kircher in mont. subter. to 2. l. 8.

raise a thunderstorm ; they are often the cause of quarrelling and contention, of abuse and reviling, so that they turn friendship into enmity.

Consider the anger and resentment of Achab ; one would think that some terrible misfortune had befallen him ; he became melancholy and refused to leave his bed ; he would not touch food or drink, and did nothing but look at the bare wall. “ And casting himself upon his bed, he turned away his face to the wall, and would eat no bread.”<sup>1</sup> But, Achab, what was the matter with you ? Were you suffering from fever, or was your stomach out of order, or had any other illness attacked you ? No ; nothing of the kind. And why was he then so distressed and disturbed ? A rude answer was the sole cause of his bitterness. Achab wished to purchase a certain vineyard ; he sent for the owner, Naboth, and asked him to exchange it with him. Naboth, instead of excusing himself in a polite manner, or acceding to the king’s request, answered gruffly, “ The Lord be merciful to me, and not let me give thee the inheritance of my fathers.”<sup>2</sup> This seemingly uncourteous answer was the little stone that aroused all Achab’s wrath ; “ And Achab came into the house angry and fretting, because of the word that Naboth had spoken to him.”<sup>3</sup> Mark these words, my dear brethren, the Holy Scripture does not say that he was angry because of the deed, but because of the word. What great power a little word has on a passionate disposition. Was it worth while to get so angry for such a trifle ; to throw himself on his bed, and refuse to eat or drink ? See what power a little word had over him. Seneca writes that Vedius Pollio once condemned a slave to be thrown into a fish-pond for having broken a glass vessel, while waiting at table. Fortunately for the slave, the emperor Augustus was present, and he was so disgusted at the cruel sentence, that he had the slave set free and ordered every glass vessel in Pollio’s house to be broken, so that the latter might not have so many opportunities of giving way to anger, and of sacrificing human life for the sake of a broken glass. Still more senseless was the conduct of the two shepherds ; they were out one fine night on a hill, looking at the beautiful sky with its twinkling stars. Oh, said one, if I had land as long

Proved from  
history.

<sup>1</sup> Et proiciens se in lectulum suum, avertit faciem suam ad parietem, et non comedit panem.—III Kings, *xxi.* 4.

<sup>2</sup> Proptius sit mihi Dominus, ne dem hereditatem patrum meorum tibi.—*Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Venit ergo Achab in domum suam indignans et frendens super verbo, quod locutus fuerat ad eum Naboth.—*Ibid.*, 4.

and as broad as the sky, how rich I should be. And if I, said the other, had as many sheep as there are stars in the sky, should I not be rich also? But, asked the first, where would you find pasturage for such a number of sheep? In your meadow, of course, was the answer. What, you would pasture them on my fields? Yes, why not? You would not dare to do it. Would you prevent me? I would; if I caught your sheep in my meadow, I would kill every one of them! I should like to see you, said the other; and so one word borrowed another, until in a short time they were hard at it, fighting away with one another until they both fell down the hill.

Confirmed  
by experi-  
ence.

See, my dear brethren, for what worthless things an irascible and ill-tempered man gives way to his passion, when he does not know how to control its first movements. A doubtful answer given to a question of his, the least fault committed by one who is living in the same house, the silence of one, the loquacity of another, a thoughtless word, a well-meant contradiction on the part of his wife, the crying of his innocent children, the slowness, or precipitation, or awkwardness of his servants, nay, even his own faults stir up his ill-humor, and make him fill the whole house with confusion and discord. Even things that it is out of our power to improve or to change, such as inclement weather, a harsh wind, a difficulty in some work or other, a stubborn horse, a howling dog, an ill-tuned instrument, a blunt knife, a bad pen, a cup or glass broken by accident or even by his own fault, and a thousand other similar trifles are capable of making him quite beside himself with anger; so that he begins to curse and swear, and gets in a great passion. Now, is that the way in which a sensible man should act? Are such things to be deemed a sufficient cause for losing one's temper and often disturbing the whole family?

Usual ex-  
cuses for  
anger.

Oh, some will say, it is easy to call these things trifles; you do not know how things go on in our house; I should have as little feeling as a stone, if I were to pass them over in silence. When my drunken husband comes home the worse for drink, have I not reason to be angry? When my good-for-nothing, fault-finding wife criticises everything I do, how can I keep my temper? Must I not get angry if my servants do not do what I tell them? Have I not reason to be displeased, when I see my children running about the house, and doing what they like? When I meet that troublesome neighbor of mine, with whom I have a lawsuit, I should have the patience of Job to be able to

control myself. If others did not interfere with me, I should be all right; but as things are, I cannot keep my temper. Ah, my dear Christian, you are making a great mistake and deceiving yourself! It is not your husband, nor your wife, nor your servant, nor your child, nor your neighbor, nor any one else that is the cause of your giving way to anger: you yourself are to blame especially. Your over-sensitiveness, which does not allow you to bear the least annoyance from others; your obstinacy, which makes you try to have everything according to your own ideas; your imagination, which makes a mountain out of a mole-hill; your suspicious character, which you neither mortify nor restrain; the bad habit you have so long indulged in, of giving way to anger at the least provocation; these are the real causes of your ill-humor and anger. If you had learned a little Christian patience and meekness, you would not be at all disturbed by hundreds of such trifles, or at all events, you would not give such violent and unreasonable expression to your feelings.

Well does the Prophet David pray to God in the name of all passionate people: "Turn away my reproach, which I have apprehended." Mark the words, "which I have apprehended;" the meaning is: This reproach is not only groundless as far as I am concerned, so that I do not believe I have deserved it; but also it has no existence even on the part of others, for it was simply the result of my own sensitiveness. My imagination began to trouble my heart, although I had no wrong to complain of. Balladius relates a ludicrous incident, which will serve to illustrate my subject. St. Vincent was once describing in a sermon the contest of St. Margaret with the devil. A courageous, but foolish young man, who was listening to him, thought that he should like to try a similar adventure. Full of this idea, he went off to a ruined and deserted hut, in the hope that the devil would come to visit him there, and engage in a struggle with him. While he was looking for the arch-enemy in every corner, he saw a poor old woman with a sickle in her hand who had come to cut a few bundles of grass in the field. The young man looked at her, and at once came to the conclusion that she must be the devil. Avaunt! wicked spirit, said he, I know you in spite of your disguise, by the sickle you hold in your hand, and by your flaming eyes! With these words, he threw off his mantle, made the sign of the cross a

Frequently the cause of anger exists only in the imagination. Shown by an example

<sup>1</sup> *Amputa opprobrium meum., quod suspicatus sum.—Ps. cxviii. 39.*

countless number of times, rushed upon the poor old creature and threw her on the ground, treating her as if she were an old sack. She was utterly unable to cry for help, but she defended herself as well as she could with her sickle and with the few teeth she had left. The contest lasted some time, until at length it attracted the notice of some people, who came up and found the two combatants bathed in blood. The poor woman suffered so severely, that she died of her wounds a few hours after. It was certainly a grand thing to gain such a victory over an old woman, and then to boast as if it had been the foul fiend himself who was vanquished ! All passionate people act in the same way. They attack those from whom they imagine they have received an insult, with as much fury, as if it was against the devil himself that they were directing their efforts. If you had a little patience, you would be able to see that an old woman is not the devil. That neighbor of yours has a sharp tongue and says annoying things to you sometimes, but she is not the devil; she has nothing against you; she neither despises you nor wishes to do you the least harm; her sickle will not hurt you; she is only an old woman and not the devil. The same is to be said of all the other things that are likely to excite your ill-temper; they are not half so bad as they seem; the wrong exists only in your own imagination, and you might say with the Prophet, "my reproach which I have apprehended." The truth of this you are often forced to acknowledge to yourself when your fit of anger is over, and you are obliged to confess that the faults which caused you to get into a passion were really of very trifling importance after all. For instance, a week ago your husband drank too much; a week ago your wife contradicted you, or your child broke something, or your servant was disobedient, etc. Now I ask you, are you as much inclined to anger at those faults at the present moment, as you were a week ago, when you gave vent to your passion in curses and injurious expressions? Certainly not. But why? The fault is just as great now as it was then. Why do you not think it deserving of the same anger? The only reason is, that then your passion was excited, and you imagined the fault much greater than it really was, so that your unbridled passion was the cause of your anger, and it made you act in direct opposition to the dictates of reason.

The passionate man gains no-

And what does the passionate man gain by giving way to his temper? Nothing, but that he makes his temper worse and

more difficult to be controlled, causes himself a great deal of pain and annoyance by imagining that people are treating him unjustly, injures his health and shortens his life; for, according to what physicians say, there is nothing more injurious to health, than to give way to anger; and makes himself hateful to the members of his own family and contemptible to all sensible men. For as meekness and amiability make one respected and loved by all, so a man of a passionate disposition, who gets angry at the least trifle, is simply unbearable; he is looked upon as one who is utterly incapable of self-control, who constantly forgets himself and exposes his weaknesses to every one. Thus he becomes a burden to himself, for when his anger is over, he sees how foolishly he has acted, and of course he must be ashamed of himself.

thing by his anger; and injures himself.

Finally, what should most of all deter one from anger, is the fact that thereby God is offended, and His wrath and malediction are incurred on account of the many sins against Christian charity that arise from it. For that unnatural cursing, swearing, and abusive language, quarrelling and fighting, long-continued hatred and enmity, discord and strife, vindictiveness and sometimes even murder, nay even blasphemy against the Most High, are all children of anger, and God will not allow them to go unpunished. Therefore, in order to preserve us from those sins, our Lord pronounces this sentence against anger, in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "Whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment;" but he who through deliberate anger, "shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, my dear brethren, let us do all in our power to avoid such a detestable vice, which runs directly counter to sound reason, and is a cause of so many sins. "Let all bitterness and anger, and indignation and clamor, and blasphemy be put away from you, with all malice."<sup>2</sup> Such is the warning of St. Paul. But what are we to do in order to check this evil inclination, to which we are all subject? That we shall see in the

Incurs the wrath of God, and commits many sins that arise from anger.

### Second Part.

To avoid all anger, two things have to be observed, one by those who have to deal with passionate people, the other by those

They who have to do with pas-

<sup>1</sup> Omnis qui irascitur fratri suo, reus erit iudicio . . . Qui autem dixerit: Fatue, reus erit gehennæ ignis.—Matth. v. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Omnis amaritudo, et ira et indignatio, et clamor et blasphemia tollatur a vobis cum omni malitia.—Eph. iv. 31.

tionate  
people must  
be careful to  
give them  
no occasion  
for anger.

who are easily excited to anger. The former must be very careful to give the latter no cause for offence, once they know them to be easily excited ; they must never dispute with, or contradict them, and they must avoid everything which they know to be a likely cause of anger to them ; besides, they must bear with any annoyance which the others cause them, in a spirit of meekness and patience, for God's sake, in order, to preserve peace and quiet ; and they may console themselves with the assurance that they have the very best opportunity of increasing their virtue, and gaining great merit in Heaven, by practising this patience and self-denial. But if it is quite evident that the other is determined on getting into a passion, then there is nothing to do but to follow the advice of St. Paul : " Give place to wrath ;"<sup>1</sup> that is, let the angry man have his way ; keep silent, and let him say and do what he will, until his anger is over ; go out of his way, out of his sight if possible ; do not attempt to excuse yourself, although you are innocent ; apologize to him as if he had reason to be vexed with you. This meekness will overcome his anger, and when he comes to himself, it will make him admire your virtue, acknowledge his own fault, feel ashamed of himself and have a greater esteem and love for you. In a word, if there is no one to contradict, there is no occasion for anger and bad temper.

Married  
people  
should es-  
pecially ob-  
serve this  
towards  
each other.

Oh, if all, married people especially, understood this beautiful art, and constantly practised it towards each other, what quarrels and discord and misunderstandings, along with the numerous sins that spring from them, would be avoided in families ! But, alas, they do not understand it, and therefore, neither will give way, neither will remain silent ; both strive to have the last word, and of course thus they give rise to the bitterest family quarrels ! They are like that married couple who always disagreed on a certain day every year ; and do you know why, my dear brethren ? They once had some roast fowl for dinner, and they differed in opinion as to what kind of birds they were. The husband said they were blackbirds, the wife maintained that they were fieldfares ; they had a great dispute about the matter, and at last came to blows. Next year, when the same day came round, the husband said to his wife : Do you remember how foolish we were last year, to fight about the blackbirds ? Yes, answered she, and it was your fault ; they were fieldfares, not blackbirds. And so they began the dispute again as bad as

<sup>1</sup> *Date locum fræ.*—Rom. xii. 19.

ever, and repeated it every year when the day came. It is certainly a most ludicrous affair, my dear brethren. But do not people act just as foolishly nowadays in many households? One contradicts the other, and neither will give way, in matters that are not of the least importance, and thus discord and hatred arise, and married life is turned into a regular purgatory, to be followed very often by the eternal pains of hell!

How much annoyance we should save ourselves, how many sins should we avoid, if we only had a little Christian patience in bearing with our neighbor's shortcomings, and in practising mutual forbearance! When Cardinal Bellarmine saw any of the members of his household quarrelling, he used to say that an ounce of charity is worth a hundred wagon-loads of right: thereby showing that in a quarrel, there should be no question as to who is right, and who is wrong, for that only makes matters worse, but each one should be ready to give up his opinion for the sake of preserving peace and concord. When your husband, or wife, or any one, no matter who, begins to quarrel with you, remember what Christian charity and patience require of you, and do not contradict; keep silence. Yes, you say, but I have not given any cause for a quarrel; I am treated unjustly. No matter; you must not forget that an ounce of patience and charity is worth a hundred wagon-loads of right. But I am quite certain that I am right and the other wrong! No matter; it still remains true that an ounce of patience is worth a hundred wagon-loads of right. You cannot do a better thing than give up your right for the sake of preventing anger, discord, hatred and many other sins.

Christian  
patience  
and charity  
must pre-  
serve us  
from anger.

And what advice have I to give those who are of a passionate disposition, and who are easily excited to anger? What means must they use in order to control and overcome this evil inclination? I answer, that, next to humble, daily prayer to God for the virtue of Christian meekness, the best means is for them to foresee, as far as possible, when they are calm, the occasions, objects, or circumstances that are likely to move them to anger, to imagine that those occasions are now really present, and then to arm the mind against them by a firm resolution not to give way to anger. For instance: you might say to yourself. This evening my husband will come home drunk; what shall I do? To-day my wife will contradict and speak sharply to me; my children will disturb me with their noise; my neighbor will meet me in the street, and will not speak to me; the people will

What a  
passionate  
man must  
do to avoid  
anger.

make fun of me ; when I go into company I shall be made a laughing-stock of ; my work will be a failure, etc. Shall I therefore give way to anger and bad temper ? No ; I shall restrain my anger for God's sake ; not a curse, nor a wicked word shall fall from my lips ; I shall keep silent, and act as if the matter did not concern me at all. In that way one can be beforehand with anger and prevent it from breaking out ; and as a misfortune that we anticipate causes less affliction than when it comes unexpectedly, so also we can make injuries and annoyances less by foreseeing them.

How he is  
to restrain  
his rising  
passion.

Again, if you find that something suddenly occurs to provoke you to anger, go away, so as not to see it. It may be your neighbor who insults you in the street ; go at once into your house and shut the door. If you are annoyed by some one in your own house, go into another room, or else to the Church, and pray to God for patience, until your anger has passed away. If you cannot go away, nor otherwise avoid the annoyance, keep perfectly still ; do not speak a word ; undertake nothing, make no resolution, until your resentment has subsided ; because you cannot act prudently while your reason is disturbed by passion. Such was the advice that a certain philosopher gave the emperor Augustus : Whenever you feel inclined to anger, he said, you must repeat the letters of the alphabet from beginning to end, over and over again, until your anger has passed ; in that way you will neither do nor say anything that you will have to repent of afterwards. The emperor Theodosius, acting on the advice of St. Ambrose, published a law forbidding any malefactor condemned to death to be executed, until thirty days had elapsed after the sentence was pronounced against him. The pious emperor knew well that it would be unjust not to give a poor wretch who was condemned to death by an enraged sovereign, any respite until the latter's anger had passed over. It was a remarkable saying that Architas made use of when he returned home from a foreign country, and found that his steward had allowed his property to go to ruin : If I were not angry, said he to the careless steward, I should punish you severely ;<sup>1</sup> And in acting thus he showed great wisdom, although he was a heathen, for he knew that while his reason was disturbed by anger, he could not inflict just punishment. Christian parents and married people, you should profit by this example. You are bound to chastise your children when they deserve it ; you must administer par-

<sup>1</sup> Quam male te acciperem, nisi iratus essem.

ental punishment to your children and servants when they do not serve you or their God properly ; but you must be very careful not to inflict this punishment when you are in a passion, for if passion puts the rod in your hand, you are apt to exceed the bounds of moderation, and to have recourse to abuse and cursing, which will make the punishment fruitless. Defer it then to some other time, when your reason will be undisturbed, and you can chastise your children and servants with fatherly love.

Finally, if in spite of your resolution, you are carried away by anger, you must at once enter into yourself and repent of your fault and beg of God to forgive you for having offended Him. Think and say to yourself ; what have I gained by getting in a passion ? Was it worth while to allow myself to be so disturbed ? What a number of foolish things I have said ! If I had borne with the annoyance patiently for God's sake, I should have gained a beautiful crown in Heaven ; as it is, I have only scandalized my neighbor and incurred the wrath of God. Then renew your resolution of being more careful in future, and impose some penance on yourself, such as saying certain prayers, or giving alms whenever you give away to ill-temper. You will thus, with the help of God's grace, conquer yourself little by little, and practise Christian meekness.

What he must do after having been angry.

I conclude with the words of the Prophet David: " Be ye angry and sin not."<sup>1</sup> Be angry and displeased when God is offended, and, if you can, chastise and prevent the sins of others. But if a man has to suffer anything from his neighbor, he must practise charity, patience and meekness. Always remember, says Seneca, who it is that causes you annoyance or insults you. Is he a child ? Then you must have pity on his youth. He does not know that he is doing wrong. Is it a grown-up person whom you have offended ? Why should you be angry with him ? You offended him first. Is it some one who insults you through sheer malice ? Then you must not be surprised at what he does, nor must you be angry with him, for he has already punished himself by being so wicked.<sup>2</sup> No matter who has injured you, you should not forget that he is your neighbor, that you are bound to love him as yourself, and to return good for evil. " Bear ye one another's burdens, and so you shall fulfill the law of Christ ;"<sup>3</sup> such is the advice that St. Paul gives

Conclusion and exhortation to meekness and patience.

<sup>1</sup> Irascimini, et nolite peccare.—Ps. iv. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Puer est ? Aetati donetur ; nescit an peccet. Laesus est ? Prior fecisti. Malus est ? Noli mirari, jam sibi poenas dedit qui peccavit.—Senec. de ira. c. 30.

<sup>3</sup> Alter alterius onera portate : et sic adimplebitis legem Christi.—Gal. vi. 2.

us, and according to it, we must overlook each other's faults and failings. There is no one without faults which sometimes make him troublesome to others, yet these latter must bear those faults with patience. If, then, you are offended, you must think to yourself: I have offended others, or there is something in me which is displeasing to them; they must be patient with me, and of course I must be patient with them. "In your patience you shall possess your souls,"<sup>1</sup> says Christ. How patient one is with a querulous old man, or a troublesome sick person, or an eccentric and headstrong relative, when he hopes to inherit a large sum of money from him! How patient courtiers are! What annoyances and slights does not one bear through fear of displeasing men! And shall we be less diligent in practising patience for God's sake and to avoid displeasing Him, although He commands us to be meek, patient and kind to our fellow-men?

After the  
example of  
Christ.

Always keep before your eyes Our Lord, Jesus Christ. How gentle and patient He was with His disciples, while they were still very ignorant! How gentle and patient He was with the greatest sinners! How gentle and patient He was towards those who mocked, scourged and crucified Him! "Who when He was reviled, did not revile," as St. Peter says, "when He suffered He threatened not, but delivered Himself to him that judged Him unjustly."<sup>2</sup> And as Isaias prophesied of Him: "He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter, and shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearer, and He shall not open His mouth."<sup>3</sup> "Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart."<sup>4</sup> If these words do not help you to restrain your anger, what can do it? St. Martin was very much troubled and annoyed by one of his priests named Brizius; but he would not turn him away, although many advised him to do so. Whenever that advice was given him, the holy man would answer: "Christ bore with Judas, and shall not I bear with Brizius?"<sup>5</sup> So, too, should you say when you have anything to suffer from your neighbor; Christ bore with Judas who betrayed Him, and shall I refuse to be patient with my fellow-man, because he looks at me in an unfriendly manner? Shall I quarrel with my friend, because

<sup>1</sup> In patientia vestra possidebitis animas vestras.—Luke. xxi. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Qui cum malediceretur, non maledicebat, cum pateretur, non comminabatur: tradebat autem iudicanti se injuste.—1 Pet. ii. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Sicut ovis ad occisionem ducetur, et quasi agnus coram tondente se obmutescet, et non aperiet os suum.—Isa. liii. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Discite a me, quia mitis sum et humilis corde.—Matth. xi. 29.

<sup>5</sup> Christus passus est Judam; et ego non patiar Brizium?

he has let fall some thoughtless expression? Christ bore with the traitor Judas; ought I not to be patient with my troublesome husband, with my obstinate wife, with my noisy child, with my disobedient servant; and should I not meet my disagreeable neighbor kindly? Yes, O my Lord and my God, how Thou puttest me to shame when I consider Thy example! Thou wert mildness itself amongst the wicked wretches who were torturing Thee, and I, a poor sinner, so readily give way to anger against my own brethren when they happen to do anything against my will! Thou art silent while they spit in Thy face and strike and abuse Thee, and I, a miserable mortal, must curse and swear and abuse others, if they contradict me in the least! Thou wert patient even to the shameful death of the Cross, and I cannot control my anger for a single day; the least thing puts me in a passion! Ah, my meek Saviour, let me learn of Thee at last to be meek and humble of heart! This very day I shall begin! Help me by Thy powerful grace. Amen.

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*TWENTY-FIFTH SERMON.*

**HOW UNBECOMING IT IS TO SEEK REVENGE.**

Subject.

1. To take revenge for an injury is never looked upon in the world as an honor. 2. To bear an injury with meekness and patience, and to pardon him who has inflicted it, is always looked upon as an honor.—*Preached on the Feast of St. Stephen, the first Martyr.*

Text.

*Positis autem genibus, clamavit voce magna dicens: Domine, ne statuas illis hoc peccatum.*—Acts vii. 60.

“And falling on his knees he cried with a loud voice, saying: Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.”

Introduction.

Great are the encomiums and praises which the Holy Ghost Himself gives to St. Stephen, the first Martyr, in the Acts of the Apostles; “And Stephen full of grace and fortitude, did

great wonders and signs among the people. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit that spoke. And they saw his face as if it had been the face of an angel.”<sup>1</sup> While still in this life he had the happiness of seeing the glory of God; “But he being full of the Holy Ghost, looking up steadfastly to Heaven, saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.”<sup>2</sup> And much more to the same purpose. Still, I do not require all those texts to show how deserving of praise St. Stephen was: I need only consider the text I have chosen, and imagine that I see on one side the ferocious Jews, gnashing their teeth with rage, and hurling showers of stones at him, and on the other, the intrepid martyr, kneeling down and praying with folded hands amid the rain of stones, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge;” forgive them; do not punish them for what they are doing. This alone is quite enough to show how St. Stephen deserves to be honored by every one; because he prayed for, and did good to those who injured him. But what am I saying? He deserves to be honored by every one? That very act of St. Stephen’s is the last one which the perverse world would look upon as honorable; for it considers the forgiveness of injuries as a base and unmanly act and a proof of cowardice. Therefore we constantly hear people saying: No, I will not bear that; I must have revenge; I will not forgive, until I have had satisfaction; my honor requires it; if I were to act otherwise I should lose my reputation, I should be ashamed to appear before the world. And why? Because my honor would suffer if I did not take revenge for that insult. Such is the language of vindictive worldlings. And still I say that the very reason why St. Stephen deserves to be honored, is because he prayed for those who injured him. How are we to reconcile these two things? One or other of them must be false. And so it is, my dear brethren, one of them is false. Therefore, if I now succeed in proving that the judgment of the perverse world is false and erroneous, in thinking that honor depends on revenging an insult; and that real honor consists in bearing patiently and forgiving injuries; then I shall preach a panegyric of St. Stephen, and at the same time convince passionate and vindictive people that they are wrong, and exhort

<sup>1</sup> Stephanus autem plenus gratia et fortitudine faciebat prodigia et signa magna in populo. Et non poterant resistere sapientiæ et Spiritui, qui loquebatur. Viderunt faciem ejus tamquam faciem Angeli — Acts vi. 8, 10, 15.

<sup>2</sup> Cum autem esset plenus Spiritu sancto, intendens in cœlum, vidit gloriam Dei, et Jesum stantem a dexteris Dei.—Ibid., vii. 55.

them to imitate the meekness and patience of St. Stephen. Is not that so? Then I will undertake to prove that, with the divine assistance, which I hope to receive through the hands of Mary and of the angels of peace.

Plan of Discourse.

*To take revenge for an injury, and to attack with anger and hatred him who has inflicted it, is never looked upon in the world as an honor. This I shall briefly prove in the first part. To bear an injury with meekness and patience, like St. Stephen, and to forgive him who has inflicted it, is always looked upon as an honor. This I shall show in the second part.*

Therefore, he who loves his honor must not say, I will have revenge; but, I will bear it with patience and forgiveness. What I am about to say, as you will see in the course of the sermon, may be applied to all the vices and unlawful customs of the vain world.

The first part of my sermon requires no further proof than the refutation of the pretext generally brought forward; namely: My honor requires that I should take revenge on him who has injured me. Tell me, in what does your honor consist? On what does it depend? If it is an honor for you to revenge an injury, then it must be an honor either amongst men on earth, or amongst the angels and saints in heaven, or with the Almighty God, or amongst the devils and lost souls in hell. Besides these there is no other place, there are no people. Now, is it an honor for you with God? But how can that be, when you deliberately transgress His law, and insult Him by your disobedience; for He has forbidden you under pain of hell to seek revenge, and has often and solemnly commanded you, not only to do no harm to, but even to love, and pray for, and be friendly with your greatest enemy, not to speak of those who merely give you slight cause for annoyance now and then? This law has been declared often enough: "But I say to you: Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you."<sup>1</sup> And besides that you contemn His supreme authority by usurping His office of Judge, and taking the sword out of His hand to use it yourself. Has He not kept this right strictly for Himself? "Revenge to

To take or seek revenge is no honor with God.

<sup>1</sup> Ego autem dico vobis: Diligite inimicos vestros, benefacite his, qui oderunt vos: et orate pro persequentibus et calumnantibus vos.—Matth. v. 44.

me : I will repay, saith the Lord ;”<sup>1</sup> Nay, according to His own words, you do to Him the same injury that you inflict on your fellow-man : “ As long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to Me ;”<sup>2</sup> It would be a strange thing, then, if we could hope to gain favor and honor with the Almighty by acting in direct opposition to His express command ! But there is no use in wasting any more time on this point ; you know very well that God does not look upon it as an honor for you to be at enmity with your fellow-man, and that by desiring revenge you give up the honor you should most esteem.

Nor with  
the angels  
or the  
devils.

Do you seek for honor elsewhere ? With the angels and saints, for instance ? But you will be just as unsuccessful as in the former case ; for an injury done to my dearest friend, I consider as done to myself ; the angels and saints will not be very grateful to you for refusing to do as God commands you ; since they love God above all things, and desire nothing more than the perfect accomplishment of His will on earth as in Heaven. Perhaps the devils will honor you ? Yes, in a certain way ; they will exult over you, because you give them the pleasure of seeing that you are obedient to their suggestions, that you entertain desires of revenge, and that you have renounced God and your eternal happiness to become their companions in hell. But I do not think you are anxious to secure such an honor as that ; at all events it is an honor that no one would grudge you, or try to deprive you of.

Nor with  
sensible and  
pious men  
on earth.

So that you have no place left to seek honor by desiring revenge unless on earth amongst men. And amongst what kind of men do you expect to find it ? Amongst sensible, righteous, pious men, who like good Christians try to save their souls, who are illumined by the light of faith, and governed by the wisdom of God, and are therefore in the best possible position to judge of the matter correctly ? Will they be likely to have a high opinion of you when they see that you return evil for evil, do not yield a hair’s breadth to your neighbor, and refuse to forgive him ? If so, they must look on it as a shame to forgive their brother for God’s sake, a shame to live according to the Gospel of Christ, and an honor and glory to despise and to offend God. But no faithful Christians can, or will ever be of that opinion ; for they are fully persuaded of the contrary. You speak very

<sup>1</sup> *Mihi vindicta, ego retribuam, dicit Dominus.*—Rom. xii. 19.

<sup>2</sup> *Quamdiu fecistis uni ex his fratribus meis minimus mihi fecistis.*—Matth. xxv. 40.

uncharitably of one who has injured you ; you grow pale with envy when he is praised in your presence ; you cannot conceal the joy you feel when some misfortune happens to him ; and you maintain that it is a good thing for him to be humbled at last. You are fond of explaining at great length the injury he has done you ; you call down a thousand curses on his head. I will not forgive him, you say, he shall never cross my threshold. I will teach him who I am ; I will not rest until he has given me complete satisfaction, and so forth. And you believe you have a right to say such things. But what must they think who hear you speaking like that ? There may be some half-hearted Christians, who through human respect will applaud you and approve of your sentiments ; but a good Christian, although he may not say anything through fear of giving offence, must still think to himself that you are giving proof of great weakness of character, that it would be much better for you not to speak in that way, that neither your words nor your intentions are such as become a Christian ; he will be greatly disappointed at finding you so deficient in prudence and piety, and he will lose a great deal of any respect he may have had for you. Such must necessarily be the opinion of every good Catholic with regard to a vindictive man. And it is a fine honor indeed, for people to be able to say of you that you are a passionate, quarrelsome, vindictive and unforgiving man ! One must be careful of him, they will say of you, I would not advise any one to have to do with him ; he cannot bear a word, and he will never forget the least offence. It is a fine honor when people can say : Those two have no great love for each other ; they are always at loggerheads ; they cannot be invited to the same house, or there is sure to be a quarrel ; for a long time their friends and relations have been trying to reconcile them to each other, but in vain ; they are too obstinate, neither wishes to give way to the other. See, oh vindictive man, if you think it is an honor to seek revenge, you must at once leave the society of good and sensible people, who cannot have the least respect for you, but must needs look on you as a man of low repute and disgraceful character ; for what you deem an honor, they look upon as worthy of contempt ! Therefore you must seek your supposed honor elsewhere. And where then ? You cannot find it with God, nor with the saints in Heaven, nor even with the devils in hell, and much less with good men on earth.

Who will then look upon it as an honorable thing for you to It is an honor only

with wicked  
Christians.

take revenge on your enemy? I know; you must go amongst those who are of the same opinion as yourself, that is to say, amongst passionate, quarrelsome, vindictive and discontented men; amongst half-atheists, who know little and care less about the Gospel of Christ; whose only law is the world with its vain customs and false maxims; who give themselves little concern about God and His commandments, and although they profess to be Christians, yet belong in reality to those whom the Apostle calls "Enemies of the Cross of Christ;"<sup>1</sup> enemies of the numble, meek and crucified Redeemer. There is no doubt that these people will consider it an honor not to allow an injury to go unavenged, and that they look on it as a glorious thing to demand eye for eye, and tooth for tooth. Alas, that this should be; that there should be found Catholics, who, although they have sworn to observe the law and teaching of Christ, look upon it as an honor to do what even the devils would be ashamed of, and would repent of, if repentance were possible for them! Alas! that there should be Catholics who make a boast of acting contrary to the will of God! But what do I complain of? I should rather say with Our Lord; "Let them alone; they are blind, and leaders of the blind;"<sup>2</sup> they call evil, good; and good, evil; they take darkness for light, and light for darkness.

And that is  
no true  
honor.

If it is an honor to be praised by people of that kind, then it is an honor to be praised by idiots and fools; for they are as little capable of deciding in what true glory consists, as fools are of saying wherein true wisdom consists. Such at least is the description given of them by St. Paul: "If any man consent not to the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ, . . . he is proud, knowing nothing."<sup>3</sup> They do not know what is good and praise-worthy. And you must acknowledge that this is so. Tell me; do you not often commit actions in public, which your conscience tells you to be wrong and shameful, for instance, when you indulge in blasphemous, uncharitable or unchaste language? I will say nothing of certain acts which you are not ashamed to commit with others. But do they not injure that honor of which you are so careful? Yes, you must acknowledge that they cause you to lose a great deal in the estimation of good and pious men; for you are ashamed even to declare them fully in confession. And why are you not ashamed to commit

<sup>1</sup> *Inimicos crucis Christi.*—*Philipp.* iii. 18.

<sup>2</sup> *Sinite illos: cæci sunt, et duces cæcorum.*—*Matth.* xv. 14.

<sup>3</sup> *Si quis non acquiescit sanis sermonibus Domini nostri Jesu Christi . . . superbus est, nihil sciens.*—*I Tim.* vi. 3, 4.

them publicly? Because you are in the company of people like yourself, who think nothing of such crimes, and even make a boast of them. What a fearful perversion of judgment! Yet, oh vindictive man, these are the people by whose false judgment you guide your actions; it is from them that you seek honor and glory, such as is given to those thieves and robbers who excel in their nefarious profession. Meanwhile, you lose all honor with God, with His friends, the saints, and with all good and pious men on earth, who have always looked upon it as a shameful thing, and contrary to the law of God, to revenge injuries and to persecute one's enemy. Hence, since honor amongst the wicked is no honor at all, you can gain nothing by vindictiveness, and you only deceive yourself, when you say that your honor requires you to avenge an insult. You must know that it is always an honor to bear the faults of others with meekness and patience, to forgive from your heart those who offend you, and to love for God's sake those who persecute you; as I shall show more at length in the

### Second Part.

I will not go back to what I have said already and speak of the favor that may be gained with God, and with all good men on earth by bearing injuries with patience; I will merely try to adapt myself to the ideas of those who are given to seek revenge, and will speak simply of that honor which they think they can gain in the eyes of the world. In what does it consist? In a reputation for bravery, courage, strength and the ability to defend one's self: a reputation they are afraid of losing if they bear an offence with patience. For such is the language they hold. Could I bear that? they ask. Must I be silent and overlook that insult and be the first to propose a reconciliation? If I let the matter pass off quietly, what will people think of me? They will look on me as a pitiful fool and coward, whom they can treat as they like. And what will my opponent say? He will believe that I am not able to defend myself, and that I give in to him for that reason. No, I cannot allow that; I must at least show that I am a man.

Now, my dear brethren, I will prove the very opposite of that, and show that it is not the taking of revenge, but the patient toleration of injuries that really deserves the name of bravery, courage and manliness, and therefore, that honor belongs in truth, not to him who takes revenge, but to him who for-

The imaginary honor of the vindictive man, consists in a reputation for bravery.

This is not gained by seeking revenge, but by bearing injuries patiently;

for it is a  
mark of  
weakness  
to desire  
revenge.

gives. If bravery consists in not tolerating the least offence, and in trying to return injury for injury, it should be sought for, not amongst reasoning beings, but amongst savage beasts in the desert; and the latter would carry off the palm in this respect from the most famous heroes, for they show the greatest fury in attacking those who provoke them. Nay, even the smallest animals surpass the greatest in this respect; a little lap-dog shows more fury than a mastiff or a grayhound; rats and mice, wasps and ants are more savage than horses or elephants. How is that? Touch a mouse with the tip of your finger, and you will see how it will try to turn and bite you, in order to defend itself; if you go near a wasp it will be sure to sting you; while it is quite the opposite with the horse and elephant; nay, the more you whip and spur them, the tamer they get. When a stranger comes into the house, the lap-dog begins to bark at once, and the smaller it is, the more noise it makes, thinking that it is about to suffer some hurt; but the big mastiff lies unmoved in his place and even allows little children to play all manner of tricks with him. Are we then to think that the lap-dog is strong and courageous, while the mastiff is weak and cowardly? No, my dear brethren, courage is a virtue that beasts are not capable of possessing. To seek revenge and to retaliate, it is necessary only to have a sensitive nature which is capable of feeling pain, and of being aroused to anger; for this reason is not necessary, and much less virtue; and therefore it is, that as the smallest animals are the readiest to bite, so also the weakest and most foolish men, who are least apt to be governed by sound reason, are generally the first to give expression to anger, impatience and desire of revenge.

On the  
other hand  
to restrain  
one's anger,  
is a sign of  
bravery.

But to restrain one's evil inclinations and keep them in order, to moderate one's anger and repress it when occasion is given, to be so far master of one's self as to be able to hold one's own natural tendencies in check, and bear contradiction with unruffled patience, that is far too much to be expected of those who are of a weak, vacillating and pusillanimous disposition, for it far exceeds their mental powers, and requires a noble mind, a sound understanding, and a rare and excellent virtue. Now this is the virtue which is called courage and fortitude, and it is the characteristic of him who, although he has it in his power to take revenge for an insult, allows his opponent to go in peace, and bears the insult in silence. Hence, if it is an honor in the sight of the world, and even of vindictive men themselves, to be

looked on as one of a brave and determined character, it is an honor which certainly belongs to him who knows how to forgive his enemy, while he who is bent on taking revenge, has not the least claim to it.

Hear, not a St. Ambrose, who calls enmity and desire of revenge a mark of despicable cowardice and weakness: "To revenge one's self is not an act of bravery, but of abjectness and cowardice;"<sup>1</sup> not a St. Chrysostom, who calls vengeance "a childish folly;"<sup>2</sup> for the testimony of these Saints might seem to you, to be too biased by their piety; but hear what heathens say, who had far better ideas of this matter than many Christians. Hear what the heathen Seneca says: "It is a mark of a pusillanimous and low-minded man to try to bite again him who has bitten him; on the other hand he gives evidence of a great and noble character, who after the manner of large and strong animals, does not allow himself to be disturbed by the barking of little dogs."<sup>3</sup> Hear the heathen Aristotle who speaks to the same purpose; "As it is a mark of a weak stomach not to be able to digest hard food, so it is a sign of a weak character not to be able to bear a hard word."<sup>4</sup> He who cannot bear an insult or a word of contradiction with meekness, must not be looked upon as a strong man who can digest coarse vegetables or salt meat; but as a weak child who has to be fed with milk. What a disgrace for a man who prides himself on his valor, to be compared to a child! Yet, oh vindictive man, no matter who you are, that is the name given you, not merely by the holiest and most learned of the Doctors of the Church, but also by the wisest of the heathens. You can judge now for yourself, you who maintain that your honor requires you to take revenge, what sort of honor you will gain amongst sensible people by revenging yourself on your enemy.

But in order to show you still clearer how much you are mistaken, answer me this question: There are two people fighting; one has got the other down and is pummelling him to his heart's content; which of them do you consider the bravest and strongest, he who is lying on the ground and getting the beating, or he who is giving it to him? What an unnecessary

Proved by the holy Fathers, and other writers.

It is not the meek man who restrains his anger, but he who seeks revenge, who is the weakest and is overcome.

<sup>1</sup> Vindicare se non est actus fortitudinis, sed abjectionis et timiditatis.

<sup>2</sup> Puerilis sententiæ.

<sup>3</sup> Pusilli hominis et miseri est repetere mordentem. Ille magnus et nobilis est, qui more magnæ feræ latratus minorum canum securus exaudivit.

<sup>4</sup> Sicut debilis stomachi est cibum duriores non posse concoquere, ita pusilli animi est verbum duriusculum non posse sustinere.

question, you think ; of course he who has the upper hand is the better man ; the other poor fellow must only be satisfied with what he gets ! You are right, but you have given judgment against yourself. When St. Paul was writing to the Romans, warning them to lay aside hatred and anger, to forgive their enemies, and to leave vengeance to God, he gives them the following reason for doing what he told them ; “ Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good.”<sup>1</sup> Now, when some one injures you by word or deed, and you give way to anger, and try all you can to do him an injury also, your opponent is then the conqueror, and you are the conquered ; you have to lie under, as you show by your conduct ; for you seek revenge, and have neither the courage nor the strength to overcome yourself and to practise patience ; you betray your weakness, and show how severely you have been hurt ; for as Seneca says, “ revenge is a confession of pain.”<sup>2</sup> This is the very thing that your opponent wished for ; he has attained the end he had in view, by making you angry, and he has evident proof of his success. You cannot give your enemy greater pleasure than to let him see that you feel the wound he has inflicted on you. “ The joy of him who injures another, consists in the pain felt by the latter,”<sup>3</sup> as Tertullian says ; and experience shows the truth of his words. Your wish is to have satisfaction by doing to your opponent as he has done to you ; is not that so ? Yes ; but it is by no means certain that you will be able to carry out your wish, and meanwhile you show that your enemy has gained his point and has had the better of you. If you had held your tongue and borne the injurious word or deed with Christian meekness, the other would not be any the wiser, he would be deprived of the pleasure he looked for, and would be filled with secret shame and grief at the ill-success of his project, as Tertullian further says :<sup>4</sup> I cannot cause my enemy greater annoyance than to let him imagine and experience that he cannot disturb my serenity, and that I do not feel the insults he offers me, but treat all his attacks with contemptuous silence ; for thus I get the better of him ; not he of me.

As the vindictive man must himself confess :

Besides, when you act according to the law of Jesus Christ, pardon your enemy from your heart, and return good for evil, you gain a glorious victory by compelling him against his will

<sup>1</sup> Noli vinci a malo, sed vince in bono malum.—Rom. xii. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Ultio doloris confessio est.

<sup>3</sup> Fructus laudentis in dolore læst est.

<sup>4</sup> Ipse doleat necesse est amissione fructus sui.

to be ashamed of his conduct, to admire your virtue, and to condemn his own wickedness, when he sees that he is treated with charity and kindness by one whom he tried to injure, and from whom he therefore could hope nothing good. Thus, you will become master of his heart and mind, by forcing him to esteem and love you, whom he formerly hated and persecuted. After David had slain the giant, all his efforts to gain the affection and esteem of King Saul were fruitless. On one occasion, however, he succeeded in fully conquering the latter's heart, and in making him meek and humble as a lamb; nay, the king even fell on his knees and with tears confessed David's worth. How did this happen? When he was following up David as usual, the latter found him one night asleep in his tent and had him completely at his mercy, but let him go without doing him the least harm. What a surprise that was for the angry and vindictive Saul! He had to confess that he was conquered; he fell on his knees and wept bitterly, crying out: "I have sinned; return, my son David, for I will no more do thee harm, because my life had been precious in thy eyes this day; for it appeareth that I have done foolishly, and have been ignorant in very many things. Blessed art thou, my son David."<sup>1</sup> This victory over the heart of his sworn enemy was far more glorious for David, than if he had revenged himself and taken the life of Saul. Therefore, oh vindictive man, do you wish to have a reputation for bravery, and be able to master him who does you harm? If so, you will find no better means of fulfilling your desire than to follow the advice of the Apostle: "Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good."

Finally, consider everything that is powerful and strong in the universe, and you will find that the patient toleration and forgiveness of injuries is nowhere a sign of weakness and inability, as you think; but rather a means of measuring the greatness of one's strength. Can any power be compared with that of the Almighty God? No; there never was an earthly potentate, who had a knowledge of the true God, who dared to imagine that he could resist or escape His power. And yet, what fearful insults He bears with from His creatures! How many blasphemies He tolerates daily from Christians and infidels! How often He is offended every day, and insulted in thought,

for he is thus forced to esteem his opponent.

The Almighty God shows His power by patiently bearing offences.

<sup>1</sup> Peccavi, revertere fili mi David, nequaquam enim ultra tibi malefaciam, eo quod pretiosa fuerit anima mea in oculis tuis hodie: apparet enim, quod stulte egerim, et ignoraverim multa nimis. Benedictus tu, fili mi David.—I Kings xxvi. 21, 25.

word and deed by men ; and by you, too, oh revengeful man, at the very moment in which you are meditating revenge on your fellow-man ! “ And,” asks St. Chrysostom in amazement, “ does He therefore extinguish the light of the sun ? ”<sup>1</sup> Does He deprive the earth of its fruitfulness, so that it can no longer bring forth what is necessary for our sustenance ? Does He set the waters of the sea free from their limits, that they may overwhelm His enemies ? Does He hurl down His thunderbolts on them, and smite them to the dust ? Oh, woe to you, and to me, and to us all if He were to consider that His honor consisted in taking revenge ; if like us, He thought that His glory required Him at once to put forth His power, and to avenge the insults offered Him, and if He showed as little patience towards us, as we do to those who offend us ! Where should you, and I, and so many others then be ? Hell would soon become too small to hold us all. No, O Almighty and most patient God, we know by experience, and acknowledge that Thou dealest with us far differently and far more mercifully ! Thou makest Thy sun to shine on Thy enemies, as well as on Thy friends ; every moment Thou preservest, feedest and doest good to the most wicked and obstinate sinners ; Thou bearest with them most patiently ; Thou waitest for them, goest after them and callest them back ; Thou offerest them grace and forgiveness, and lovest them in the very moment when they are insulting and offending Thee, although there is nothing that grieves Thee so much as those insults and offences. Now, my dear brethren, is it any dishonor to the Almighty, that He is so patient ? Does He therefore lose any of His strength and power to defend and avenge Himself ? Must we therefore think slightly of Him, and say : God forgives sinners, and allows them to insult and offend Him, because He cannot protect Himself ? Woe to us again, if He were to make us feel the effects of His wrath ! But, as St. Paul says, it is because He is all-powerful, that He is so patient and forgiving towards His enemies : “ What if God, willing . . . to make His power known endured with much patience vessels of wrath, fitted for destruction.”<sup>2</sup> But why do you say that, O holy Apostle ? Would it not have been better to have said, “ wishing to show His *mercy*,” etc. ? No, for it is the intention of

<sup>1</sup> Quid igitur ? Num idcirco solis extinxit radios.

<sup>2</sup> Quod si Deus volens . . . notam facere potentiam suam, sustinuit in multa patientia, vasa iræ, apta in interitum.—Rom. ix. 22.

the Almighty to show His power thereby. "Thou hast mercy on all, because Thou canst do all things,"<sup>1</sup> says the Wise Man ; and therefore when Moses tried to appease the anger of God against the Israelites, he made use of the following prayer : "Let then the strength of the Lord be magnified, as Thou hast sworn, saying : the Lord is patient and full of mercy, taking away iniquity and wickednesses. Forgive, I beseech Thee, the sin of this people."<sup>2</sup> Such also is the meaning of the prayer of the Catholic Church on the tenth Sunday after Pentecost : "O God, who showest Thy power especially by being patient and merciful."<sup>3</sup> Therefore, O vindictive man, you must acknowledge that to bear injuries patiently and to forgive them, cannot be a sign of weakness and much less one of dishonor ; for, as Peter of Blois asks, "Is that which is becoming in God, unbecoming in a servant of God ?"<sup>4</sup> Therefore our Lord says : "Love your enemies . . . that you may be the children of your Father who is in Heaven ;"<sup>5</sup> such is the reason He gives for this command, because God acts thus with His enemies.

Yes, you object, but He is God, who thus patiently forgives those who offend Him ; we know already that He is Almighty, and that He cannot lose His honor thereby ; but if I remain silent under an injury, he who has inflicted it will think that I am not able to defend myself, and that would be a disgrace to me ; therefore, I must show him that I am not so weak as he thinks, and then I can make friends with him again. What a foolish objection that is ! You say, He is God ; but does not that make the offence infinite ? An offence offered to me is of small moment, and I have no right to revenge myself, but God has an unlimited right to take what revenge He pleases. And besides, when God forgives, He does so without any advantage to Himself ; when I do it I can save my soul thereby. Therefore, the only conclusion I can come to, is that, since I am not God, but man, I must be all the more ready to forgive. Again, you say, that we know that God is Almighty, and that he cannot lose any honor by forgiving. Well, if you consider that objection to be of weight, take the example of one who is man as well as God.

Jesus Christ considered it an honor to bear the greatest injuries with meekness.

<sup>1</sup> Misereris omnium, quia omnia potes.—Wis. xi. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Magnificetur ergo fortitudo Domini sicut jurasti, dicens : Dominus patiens et multae misericordiae, auferens iniquitatem et scelera. Dimitte, obsecro, peccatum populi hujus.—Num. xiv. 17, 18, 19.

<sup>3</sup> Deus qui omnipotentiam tuam parcendo maxime et miserando manifestas.

<sup>4</sup> Numquid quod deceit Deum, dedecit Dei servum ?

<sup>5</sup> Diligite inimicos vestros, . . . ut sitis filii Patris vestri, qui in caelis est.—Matth. v. 44-45.

the meekest and most patient of men, Jesus Christ ; you know what insults, injuries, persecutions and bitter sufferings, even to the death of the cross, He had to endure, and how patiently, meekly, and lovingly He bore them, without so much as opening His mouth to complain of them, and how He repaid them with benefits. And was He not all the time an Almighty Lord, who had the power of avenging Himself how and when he pleased ? Still He gave no sign of this power ; otherwise the Jews would not have treated Him as they did. Nay, on account of His patience, His persecutors looked on Him as a weak and powerless man, who could not protect Himself from them. " He saved others," they said when He was hanging on the cross, " Himself He cannot save ;"<sup>1</sup> Therefore, O Jesus, according to the judgment of the children of the world, it is a shame for Thee not to have used Thy Almighty power in taking vengeance on Thy enemies ! It is a shame for Thee, according to worldly notions of honor, to have fled as a weak little child from the wrath of Herod, when Thou couldst easily have made him feel the weight of Thy power ! A shame for Thee, when the Jews took up stones to throw at Thee, to have contented Thyself by merely escaping from them ! A shame for Thee to have rebuked the zeal of Peter in the garden, when he drew the sword to defend Thee, and to have forbidden him to hurt any one ! A shame for Thee to have listened so humbly to so many blasphemies and false testimonies, and not to have contradicted them ! A shame for Thee to have borne so many buffets, and wounds, and bruises ! A shame for Thee not to have called down fire from Heaven on the wretched who led Thee to judgment ! A shame for Thee, when on the cross, to have prayed for Thy murderers, instead of taking vengeance on them ! A shame for Thee and Thy Gospel to have left such a disgraceful teaching to the world, and to command us to love our enemies as ourselves and to do good to them ! And therefore, it is a shame for Thee, that no one can follow Thy example and observe Thy law, without dishonoring himself before the world !

Therefore, it is no disgrace, but the greatest honor to follow the example of Christ, and bear injuries meekly.

Oh, revengeful man, you must either say that all this is true, or else confess that the patient toleration and forgiveness of injuries is an honor and glory to the strongest and bravest ! If you say the former, how can you look at Christ on the cross without shame ? How can you keep a crucifix in your house, in your room, at the head of your bed, without being ashamed ?

<sup>1</sup> *Allos salvos fecit, seipsum non potest salvum facere.*—Mark xv. 31.

You should get rid of it at once, and never allow a picture in your house of Him who was so weak and cowardly as to bear all those injuries without revenging Himself, and who disgraced Himself by actually forgiving His enemies ! And blot out your own name too, from amongst the number of Christians, for they make profession of that disgraceful Gospel which contradicts all the world's ideas of honor ! But if you acknowledge, as you ought, the latter, namely, that forgiveness of injuries is an honor even to the greatest men, why do you not strive for it, since you attach so much importance to honor ? If the forgiveness of injuries were a thing unheard of, if there never had been any one who practised it ; still the example of Christ alone, should more than suffice to induce us Christians, at all events, to look upon the patient toleration of injuries as an honor and glory, not as a disgrace. Emperors, kings and princes of this small world of ours, mortal creatures as you are like ourselves, what power and influence you have over the judgments and opinions of men ! No customs too unbecoming, no fashion too vain, nor manner of life too extravagant for men to follow, when you give them the example of it ! If a king were to clothe himself in a poor garment and take a spade in his hand and dig, that dress and labor would certainly not remain long the exclusive mark of peasants ; for all his subjects, and even his courtiers would deem it an honor to imitate their king. The Moors, as Diodorus Siculus narrates, used to imitate the very gait of their kings so faithfully, that they aped even their bodily defects and thought it an honor to do so. Thus if the king was misshapen in any member, they mutilated themselves, so as to resemble him, looking on it as a shame and disgrace to have sound limbs when their sovereign was a cripple. And Thou, O great God and dearest Saviour, canst Thou not have the same power over the hearts of thy Christians, Thy servants, Thy children ? Canst Thou not make them look upon forgiveness of injuries and the love of their enemies as an honor and not as a disgrace, since Thou hast sanctified it by Thy example ? Can we condemn what an Incarnate God considered worthy of, and a glory to Himself ? In a word, are we Christians, or not ? Do we acknowledge Christ as our Head ? Do we believe Him to be God ? Then why are we so little influenced by His example ? Why are we ashamed of doing what He tells us ?

I know all that, the vindictive man will say ; but our Lord had full control over His anger, while I am only a poor mortal,

As the saints  
and pious  
servants of

God have  
done.

who find it hard enough to restrain myself. So after all you attribute your revengeful feelings to weakness? I thought you wished to make a boast of them, as a mark of courage and manliness, and therefore as an honor to you; but since you put them down to weakness, they cannot be any great credit to you, as far as a reputation for courage is concerned. However, you cannot avail yourself of this excuse, for there are examples enough of men who were subject to the same weakness as you and I, who gained undying honor and glory before all men, by their patience in bearing with and forgiving injuries, that they could easily have avenged. Joseph was most cruelly treated, and sold as a slave by his brethren, and was he not a man? David, who allowed his persecutor Saul to go unhurt, when he could have taken his life; Stephen, who prayed for those who stoned him; Paul, who loved his persecutors more than himself; Ambrose, who fed at his own table for a long time, a traitor who had plotted against his life; Achatius, who pawned the sacred vessels, that he might get food for his enemies who ridiculed him; Leo, Zacharias, Alexander, all three of whom were popes; the first of whom saved his enemy's life, the second enriched his enemy, and the third raised his enemy to high dignities; were they not all men? But why do I mention individual instances? The thousands of martyrs, who gave up their lives and properties without a word; the early Christians, who used to embrace, and ask each other's pardon before hearing holy Mass; were they not all mortal men? are not their actions chronicled in history to their great glory, as a proof of their bravery? Yes, you say, they were good and holy men. Do you then not wish to be good and holy? If so, you have a queer idea of honor! Have not holy people a weak nature, and can they not, must they not be careful of their good name? Take care, lest, if you refuse to do what good and holy people have done, you may not be reckoned amongst the friends of God, but amongst His accursed enemies.

And also  
mighty  
kings and  
sovereigns.

Still, to leave you no excuse whatever, cast your eyes on the example of those men who had the greatest interest in preserving their honor before the world (forgive me, O divine Master, if contrary to my custom, I am forced to have recourse to the authority of profane history to enforce the teaching of Thy Gospel; for things are unhappily come to such a pass nowadays, that such an authority has more influence with men than Thy divine word and the lives of Thy saints); you will find amongst

Christian potentates, a Theodosius the Great, and his sons, Arcadius and Honorius, all three of whom were Roman emperors, who caused the following law to be promulgated: "He who speaks an injurious word against our majesty, must not be punished on that account; for he has spoken either through indeliberation, or folly, or malice; if he has spoken through indeliberation, no notice should be taken of what he has said; if through folly, he is deserving of pity, and is already punished sufficiently; if through malice, we must forgive him, because we are Christians, and the Christian law requires that of us;" you will find a Wenceslaus of Bohemia, who being treacherously attacked by his brother Boleslaus, and having succeeded in overcoming the latter, and depriving him of his sword, took no other revenge, than to give back the sword, and say to him in a friendly tone, "Let us live in peace and love, as brothers ought;" you will find a Philip II., King of Spain, of whose meekness and patience the following well-known incident is related: "One night he had to write a long letter to the Pope on most important and pressing business; when he had finished it, his servant by mistake gave him the ink-bottle instead of the sand to dry it with; the king not noticing the mistake, poured the ink over the letter and of course rendered it illegible. If one of your servants were to make a mistake of that kind, my dear brethren, could you restrain yourselves from throwing the ink-bottle at his head? But Philip was not in the least disturbed, and merely remarking, "You have made a mistake, give me some fresh paper," began to rewrite the letter. These were kings and great men of the world, who certainly knew in what their honor consisted.

Consider even the heathens, who had no other end and object in what they did, but to gain honor before the world. Lycurgus, the legislator, strict as he was in matters of justice, would not allow any punishment to be inflicted on a man who had wantonly put out one of his eyes in a sedition. Cato, the Censor was once buffeted by one of the common people, but he never said a word, and went on as if nothing had happened. Socrates, the philosopher, who was condemned to death although innocent, prayed to the gods to grant prosperity to his judges, when he was about to drink the cup of poison. These and hundreds like them, were heathens, who had not the reward to expect that Christ has promised to us. Tell me now, O vindictive man, if they had acted differently, if they had given vent to.

And even  
heathens,  
too.

their rage and resentment against their enemies, would they have gained such glory? Would their names be held up to the admiration of the world, as they now are? You yourself admire those men; and why? Is it not because they were so patient and so brave in bearing injuries? Then, according to your own confession, not revenge, but patience and the forgiveness of injuries is a title to the respect and esteem of the world.

Conclusion and exhortation to bear injuries with patience and meekness, according to the divine command.

But, after all, what is the world to me? I am not amongst heathens and infidels, to whom I should prove that the love of our enemies is an honor! I am speaking to good Christians, who have abjured the world, and its vanities in holy baptism, and who propose to themselves no other end in all their actions, but the honor and glory of God. Suppose then, what never will be, that it was a disgrace before the world to leave an injury unavenged; has not the great God, who has commanded us to give up everything, even life itself, rather than offend Him, sufficient power over His creatures to oblige them to keep His commandments, even at the risk of losing their honor and good name? Who can doubt it? Now, one of His chief commandments is not to seek revenge, to forgive your enemy from your heart, to love him and do him good, and that commandment you must keep under pain of eternal damnation. Should not this be enough for a Christian, who wishes to save his soul, and who loves and honors his God? And so it is, O great God. To Thee belongs everything that I have; mine be it to obey Thee in everything as Thy most humble servant! It is no matter to me what the foolish world thinks of this command of Thine! Whether it is an honor or a disgrace I will obey it. I need not trouble myself much about the world, if Thou, my God, art pleased with me! Let men say, or think what they will; let them look on me as a weakling, a coward, as one who has neither courage nor strength to defend himself; I must and will place my honor and glory in acting as becomes a true servant of God, and a Christian, that is, in obeying Thee and Thy law! Rather will I, with Thy saints, and with Christ my Lord, incur the ridicule of the world, if necessary, than seek false glory from the wicked! Therefore I will forget the injuries I have received; I will patiently bear with him for whom I have a natural aversion; I will at once be reconciled to my enemy, forgive him from my heart, and return him good for evil. Such is the resolution that all good Christians here present, now make for Thy sake. Amen.

TWENTY-SIXTH SERMON.

ON THE INJUSTICE OF REVENGE.

Subject.

He who seeks revenge, 1. acts against private and natural right. 2. Against divine right.—*Preached on the Feast of St. Stephen, the first Martyr.*

Text.

*Positis autem genibus, clamavit voce magna, dicens : Domine, ne statuas illis hoc peccatum.*—Acts vii. 60.

And falling on his knees, he cried with a loud voice, saying : Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.”

Introduction.

Here is an example for you, O vindictive and quarrelsome Christians. See what that disciple of Christ, St. Stephen, did ; “falling on his knees ;” pay attention now to what he said ; “he cried with a loud voice : Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” To whose charge ? To the charge of those who have cast me out of the city, who have gnashed their teeth against me, who are stoning me, and putting me to death. What do you think of this, revengeful Christians, you who give full vent to your rage, and seek revenge, and curse and swear if the least thing is said or done to offend or annoy you, nay, if you only imagine that you are offended ; while, if you cannot take revenge, you at least pursue him who has offended you, with the bitterest hatred ? Are you Christians ? The law of Christ proves that you are not the kind of Christians that He wants : “But I say to you : Love your enemies, etc.” What ? Must I love him who has injured me ? Must I not seek satisfaction for the injustice he has inflicted on me ? Must I bear his insolence in silence, although I am as good as he ? No, I must have revenge ; it is my right ; the wrong I have suffered entitles me to it, etc. Such are the false arguments and pretexts brought forward by the vindictive man, and to show how false they are shall be the object of the present sermon. You say, I must take revenge ; I have a right to it. But I say you must not take revenge in any way ; you have not the least right to it ; and if you take it, you act against all right : as I shall now show.

## Plan of Discourse.

*You act against private and natural right. The first part. Against Divine right. The second part. Therefore if you wish to be just, you must love even your greatest enemy.*

O Mary, Mother of beautiful love, and you, holy angels burning with love, obtain for us from the Child Jesus, who was born for the love of us, the grace to imitate St. Stephen and to love our enemies.

He who takes revenge, acts against the private right of men.

There are distinguished principally two kinds of civil, or human right. There is private right, which concerns each individual ; and secondly, public or general right, which regulates the well-being of the whole community. You act against both of them, when you seek or take revenge for an injury ; whether that revenge consists in something you do to harm your opponent or in what you say against him by injuring his character, cursing or abusing him, or in the thoughts of anger, hatred, or envy which you have towards him. And first, as far as private right is concerned ; by virtue of it, I have a full title to all that belongs to me, to my money and property, if I have any, to my honor and good name, to my health and strength ; so that no other private individual can deprive me of, or injure me in any of these things against my will. If I am injured, I have a right to be fully indemnified. Mark the word, “ fully ;” that is, neither too much, nor too little must be restored to me, or else there will be a wrong done on either side. Quite right, you will say, that is just what I want ; it is the very thing I am working for when I seek revenge ! My right has been injured, and I want to assert it ; so I do to my opponent as he has done to me. He has attacked me, and I will attack him ; he has spoken badly of me ; I will do the same to him. I will give him abuse for abuse, and injury for injury ; or, at all events, I will have no good wishes for him, and I will return him hatred for hatred. He shows clearly enough that he cannot bear me ; neither will I show any great friendship for him. If he passes me by without saluting me, I will treat him in the same way. All the harm he wishes to me, I wish to him. That is the way to defend my right, and to preserve the equality that justice requires.

Because he cannot observe equality.

Yes, that may be all very good in theory ; but it is exceedingly difficult in practice, nay, humanly speaking, it is impossible. If you want to preserve strict equality, and measure your revenge, so as not to exceed by a hair's breadth the amount of injury

that has been inflicted on you, do you know what you must do? You must be able to measure and to understand exactly how grievous each injury is that you have received; you must know the intention your opponent had in acting in a certain manner towards you, or when speaking, or thinking of you in a certain way; for the circumstances can appreciably increase, or diminish an injury; and you must know, too, how severely, or deeply, or bitterly he will feel what you are about to do to him; and many other circumstances besides. If you have not this knowledge, you will certainly exceed the limits of justice, and do too much. But where are you to get it? Can you see the heart and intention of another, or measure the degree of his sensitiveness? And how can you pretend to be able to weigh your hatred and revenge against his, at a time when your heart is full of bitterness, anger and dislike, and you are thinking of nothing, but the best way of revenging yourself? It would be an impossible task for a man who is perfectly calm and has the full use of his reason; how then could you undertake it, when your mind is altogether taken possession of and distracted by anger and hatred?

Tell the dog that you keep to protect your property from thieves, that he must not bite or bark at any one who does not come with the intention of stealing, and that he must not bite a thief harder than the value of what he intended to steal allows. Now let your dog loose, and see how he will act. A beggar comes to the door; the dog barks at him furiously; an innocent child, or one of your best friends comes in; if you do not look out the dog will do him a mischief. Yet these people are not thieves, and do not deserve such treatment. The beggar only wants a piece of bread; the child has been sent on a message to you by its parents; your friend comes to see you; why should the dog bark at them so savagely? Oh, he knows no better! Another poor man sees a piece of wood lying on the ground; he picks it up, and the dog rushes at him, and bites a piece out of his leg. Certainly the object stolen is not worth that. Quite true; but the dog knows no better; he is a brute, and what can he know about such things? Aristotle compares a revengeful, passionate man to a savage dog; and experience teaches that the comparison is just; for amongst all the evil inclinations that disturb and disorder the mind, there is none that makes more havoc with sound reason than hatred and anger. Therefore the Holy Scripture compares a passionate and vindic-

Shown by a  
smile.

tive man, to a blind man who wanders about in the dark : “ He that hateth his brother is in darkness and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth ; because the darkness hath blinded his eyes ; ”<sup>1</sup> and to a fool : “ Be not quickly angry ; for anger resteth in the bosom of a fool. ”<sup>2</sup> To a fool, I say, who knows not how to discern right from wrong, whose mind is in a state of confusion, and who is led captive by his imagination. And is not that the case, my dear brethren ? How much misunderstanding, disunion, quarrelling, and bitter enmity is sometimes caused between friends, brethren and even husband and wife by mere imagination and groundless suspicion ? For it is easy to interpret as hostile the actions of those whom we suspect of disliking us. A doubtful expression, a laugh, a gesture, a gloomy silence makes us think we are the objects of a scorn or ridicule which the other does not even think of ; and once this suspicion has become firmly rooted in our minds, we look on everything that is said, or done, or thought by that person, as an insult to ourselves. If an injury is done us, that we think he could have prevented, our first thought is that he allowed it to happen on purpose, on account of his dislike to us ; if we lose an occasion of profit, or an office, or employment in which he could have helped us by his influence, we at once think that he has deliberately tried to prevent us from getting it ; and yet, if we take the trouble to examine the matter a little closer, we shall see that we are altogether unable to verify our suspicions. And meanwhile the innocent and well-meaning friend is barked at and bitten by the savage dog, who looks upon him as an enemy, and hates and persecutes him. Is that right ? Is that the way to be just and to preserve equality ?

For he considers the injuries inflicted on him, greater than they are in reality.

Even supposing that he does not mean you well, and really inflicts an injury on you ; still you will never be able to keep your revenge within just limits, nor to observe due equality in taking satisfaction. For in this case too, you are sure to look upon the injury you have suffered as far more grievous than that which you inflict in return. Why so ? The reason is natural enough ; it is because you love yourself more than you love the other ; you feel what hurts yourself, but you do not feel what hurts him ; in the former case you make a mountain out of a mole-hill, in the latter, you make a mole-hill out of a mountain ;

<sup>1</sup> Qui autem odit fratrem suum, in tenebris est, et in tenebris ambulat, et nescit quo eat, quia tenebræ obcæverunt oculos ejus.—I. John ii. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Ne sis velox ad irascendum, quia ira in sanis stulti requiescit.—Eccles. vii. 10.

and of course when you try to retaliate, you are sure to do him more harm than he has done you. He has wronged you of ten dollars, you say ; but in the meantime, ten months, or perhaps ten years have elapsed, during which time you have pursued him with the bitterest hatred, and wished him a thousand evils or at least rejoiced when any harm was done him ; you say nothing of all that, and still you are not satisfied. Is that the way to preserve equality ? Does the injury you have suffered deserve such a long-lived hatred ? You say, he has publicly ridiculed and laughed at you ; but you forget the number of times you have spoken ill of, and calumniated him, and taken away his good character in his absence. Is that the way to preserve equality ? You say he has caused you annoyance ; why do you not speak of the harm that you have tried to do him whenever you could, for a whole year ? Is that the way to preserve equality ? He has refused to do different things for you, you say ; but you forget the many occasions on which you refused him Christian courtesy, kindness and charity ; you count that as nothing. Do you think that the proper way to preserve equality ? He has inspired one individual with feelings of dislike for you ; but you have made ten enemies for him ; whenever you had a chance, you tried to draw down upon him the hatred of others. Is that the way to preserve equality ? And still you think that your wrong is greater than his, and you refuse to forgive him, or to lay aside your hatred ; so blinded are you, so much is your reason perverted by anger and the desire of revenge !

Suppose now, that your reason is perfectly undisturbed, that you have given the matter due consideration, and that you retaliate so as to observe perfect equality, neither too much nor too little ; do you know what justice requires of you besides that ? It requires that before he who has injured you is punished, sentence to that effect be passed upon him by a lawfully appointed judge. Now, you hate that man, and persecute him, and annoy him, and do all you can to be revenged on him ; and you say, I have a right to do so. But why have you that right ? Because, you answer, he has offended me, and wronged me. But for that very reason, because he has offended and wronged you, you have not the least right to revenge yourself. What do you, gentlemen of the law, think of the matter ? There is a man who has suffered an injury ; he wishes to be accuser, witness and judge all at once, to pronounce the sentence, and determine the punishment and inflict it. Is that a legitimate

Because he  
is judge in  
his own  
cause.

mode of procedure? Could, I will not say Christians, but even Turks or heathens tolerate such a mode of administering justice? If a lawfully constituted judge shows more favor to one party than to another, how would people look upon him? They would protest against his mode of action, and accuse him of being partial. But, O vindictive man, you will not hear of forgiveness; you wish to take revenge because you have been offended, and so to be accuser, witness, judge and executioner in your own cause: "who hath appointed thee judge over us?"<sup>1</sup> I ask you, as Moses was asked formerly. But, you answer, it is lawful to repel violence by violence. That is true; but it is one thing to defend yourself from injury, and another to seek revenge for an injury already inflicted; the former is allowed to every one by the law of nature; the latter is against all law. Why has God decreed that there should be judges? Nay, what has God Himself to do? Must He look on idly, while we are judging and condemning each other? He has reserved this judgment to Himself alone, and it is to Him that we have to appeal, as the Apostle says: "Not revenging yourselves; but giving place to wrath; for it is written: Revenge to me, I will repay."<sup>2</sup> See how you violate the private right of your neighbor by your revengeful spirit!

He also acts  
against the  
public right.

Still more grievously do you sin by taking revenge, against the general civil right. It is a matter, you say, that concerns my repose, my property, my interests, my honor; all of which require that I should have satisfaction; therefore, I must, and will have revenge. But the peace, prosperity, order and safety of a whole town, of a whole country, of the whole world, require that you should not be allowed to take revenge; and, therefore, you should not, and must not revenge yourself, although you thus lose your property, your contentment, and your honor; for the common good must be preferred to that of a private individual. If every one were allowed to avenge himself as he pleases, how could people live in the world? That would simply let loose all sorts of rebellion, wars, persecutions, thefts, murders, in a word, it would open the door to cruelties of all kinds. Those who would have bitter feelings towards each other, would never be reconciled; hatred and enmity would never cease, people would vie with each other in inflicting injuries and in avenging

<sup>1</sup> Quis te constituit judicem super nos?—Exod. ii. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Non vosmetipsos defendentes; sed date locum iræ, scriptum est enim: Mihi vindicta, ego retribuam.—Rom. xii. 19.

them; there would soon be an end to friendship; neighbors and relations would become implacable enemies; families would try to ruin each other, so that parents would have to mourn the loss of their children; the houses would be empty, the towns and countries would lose their best inhabitants, and kingdoms would no longer enjoy either safety or freedom. In former times it was the custom to get men to fight with wild beasts in the amphitheatre at Rome, and also in the one here at Treves, for the amusement of the public; but if every one were allowed to take revenge as he pleased, the whole world would be turned into an amphitheatre in which a far more cruel spectacle might be seen; for men would then fight, not against wild beasts, but against their fellow-men, with greater cruelty and ferocity, than lions and tigers display in their combats with each other. The world would then become like to hell; for of both could be said with truth the words: "Where no order, but everlasting horror dwelleth."<sup>1</sup> Now use your reason a moment and consider this; place it all in the scales and weigh it; on the one side you have those great and numerous evils, on the other the honor or pleasure you gain by venting your anger on another. Which weighs the heavier? On which side is justice? Which has the right, you, or the common weal? You, who wish to revenge yourself at the cost of the peace of the world, or the common good that, for its own safety and quiet, forbids you to take revenge, although you thus lose your honor or contentment? It is evident then, that enmity and vindictiveness are opposed to all civil rights; but that is the least disastrous consequence, and it is acknowledged even by heathens and idolators. They are opposed also to the divine right, and that is a most terrible consequence, as we shall see in the

### Second Part.

Is it not sinning against the divine right to deprive the Almighty of the honor we owe Him in so many respects? Now, in what does this external honor consist? In this, that men do what God wishes, and observe His law in all things. This you do not do, when you hate your neighbor and try to be revenged on him, for God has strictly forbidden you to do so. You may say, I do not hate my neighbor himself, but the malice, or insolence, or sinfulness with which he has injured me, who have done him no harm. This I hate, this I

He sins against the divine right, because by chastising his neighbor he insults the divine honor.

<sup>1</sup> Ubi nullus ordo, sed sempiternus horror inhabitat.—Job x. 22.

cannot, and must not suffer, this I try to punish, so that I may bring him to repent of what he has done, and prevent him from doing it again. That is simply inflicting salutary chastisement on crime, converting souls, and being zealous for God's honor. That is what God has a right to from His creatures, and therefore, I do not lessen, but rather increase His honor by the revenge I take. What an apostolic man you are, to be sure ! Where did you get that great zeal for souls and for the divine honor, and such a great hatred of evil ? Would you venture to speak in that way before the judgment seat of God ? I do not hate the man himself, but his wickedness ; I do not revenge myself to do him harm, but to punish him for assailing the divine honor ! Is it long since you became so holy and zealous ? Perhaps if we could examine your past life, we should find that you were guilty of a good deal of wickedness too ; had you as great a hatred of wickedness then, as you have now ? When you committed mortal sin by thought, word, and deed, you were not afraid of losing your soul, forfeiting the friendship of God and the eternal joys of Heaven, and incurring the torments of hell ; and now you have such a violent hatred of sin ! How have you shown that hatred in your own case ? How have you punished and chastised yourself for having insulted the Almighty, and despised Him, so as to make atonement for His injured honor ? You did not think of that ! And where is your zeal for souls, if so ? Where is your desire to punish sin for the glory of God ? You should show it in your own case first of all. Or, perhaps, you are innocent and free from sin ? Why then, do you not inflict punishment and take revenge for the injuries that are done to others who are not connected with you in any way ? These too are acts of wickedness. But if anything is done against yourself you begin all at once to hate sin so violently that you cannot leave it unpunished ! You might perhaps be able to conceal your real design from a simple-minded man, by thus cloaking it ; but you cannot deceive the all-seeing God. " Hath God any need of your lie," asks the Prophet Job, " that you should speak deceitfully for Him ? or shall He be deceived as a man, with your deceitful dealings ? " <sup>1</sup> No, my good friend ; it is not zeal for souls, nor for the conversion of sinners, nor for the glory of God, that animates you ; but your own vindictive nature, which prompts

<sup>1</sup> Numquid Deus indiget vestro mendacio, ut pro illo loquamini dolos ? Aut decipietur ut homo vestris fraudulentis ?—Job xlii. 7, 9.

you to hate and persecute your fellow-man, and thus to sin grievously against the express command of God.

And who has empowered you to punish the transgressions of one who is not subject to you? It is true, according to the Wise Ecclesiasticus, that, "God gave to every one of them commandment concerning his neighbor;"<sup>1</sup> and consequently, every one is bound to do what he can, by fraternal exhortation and correction, under certain circumstances, to prevent others from sinning, or to bring them to repentance; but do you know how this is to be done? Read the eighteenth chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew, and you will find out all about it. "But if thy brother shall offend against thee, go and rebuke him between thee and him alone;"<sup>2</sup> That is to say, exhort him with kindness, and show him the evil he has done, but do so privately, and in such a way as to spare him as much shame as possible. "If he shall hear thee, thou shalt gain thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, take with thee one or two more. And if he will not hear them, tell the Church."<sup>3</sup> Accuse him before his lawful superiors. Do you understand these words, O vindictive man? Is that the way in which you act towards him who has offended you? Is there any sign of your observing Christ's precept in the hatred and anger that prompt you to wish ill to your enemy, to speak to him in an unfriendly manner, and to avoid him as much as possible? Is that the way to go to him and exhort him charitably? When you speak ill of him, and vilify him on every possible occasion, when you refuse him the ordinary signs of Christian charity, when you do all in your power to cause him injury and annoyance, do you think that you are going the right way about gaining his heart, his affection, his soul? When you make yourself his judge and executioner, do you accuse him to the Church, to those who can correct him? Away with your hypocritical zeal for souls and for God's honor! You are acting against the rights of the Almighty, and dishonoring Him by your vindictiveness.

He violates the precept of fraternal correction.

You say further, God has given to man the right, nay, He has even commanded him to take revenge. Where did you find that? In the Holy Scriptures; for we read: "It hath been said: Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thy enemy."<sup>4</sup>

He acts against the divine command in everything.

<sup>1</sup> Et mandavit illis unicuique de proximo suo.—Ecc. xvii. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Si autem peccaverit in te frater tuus, vade, et corripe eum inter te et ipsum solum.—Matth. xviii. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Si te audierit, lucratus eris fratrem tuum. Si autem te non audierit, adhibe tecum adhuc unum vel duos. Quodsi non audierit eos, dic ecclesie.—Ibid. 15, 16, 17.

<sup>4</sup> Dictum est: Diliges proximum tuum, et odio habebis inimicum tuum.—Matth. v. 43.

A similar command was given to the Jews: "Remember what Amalec did to thee . . . Thou shalt blot out his name from under Heaven. See thou forget it not."<sup>1</sup> It is true that, if we consider according to the bare letter, some of the commands given in the Old Testament, we might imagine that it was allowed to hate one's enemy and to be revenged on him. But what sort of enemies were alluded to in those texts? They were not private enemies whom the Jews were to hate and destroy; but the enemies of God, whom the Jews, as ministers of the divine justice, were to punish for their idolatry. Therefore, the kings of Israel drew down upon themselves the anger of God, whenever they spared the impious gentile nations, after having conquered them. But with regard to the conduct of the Jews amongst themselves, towards their brethren and fellow-citizens, a command of a far different nature was given; "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart. Seek not revenge, nor be mindful of the injury of thy citizens."<sup>2</sup> Nay, their charity was to be extended, not only to their enemies, but even to the very animals which the latter owned; "If thou meet thy enemy's ox or ass going astray, bring it back to him. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lie underneath his burden, thou shalt not pass by, but shalt lift it up with him."<sup>3</sup>

He violates  
the law of  
Christ in the  
New Testa-  
ment.

Even if it were the case that the Old Law was doubtful on this point, or that it really allowed hatred and revenge against one's enemy, how would that affect the matter now? Has not the Lord power to permit, command, or forbid what, how, and when He pleases? Are you a Jew, or a Christian? If you are a Christian, then you must obey the Christian, and not the Jewish law. And what does that law prescribe? Hear what our Legislator, Jesus Christ, publicly proclaimed, and caused to be proclaimed throughout the world by His Apostles; "But I say to you: Love your enemies;" not only is it unlawful for you to hate them, but you must love them, and with an active love, "Do good to them that hate you; and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you;"<sup>4</sup> Mark how emphatically this law is proclaimed; I say to you, says Christ; I who am the Lord,

<sup>1</sup> Memento, quæ fecerit tibi Amalec . . . delebis nomen ejus sub cœlo. Cave ne obliviscaris. Deut. xxv. 17, 19.

<sup>2</sup> Non oderis fratrem tuum in corde tuo. Non quæras ultionem, nec memor eris injuriæ civium tuorum.—Levit. xix. 17, 18.

<sup>3</sup> Si occurreris bovi inimici tui, aut asino erranti, reduc ad eum. Si videris asinum odientis te jacere sub onere, non pertransibis, sed sublevabis cum eo.—Exod. xxiii. 4, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Ego autem dico vobis: Diligite inimicos vestros; benefacite his, qui oderunt vos: et orate pro persequentibus et calumniantibus vos.—Matth. v. 44.

and have the supreme right to command you. In the same way earthly sovereigns are accustomed to express themselves when promulgating their decrees; This is our will. He enforces His command too with promises, if it is observed; with threats, if violated. What are these promises and threats? "For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged; and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again."<sup>1</sup> This is the general sanction of the law; hear now the special promises and threats He makes in the same Gospel; "If you will forgive men their offences, your heavenly Father will forgive you also your offences. But if you will not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive you your offences."<sup>2</sup> Oh, how good God is, to offer His pardon to the sinner, provided the latter only forgives the trifling injuries he has had to suffer from his fellow-man! Are you afraid, O man, of the severity of God's judgments? Perhaps you have reason to fear, since you have so often made Him your enemy by sin. Do you wish to appease the anger of God, and to recover His grace? There is an easy way in which you may do that, and a way that is as certain as the infallible Gospel of Christ. "Forgive, and you shall be forgiven."<sup>3</sup> Forgive for God's sake him who has in any way offended you, and you may be certain that God will forgive your sins in return.

Christians, let us enter into ourselves. If we have cause to complain sometimes, that others offend us, can we say that we have never offended our God? Such a one, you say, has done and said certain things to offend me; must I put up with it? Must I remain silent, and love him? But what are you saying? Have you never said or done anything against your God? Must He put up with it from you? Must He remain silent, and love you in spite of it? But I must have satisfaction for the insult. And has God no right to have satisfaction for the insults offered to Him? But I have a right to it. And has God no right to take vengeance on you? Yet, He is willing to renounce this right of His, if you, for His sake, give up the revenge to which you have not the least right; He will say nothing about your transgressions, and will love you in spite of them, provided only that you be silent about the injuries inflicted on you, and be

An advantageous law for us, who often offend God.

<sup>1</sup> In quo enim iudicio iudicaveritis, iudicabimini: et in qua mensura mensi fueritis remittetur vobis.—Matth. vii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Si enim dimiseritis hominibus peccata eorum, dimittet et vobis Pater vester celestis delicta vestra. Si autem non dimiseritis hominibus, nec Pater vester dimittet vobis peccata vestra.—Ibid. vi. 14, 15.

<sup>3</sup> Dimittite, et dimittentini.—Luke vi. 37.

friends with him who has inflicted them ; He will be satisfied with you, if you are satisfied with your fellow-man. "Forgive, and you shall be forgiven." Can such a promise fail to have an effect on you, and to make you practise meekness ? When St. John Chrysostom was once preaching on this subject at Antioch, he pictured to the people the evil condition in which they were, on account of their having offended Theodosius by insulting the Empress' statue ; so that they might expect at any moment to see their whole town laid waste. "In the midst of this alarm, if the executioners were already prepared to put the guilty to death, and if the people were already bemoaning their inevitable fate, what would you think," says the Saint, "if a messenger were to come from the emperor, and to say: Hear, O citizens of Antioch ; if you forgive one another, and forget mutually the insults you have suffered from one another, if you be reconciled, and make friends with each other, the emperor will at once forgive you, and forget the rebellion you are guilty of ; oh, how eagerly would you not all then embrace your enemies, and fall at their feet to ask forgiveness ! Would one of you be likely in such circumstances to defer forgiveness for a moment ? Would you be ashamed to ask for pardon, or make a difficulty of granting it ? Would you claim your rights, and refuse to make friends ? There is question of appeasing the wrath of an emperor, and of obtaining pardon from him ; and he offers it so cheaply, although in reality no price would be too high to pay for it." "Oh, my brethren," continues St. Chrysostom, and I say the same to you now, my dear brethren ; "what the angry emperor Theodosius refused to do on that occasion for his rebellious subjects, that an angry God does for us, and for the whole world, without being asked, or entreated to do so. He will forgive all the insults we offer Him by our sins, He will save us from the eternal punishment we deserve for them, if we fulfil this one condition of showing the same spirit of forgiveness towards our brethren and fellow-men, for His sake." Could He offer us anything more advantageous to ourselves ? What God is ready to forgive us is not imprisonment, nor banishment, nor torture, nor death, nor anything which human vindictiveness can think of to satisfy itself. What He is prepared to forgive us is the eternal punishment of hell, which He alone can inflict. Are we then so blinded by our desire for revenge, that we cannot see how much the advantage He offers us surpasses the condition on which He is willing to give it ?

But what am I saying ? Have we not once for all agreed to this condition ? Have we not made a contract with the Almighty, which we renew and ratify every day of our lives, when we say the words, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us" ? What do those words mean ? Lord, we say, do unto us as we do unto others. Yes, answers the Almighty, I will do to you, as you do to them ; " So also shall my heavenly Father do to you." <sup>1</sup> See, there you have a contract ratified on both sides ; neither part can withdraw without doing an injustice to the other. If there was any right to complain that this contract is unfair, God would have that right, not we ; for compare what He has to forgive, with the little that you have to forgive.

We have made a contract with God to observe it.

" He," says St. John Chrysostom, " has to forget and forgive insults which He, the greatest of Lords, has received from you, His vile slave ; while you have only to forgive the insults that you have received from your fellow-slave." <sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, He is willing to keep His word, while you hesitate about keeping yours. And although He has already drawn the sword of His justice to punish your sins, unless you lay aside your hatred against your brother, do you prefer to suffer this punishment rather than forego the pleasure of revenge ? What folly ! What blindness !

If you are determined on it, then, hate your enemy ; give vent to your anger ; and when you have taken your revenge, say the Our Father. What do you say ? Forgive us our trespasses ; hush ; do not go any farther ! " Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." But how can you say those words ? How can you say O Lord, I beg of Thee to deal with me, as I deal with my neighbor ; I have taken revenge on him ; do Thou also the same with me ; I cannot bear the sight of him ; do Thou also cast me out of Thy sight ! Do not pardon my sins, for I have not pardoned him. I cannot suffer the least word of contradiction from him ; Thou also shouldst not bear with the least fault in me ! Be as hard and severe to me, as I am to him ; hate me, persecute me, curse me, rejoice at my misfortunes, grudge me every thing good, frustrate all my plans, destroy me utterly ; just as I would my neighbor if I had the chance ! Therefore the Almighty will say, according to the contract : " Out of thy own mouth I judge thee, thou wicked servant." <sup>3</sup> It shall be so ;

Therefore, he who does not forgive his enemy, calls down the vengeance of God on his own head.

<sup>1</sup> Sic et Pater meus celestis faciet vobis.—Matth. xviii. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Ille heriles, tu serviles remittis injurias.

<sup>3</sup> De ore tuo te judico, serve nequam.—Luke xix. 22.

and this is the terrible threat that Christ utters in the Gospel, in the parable of the servant who refused to forgive his fellow-servant, although his master had remitted to him a much greater debt; and therefore the wicked servant was handed over to the torturers by his angry Lord. "So also shall my heavenly Father do to you, if you forgive not every one his brother from your hearts."<sup>1</sup> So will He act towards you; you dissemble for a time, until you get an opportunity of revenge on your enemy; God will do so too. He will seem to take no notice of you for a few years; but He will find a time in which to take full revenge on you. You pretend by your words and your manner that you are reconciled, while your heart is full of gall and bitterness; you say, I forgive him from my heart, and wish him well; but you cannot evercome your hatred sufficiently to speak to him in a friendly manner. So also will God do to you. He will appear to forgive you for a time; you will think you have recovered His grace because you have performed other good works, and thus paid Him an empty outward honor; but when your last moment comes, you will find that His heart is disposed to you, as yours is to your neighbor. You, as you imagine, go according to the claims of strict justice; but in reality you are guilty of the greatest cruelty towards your brother; so will God deal with you. "Judgment without mercy to him that hath not done mercy."<sup>2</sup> Christians, think of what I have said whenever anything is said or done to offend you, and you find yourselves carried away by your passion so as to desire revenge. Take refuge at once in the Lord's Prayer, and say to yourselves: How? Have I then never sinned against my God? Do I wish God to be angry with me, as I am now with my brother? But so also shall He do to me. Shall I then ask Him to be angry with my sins, as long as I am angry with my brother? Such thoughts as these will soon suggest to you a better mode of proceeding.

And deliberately chooses to go to hell.

And where are you now, O vindictive man? Do you still claim your right, and insist on it? If so, go and keep it; but you will find when you are amongst the demons in hell, that God has an equal right to punish you for violating His right by seeking revenge! For, to cut the matter short with you, you must necessarily choose one of two things; you must either give up your revenge, or Heaven; you must either forgive your enemy

<sup>1</sup> Sic et Pater meus cœlestis faciet vobis, si non remiseritis unusquisque fratri suo de cordibus vestris.—Matth. xviii. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Judicium enim sine misericordia illi, qui non fecit misericordiam.—James ii. 13.

from your heart, and lay aside your hatred against him, or else you will be condemned to hell for ever ; there is no other alternative for you. You may pray as long and as much as you will, although prayer is very powerful with God, it will help you nothing ; you must either forgive, or go to hell. You may give all your goods to the poor ; almsgiving, powerful as it is, will avail you nothing ; you must either forgive, or go to hell. You can hear Masses, and have Masses said ; the Holy Sacrifice is very powerful, but it will not save you ; you must either forgive, or go to hell. You can confess your sins a hundred thousand times ; God has given to this Sacrament the power of forgiving sins ; but not for you, as long as you hate your enemy ; all the absolutions you receive in that state are null and void ; all the Communion you make, are but new mortal sins ; you must either forgive your enemy, and love him from your heart, or else burn for ever in the flames of hell ; this is an article of faith. “ But if you will not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive you your offences.”<sup>1</sup> O Christian, think better of it ; do not say that you will renounce your hopes of Heaven, rather than forego your revenge ; that you will burn in hell rather than bear injuries ; that you will suffer eternal damnation, rather than speak in a friendly manner to your enemy ; that you prefer to hear the words, depart you accursed, than make peace with him ; that you would rather curse God and yourself for all eternity, than love your enemy !

Oh, no, great God, I will make a far different resolution ! I am ready to forget all offences, and to love those who have hitherto been my enemies. Now at this very moment, in this very place, I lay aside all hatred and dislike ; for, why should I defer pardon, when I know that it is necessary to my salvation. Why should I now hate him, whom in a short time I must love as a friend ? Why should I continue to deserve Thy anger, O God, to the imminent danger of my eternal salvation ? I have offended Thee often and grievously ; perhaps the punishment and Thy vengeance are already hanging over me. I will not wait for them to fall on me ; I renounce all my rights to Thee ; all vengeance I leave to Thee, to whom it belongs by right ! But I will take vengeance on my sins, as Thou hast commanded ; I will love my enemy, and to prove that I do so from my heart, I will treat him with all courtesy, honor and friendship ; I will

**Resolution to forgive all injuries and to bear them with meekness.**

<sup>1</sup> Si autem non dimiseritis hominibus, nec Pater vester dimittet vobis peccata vestra. —Matth. vi. 15.

be the first to propose a reconciliation, although strictly speaking, he should do that ; even if he is wanting in his duty, I will try to do mine ; even if I cannot fully overcome my natural dislike for him, I will do violence to myself, so that he will not notice it, and will show him all the greater marks of friendship ; I will pray for him daily, as Thou, O Lord, hast commanded ; I will refuse him no service that I can render him, and a sufficient reason for my doing that, will be the dislike I naturally feel for him. What a comfort it will be to me on my death-bed to be able to say with truth, like St. Gregory of Nyssa : “ My Lord and my God, I must now render Thee an account of all the actions of my whole life ; if I look only at my sins, I must fall into despair ; if I consider only what I have done to atone for them, I have reason enough to fear ; for what penance have I done for so many bad thoughts, unchaste words, and wicked actions ? But when I remember that Thou art faithful in Thy words, when I recall to mind that Thou hast promised to deal with me as I do with others, then, O Lord, I am consoled, and no matter how terrible Thy judgment otherwise is, I can hope everything from Thy infinite goodness. Do Thou what I have done, for I have done as Thou hast commanded ; I have forgiven ; forgive me then, according to Thy promise ; I have forgotten injuries ; do Thou also forget the sins that Thou couldst long ago have taken vengeance for ; I love my enemy ; do Thou show Thy love to me ! ” Yes, O Lord, so Thou wilt do ; I am sure of it, and so I will die in peace ! Amen.

*Another Introduction for the Feast of St. Lawrence, Martyr.*

**Text.**

*Assatum est jam ; versa et manduca.*—From the Office of the Church on this feast.

“ The roast is finished ; turn it over and eat.”

Turn your eyes in this direction, O vengeful, spiteful and quarrelsome Christians, and consider the example of St. Lawrence ! He is placed on a gridiron, and slowly roasted to death. Could any tyrant devise a more cruel torture ? What a terrible thing it is to be burnt alive ! But how incomparably worse it is to be slowly roasted to death ! Hear what he says on his bed of torture ; “ I thank Thee, O God, that I am being roasted,”<sup>1</sup> as the Church sings to-day in his person ; I thank Thee for the honor of suffering for Thy sake. But what does

<sup>1</sup> Assatus gratias ago.

he say to the butchers who torture him so cruelly, and without cause? Does he call them accursed tyrants, and pray that fire may come down from Heaven to consume them, because of the torture they are inflicting on him who is innocent? In the judgment of the perverse world he would have been right in so doing; but his own ideas of the matter were far different, for he was a true follower and servant of Him who has commanded us to love even our worst enemies. St. Laurence made a jest, so to speak, of his torments. The roast is finished, he said to the tyrant; if you want to eat me, turn me over and cut a piece off. What do you think of this, vindictive Christians, who are angry, not because you are roasted to death, but at the least word of contradiction? etc.—*continues as before.*

*The fourth part of this work will treat of the manner of forgiving one's enemy.*

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**TWENTY-SEVENTH SERMON.**

**ON SLOTH IN THE SERVICE OF GOD.**

**Subject.**

When a man neglects small things in the service of God, 1. God can have no pleasure in him. 2. He can have no pleasure in God.—*Preached on the third Sunday after Pentecost.*

**Text.**

*Quæ mulier, habens drachmas decem, si perdiderit drachmam unam, nonne accendit lucernam, et everrit domum, et quærit diligenter, donec inveniat?—Luke xv. 8.*

“What woman having ten groats: if she lose one groat, doth not light a candle and sweep the house, and seek diligently, until she find it?”

**Introduction.**

Is it worth while to go to the trouble of looking for a miserable groat? Is a single groat deserving of such care and diligence? Yet Christ speaks as if there was not the least doubt of it. What woman, He says, when she has lost a groat, will not light a candle, and sweep the house, and search carefully or it? This parable, my dear brethren, as our Lord explains

it, is to be understood of the human soul, which is lost by sin. But here I find still greater cause for astonishment. How can the Almighty God attach such importance to a single soul? He cannot suffer if it is lost, nor can He gain if it is saved. It is less in comparison to God, than a groat is to a rich man, who has millions; and yet, as He Himself acknowledges, He goes around seeking with the greatest diligence to find even one lost soul, and if He finds it, He rejoices with the whole court of Heaven as if it were of the utmost importance to Him. Such is the high value Thou placest on a soul, O God of goodness, and mercy! Ah, would that we, too, had the same high idea of everything that concerns Thy honor and service! But how is it with us in reality? We attach no value whatever to small, and, as we think, trifling things in which we might please Thee, or to small, and, as we think, trifling things in which we offend Thee. These we look on as worthless groats, that are of no account, so that they are not fit objects of our care and diligence. In to-day's sermon, my dear brethren, I mean to speak against this sloth and carelessness, and I say—

#### Plan of Discourse.

*He who neglects small things in the service of God, and does not work diligently to fulfil the will of God in all things, be they great or small in his own idea, oh, such a man is in a dangerous state! Why? Because God can have no pleasure in him. This I shall show in the first and longer part. Such a man can have no pleasure in God; as I shall show in the second part. Therefore let us serve God with zeal and fervor, in small as well as in great things, such shall be the conclusion.*

And may He grant us to observe it, who so zealously and carefully seeks for one single soul; this we ask of Him through the intercession of Mary and our holy angels guardian.

The servant who does not obey in everything, does not please his master.

You masters and mistresses, I call upon you as witnesses in this matter. You have servants in the house to wait on you. They do what you tell them; but they do not do all; they are faithful in many things, but now and then they take sides with your neighbor, who is an enemy of yours. They look after your comfort and welfare; but now and then they take little things out of the house without your knowledge and consent. They do their work; but in some instances according to their own ideas, how and when they wish, and not how and when they are told to do it. Now I ask you, are you satisfied with servants of

that kind? Are they just what you want? No, you say; I do not want such people in my house at all. But why not? It is only in little things that they act against your will, although they frequently do so. It is only in certain things that they refuse obedience; otherwise they are full of zeal and industry in your service. No matter, you say; I do not want them; if I hire a servant, I expect him to do what I tell him, exactly as I tell him; and he must be as faithful to me in one thing as in another. And you are quite right, too!

But tell me now, is God perhaps less a master, than you? Has He less right to command us mortals, than you have to command your servants? Has He less right to our service and obedience, than you have to theirs? Does He deserve to be served in all things, according to His will and command, with less zeal and diligence than you? You do not even dare to imagine that, much less to say it. But perhaps God does not expect us to serve Him with such zeal and devotion, that we try to do His will in all things, and to be always faithful to Him? Perhaps He does not care much if we now and then go over to His adversary, or serve Him according to our own inclinations? No, the first commandment teaches us quite the contrary: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God which thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind."<sup>1</sup> Mark the words, "with all"; not half-heartedly, not partially, not incompletely; but with thy whole heart, above all things, in all things, nothing excepted, in the least things, as well as the greatest.

Now, it is evident enough that he does not serve God in this way, who disregards small things, as he imagines them to be, now and then, in the divine service, although they may in reality be small things; for he does not accomplish the will of God in all things, but reserves some things for himself, since he does not do them when and how God wishes to have them done. For instance, people say, (and the greater number of Christians are of the same way of thinking), I would rather die, than commit a deliberate mortal sin; but this particular thing is only a venial sin, at least I cannot imagine that it is mortal; therefore it does not matter much. I am not so proud that I try to raise myself above my station in life, to despise others and to oppress them; still I do not wish another, who is not my superior in rank, to

God is the sovereign Master, who wishes to be loved and served above and in all things.

This service is not rendered to Him by those who are unfaithful in small things; and there are many such people.

<sup>1</sup> Diliges Dominum Deum tuum ex toto corde tuo, et ex tota anima tua, et ex omnibus virtibus tuis, et ex omni mente tua.—Luke x. 27.

be preferred to me, nor do I wish to yield to him in the least, or to suffer the least slight on his account. I am not so fond of the world as to lose my soul for its sake ; but neither am I so fond of Heaven as to give up this or that vain custom of the world. I am not so avaricious as to desire to take away unjustly what belongs to another ; still I will not allow myself to be persuaded into coming to an agreement about that lawsuit, or into giving up a farthing of my rights, even if my opponent is in danger of being ruined. I will be very careful not to cheat others seriously ; but I will be able now and then to make a trifle surreptitiously in the ordinary way of business. I detest all obscenity and impurity ; still I cannot see how every little freedom, every passing thought, is a mortal sin ; it cannot matter much to have a little pleasure now and then, and to indulge the eyes and hands a little ; these things in fact are required by ordinary courtesy and friendliness. I do not wish to excite impure love in others ; but at the same time I will do everything to attract admiration. I do not make much of a scruple about certain books, pictures, statues, and mode of dressing, although they are somewhat extravagant, and might perhaps be called scandalous by conscientious people. I will never get so drunk as to deprive myself of the use of reason ; but to get a little tipsy now and then, and to make others so, is the general custom of the world nowadays. I love my neighbor, and will never deliberately do serious harm to any one ; but I am glad that a certain person is humbled and mortified. God forbid that I should ever take away another's character ; still it pleases me to hear others finding fault with that person, and indeed I join in them myself in doing so. I have no deadly hatred to that man who treated me so ill ; but I cannot bring myself to do anything to please him ; I forgive him the slight insult, but not the more grievous one ; I do not desire revenge, but I cannot bear the sight of him ; I will be patient and meek, but no one must do me any injury. I am ready to bear everything for God's sake, but I cannot bear certain things. I will be patient with all men, but not with that man. I do not wish to lead my children into sin, but to bring them to the service of God ; still they must conform to the manners and dress of the world, they must appear in society with their equals, etc.

They try to  
serve two  
different  
masters :

See, my dear brethren, that is the way in which most people consider the matter. They make nothing of small things, or what they imagine to be small things, although they are frequently

and in reality of great importance. Thus they do not seek God with all their hearts ; they do something for the soul, but they also allow the flesh a good deal of satisfaction ; they strive to practise virtue to a certain extent, but at the same time they indulge in vice. They observe the law of God, and also fulfil the law of the vain world ; they try to please God, and at the same time to refuse nothing to their sensuality ; in one thing they serve God, in another, the devil. In a word, what we want is some way to Heaven that is not marked down in the Gospel of Christ, a way that is neither too broad nor too narrow ; we try to build a city midway between Jerusalem and Babylon, in which the love of God and the love of self may be on an equal footing. You can judge for yourselves, my dear brethren, whether God is likely to be pleased with servants of that kind. No, that cannot be ; “ No man can serve two masters,” says our Lord in the Gospel of St. Matthew, “ for either he will hate the one, and love the other ; or he will sustain the one and despise the other.”<sup>1</sup> “ He that is not with Me, is against Me ;”<sup>2</sup> He who does not try to serve Me faithfully in all things, declares himself My enemy, and works against Me. We have to do with an all-holy and jealous God, who cannot tolerate a single rival in the government and possession of our souls ; He called in no one to help Him when He created them ; He did it by Himself ; He asked no one’s assistance when He redeemed them from eternal death, He did it by Himself ; and therefore He wishes to keep those souls for Himself and His service alone.

which God will not allow.

At first the devil and the perverse world are content with a little ; they act like one who has no right to share in an inheritance, and who has recourse to all kinds of devices to get even a little of it ; and he is content with that little, because he knows that he has no right to anything ; or like that wicked woman who appeared before the judgment seat of Solomon. She was contending with another woman about a living child ; each claimed to be the mother of the child, as we read in the Third Book of Kings. Solomon, in order to find out which was the real mother, ordered the child to be cut in two, and a part to be given to each. But the real mother at once protested against this ; her maternal love would not suffer her to allow her offspring to be deprived of life, and she at once gave up all her

The devil is content with small service.

<sup>1</sup> Nemo potest duobus dominis servire : aut enim unum odio habebit, et alterum diligit aut unum sustinebit, et alterum contemnet.—Matth. vi. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Qui non est mecum, contra me est.—Ibid, xii. 30.

rights to the other, so as to save her child. "But the woman whose child was alive, said to the king (for her bowels were moved upon her child): I beseech thee, my lord, give her the child alive and do not kill it."<sup>1</sup> But the other was not satisfied with this; "Let it be neither thine nor mine, but divide it,"<sup>2</sup> she said. That, I say, is the way in which the devil acts; he knows very well that he has no claim on our hearts, that they belong altogether to God, and therefore, when he cannot bring us so far as to make us commit a mortal sin, he tries to get at least a little of our hearts from us. Let it be neither thine nor mine, he says to God; let it be divided; the half, or quarter, or twentieth part is enough for me. Give, O man, to thy God the whole day; all I ask from you is a quarter of an hour. Say your prayers and attend to your usual devotions; go to Communion every month, or oftener; I have nothing against that; only give me that sinful pleasure, that vanity, that worldly custom, those nightly meetings and dangerous companions, that talking about others; such little things as these, as you imagine them to be, you must keep for me, and I will be quite satisfied; the rest you may give to God.

For he  
knows that  
he will be  
better serv-  
ed later on.

Meanwhile the crafty tempter knows well that when he has once secured a place, no matter how small, in the heart, he will soon get possession of it altogether. He is well acquainted with the words of our Lord: "He that is unjust in that which is little, is unjust also in that which is greater."<sup>3</sup> That is what St. Paul alludes to in the warning he gives in his Epistle to the Ephesians: "Give not place to the devil;"<sup>4</sup> Tertullian translates this passage, "Give not place to evil;" but since the devil is the spirit of evil and wickedness, it comes to the same thing, and I shall retain the ordinary reading, "Give not place to the devil." But what does it mean, that giving place to the devil, and to evil? It does not by any means signify that the door is at once opened to the devil when he knocks, so that he may enter in and take immediate possession of the heart. No, giving place to the devil does not mean as much as that. If a man enters a crowded church, or other place of assembly, and asks the people to make room for him, he does not want a

<sup>1</sup> Dixit autem mulier, cujus filius erat vivus, ad regem (commota sunt quippe viscera ejus super filio suo): Obsecro, domine, date illi infantem vivum, et nolite interficere eum.—III. Kings iii. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Nec mihi, nec tibi sit, sed dividatur.—Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Qui in modico iniquus est, et in majori iniquus est.—Luke xvi. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Nolite locum dare diabolo.—Eph. iv. 27.

whole bench for himself, nor does he expect all the others to leave the place to him altogether ; he is quite satisfied if he gets barely enough room for himself. A stranger, or an old friend comes to your house and asks for hospitality ; he does not wish you and your family to leave the house altogether to him ; one room is all that he requires. It is in that way we must understand the words, " Give not place to the devil, to evil." It means simply giving him the entry into our hearts, listening to him for a few moments, leaving a small door opened to him, so that he can venture in a few steps. But woe to him who allows him even that much ! The wicked spirit will not always be satisfied with what was given to him at first ; he will try to get farther and farther, and like a rushing river, to carry away more and more with him. Therefore the easiest and safest plan is to prevent him from entering and to refuse him point-blank the first request he makes, saying boldly to him : Away with you, there is not a finger's breadth of room for you in my heart !

Thou, O God, art our true Father, and Thou canst not see without sorrow, Thy children thus divided between Thee and the devil ! Either Thou wilt have our hearts altogether, or not at all ! And that is perfectly right and just, O God ! It is to Thee alone that we owe our being ; Thou hast given us everything we have and made us what we are ; Thou hast given us Thyself completely and without reserve, and besides that, Thou art ready to give us all that Thou possessest in a happy eternity ; is it not then only right that we should devote ourselves completely and unreservedly to Thy service ? Oh, heart of man, what ingratitude, what injustice ! We hope to possess the great God for all eternity in the kingdom of Heaven, and yet we refuse to give ourselves completely to Him for a few short years on earth ! Do we not then deserve to have no part in Him either on earth, or in Heaven ? Alas, yes, says St. Augustine, that must be the end of it, according to the threat which our Lord Himself pronounced in the Apocalypse against the Angel of the Church of Laodicea : " I know thy works ; that thou art neither cold nor hot ; I would thou wert cold or hot ; but because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth."<sup>1</sup> Hear this, tepid Christians, who neglect small things in the service of God, who divide your hearts, and keep one part for God, and the other for the devil, the world and

But God  
will have  
our hearts  
altogether,  
or not at all.

<sup>1</sup> Scio opera tua, quia neque frigidus es, neque calidus : utinam frigidus esses, aut calidus : sed quia tepidus es, et nec frigidus, nec calidus, incipiam te evomere ex ore meo.—Apoc. iii. 15, 16.

your own sensuality, so that you offer to God only half service ; because you are neither hot nor cold, but tepid, because you belong partly to me and partly to another, on that very account you are intolerable to me, and you excite my disgust, so that I am forced to vomit you out of my mouth and to reject you.

Therefore a half service is false and displeasing to God.

The heathen philosophers, says St. Augustine, after long study, arrived at the knowledge of the one, true God by the light of reason ; but influenced by human respect they continued out of custom to conform to the idolatrous rites of the pagans. In their hearts they adored the true God, outwardly they showed honor to false deities, and in that way they acknowledged no God ; for they were neither faithful, nor infidel, Christian nor heathen. “ It would have been better for them,” says St. Augustine, “ not to have known God, than to have mixed up His worship with that of false gods.”<sup>1</sup> False and vain was the piety of these philosophers ; false and vain is the piety of many Christians nowadays, who do not serve with all their hearts, the God whom they know ; who try to divide themselves between God and the world, between God and the devil ; who serve God in some things, and the devil and the vain world in others. You must know that, if you go on in that way, God, who is not satisfied with half service, will abandon you altogether. And for that reason, the small things, as you imagine them to be, in which you neglect the divine service, are not small, but, as St. John Chrysostom says, they are nearly everything in importance.<sup>2</sup>

Because it is unjust.

And how would it be, O Christian, if God were to act with you, as you do with Him ? Would you be satisfied ? You wish to avoid mortal sins ; but you do not trouble yourself about what you look upon as venial offences, although in truth they are often serious enough ; suppose now that God was prepared to forgive some of your sins, but not all of them ; or that He was willing to give you the grace to repent of certain sins, but not of all ; how would it be with you then ? You are disposed to give Him only what you think barely necessary to escape hell ; if He acted in the same way with you, and gave you barely food enough every day to prevent you dying of hunger, would you be satisfied ? You do not wish to overcome yourself in one or two things, which God wishes you to do or to avoid ; suppose now, that God took away from you your eye-sight, leav-

<sup>1</sup> *Facilius effecerunt, ut Deum non haberent, quam ut diis multis, falsisque miscerent.*

<sup>2</sup> *Quamobrem hoc parum non est parum ; imo vero est fere totum.*

ing you however, all your other senses, would you be satisfied ? But how good God is to you ! He continues to load you with all kinds of graces and benefits, that you are often unable to appreciate properly, and in spite of your ingratitude, to bestow them on you at all times, in all places, under all circumstances ; so that if you had endless time at your disposal, and inexhaustible strength, as well as a heart capable of endless love, you should devote them all to His service, in order to prove your fidelity, gratitude and love ; but as things are, you are not certain of a single moment of time, of a single breath of life, and besides that, you are narrow-minded and half-hearted, so that you can give Him very little ; and yet you try to deprive Him of a part of this little ! Is that generous ?

Can the great God be satisfied with such a half-hearted service ? Can He be pleased with it ? No, you do not, and can not please Him. His desire is that His holy will be fulfilled in all things without exception, with the greatest exactness. I have found a man according to my own heart, says He, speaking of His servant David, because “ he shall do all my wills ; ”<sup>1</sup> in small things, as well as in great. “ He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in that which is greater ; ”<sup>2</sup> and he who neglects Me in small things, is not according to My heart. No matter what he does for Me otherwise, he will not please Me. So that God has no pleasure in him who disregards small things in His service, and who, even in one or two things only, does not try to do His will with all diligence. Nay, a man of that kind, no matter how pious and devout he may be otherwise, can have no pleasure in God ; as we shall see briefly in the

And therefore does not please Him.

### Second Part.

This follows, necessarily from the first part, according to the words of St. Bernard : “ God cannot please him who does not please God.”<sup>3</sup> If I see a servant who is continually unfaithful to his master, even in small things, who is always disobedient and obstinate in certain matters, and who refuses to do as he is told, whenever he is inclined to differ with his master, although he sees that the latter is displeased with him on that account, I am necessarily driven to the conclusion that such a servant has little love and respect for his master, and cares little about

The servant who is disobedient in many things, does not care for his master.

<sup>1</sup> Qui faciet omnes voluntates meas.—Acts xiii. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Qui fidelis est in minimo, et in majori fidelis est.—Luke xvi. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Qui non placet Deo, non potest illi placere Deus.

his favor and good opinion. Certainly, if I have a genuine love for a person, I would be afraid to do the least thing to displease him, and I would do all in my power to give him pleasure ; if he only gives the slightest sign that he wishes me to do something for him, I am quite delighted to do it, no matter what trouble it may cost me.

He who despises small sums, does not love money.

How do we know, my dear brethren, that a man is avaricious and fond of money ? For instance, a man has a bag full of gold ; he is very careful of it and keeps it under lock and key, so that it may not be stolen ; what do you think of him ? Is he avaricious ? Another man has inherited thirty thousand dollars ; he runs to and fro, and gives himself no end of trouble to secure the possession of this legacy ; would you look on that man as avaricious, and say, oh, what a miser he is ? No, you would do the very same yourself, for you would think that such a large sum of money is well worth the trouble ; and even the most prodigal of men would be unwilling to lose it. But if you see that the same man is just as greedy of a small amount, as he is of a large sum, that he disputes about a penny, that he is willing to get out of bed at night and to open the door for the sake of a few pence, and that he looks at every penny twice before he spends it, oh, you would say, that man is a regular miser : there is no doubt that he is fond of money. If, on the other hand, he neglects small things in his business, so that he will hardly rise from his chair to make a few pence, and does not care if he loses a dollar now and then, oh, you think, he does not care much for money ; nor is he a provident man, for he is too ready in spending what he has.

So too, he does not love or serve God properly, who often offends Him, although only in small things.

The same is to be said, my dear brethren, of a Christian, with regard to the love and service of God. There is many a one who is neither a murderer, nor an adulterer, nor a blasphemer, nor given to cursing, nor does he cheat or rob others ; in a word, he does nothing, and will do nothing that he knows to be a mortal sin. But is he earnest and zealous in the divine service ? Has he a real sincere love for God ? That I am not yet certain of by any means ; for the sins he avoids are grievous mortal sins, and must be avoided by every one who wishes to save his soul and go to Heaven. But if I find that he is just as careful in avoiding venial sin, that he is equally diligent in performing the least of his obligations to God, and that he does at once what he knows to be pleasing to God, then I must acknowledge that he really loves God with his whole heart, and that he is determined

to go to Heaven. But on the other hand, does he commit venial sin without fear or shame, does he adhere to certain practices or customs of the world which he knows to be contrary to the divine will? If so he may go to Confession and Communion, he may hear Masses and sermons, he may attend public devotions; he may give alms and pray as much and as often as he likes, but he will never persuade me that he has a sincere pleasure in God, or that he loves God with his whole heart, as he ought.

And what sort of a love can such people have when they say, not indeed in words, but by their acts, no matter how long they spend reading their prayer-books, or how high an opinion they have of their own piety, when they say: My God, I love Thee above all things, but (and this is a thought that must often occur to them) not above this or that thing, which I do not wish to give up? Lord, may Thy holy will be done, but not in this matter. O my God I am ready to do all that Thou wishest, except that one thing; in that I have to conform to the custom of the world, and to prefer it to Thee. I am willing to sacrifice everything, my soul, my life, my property, my blood, if Thy holy faith, or Thy honor and glory should require it; but Thou must not ask me to overcome myself in this or that matter; although I knew it would please Thee if I were publicly to uphold Thy Gospel of humility, modesty and chastity, and to defend Thy honor and glory before the world; yet I cannot overcome myself to that extent, nor will I try to do so. Is that the way to love God with the whole heart and above all things? You may say to me a hundred times, and a thousand times, that it is; but I will not believe you, and I maintain that all your piety is mere nonsense; God does not please you; you do not love Him at all, not to speak of loving Him with your whole heart. "He that feareth God," says the Wise Preacher, "neglecteth nothing,"<sup>1</sup> be it great or small.

He loves  
God in  
word, but  
not in deed.

Consider the example of the saints; you may learn from it what it is to love God with one's whole heart. Ask St. Bernard, and he will tell you that "a soul that loves God, looks upon it as more fearful and terrible than hell itself to offend Him in the least thing."<sup>2</sup> Mark these words, for he does not speak of offending God in great, but in small things. Nor does he say that a soul that loves God would find such offences merely terrible, but more terrible than hell. Consider the examples of

Not like the  
faithful  
servants of  
God.

<sup>1</sup> Qui timet Deum, nihil negligit.—Eccles. vii. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Terribilius ipsa gehenna iudicat, in re levissima vultum omnipotentis scienter offendere.

St. Bernard, St. Benedict, St. Francis ; see how they throw themselves into the snow, or into a frozen pond, or into a thorn-bush, through fear of yielding ever so little to a sensual thought. See how St. Francis Xavier, when he was assailed by an impure thought during his sleep, defended himself so vigorously against it, and was so filled with fear of offending God by it, that the blood poured from his mouth and nostrils. Consider even the Patriarch Abraham in the Old Law : he was so ready to obey the least sign of God's will, that he actually drew his sword to sacrifice to God his only son Isaac, whom he loved most tenderly. And we, Christians, who say so often in our prayers that we love God with all our hearts ; alas we refuse to sacrifice to Him not our only child, but some miserable thing that He asks of us ! Is it not evident that we do not really love our God, and therefore that He does not really love us from his heart ?

Therefore,  
he cannot  
have true  
peace of  
conscience.

But, alas, what an effect on the soul and mind of a Christian who wishes to save his soul and to go to Heaven must this thought have : I have no true pleasure in God, and He has no true pleasure in me ! On the contrary, the thought, I now give to my God all that I have, and my God has a true pleasure and joy in me, is the thought that takes all the bitterness and pain out of the torments of the martyrs, out of the labors and afflictions of apostolic men, and fills their hearts with the sweetest heavenly consolation.

But for you, tepid and slothful Christians, who refuse to give to God all that He asks of you, what a painful and troublesome thing it is for you to have to think, in the midst of your business, your household cares, and your sensual enjoyments, nay even in the midst of those apparent good works of yours, that you do not do all that God wishes, that God is not satisfied with you, that He has no pleasure in you ! In that state you go to the church to pray ; but the worm is gnawing secretly at your conscience, God is not pleased with me. You confess your sins ; but your conscience cries out God is not pleased with me, because I do not amend all that I should amend. You go to the Table of the Lord to receive the Flesh and Blood of your Saviour ; but your conscience cries out, God is not pleased with me, there is still something in my actions or in my dress, as I approach the communion-rail, which is displeasing to God because it gives the others an occasion of offending Him by looks or desires. After Communion you repeat the usual prayers to the

God whom you have within you ; I love Thee with my whole heart ; I am sorry for ever having offended Thee by the least sin ; I would rather die than displease Thee in the least ; I offer myself body and soul to Thy service ; do with me, O God, whatever Thou wilt ! What fine words these are, which are found in every prayer-book ; but they are accompanied by the gnawing worm : I know that what I say is not true ; I do not love God with my whole heart ; there is still a sin, an imperfection that I am not sorry for, a scandalous custom that I do not wish to give up ; I will not give everything to God ; in this or that thing I will not do what is pleasing to God. I often wish that I had more time and leisure to serve God, and to do something acceptable to him ; but the gnawing worm cries out : you are not sincere, you do not mean what you say ; for in this or that particular thing you can please God ; He expects you to do it, nay He even commands you ; but you refuse to obey. Therefore God has no pleasure in you ; nor does His Holy Spirit give you that consolation which He grants to zealous and pious souls, according to the testimony of the Apostle St. Paul, namely, that of knowing that you are really a child of God. <sup>1</sup> Therefore you have great reason to fear that God, to whom you are unwilling to give yourself and all that you have completely, may also, when temptation assails you, deny you those special helps of His grace, which He is bound to give to no one, and in your last moments He may deny you the grace of final perseverance, which He is equally at liberty to give, or to refuse. Woe to you, if that is to be the case with you ! Can any Christian, who wishes to go to Heaven, be at ease with such a thought as that in his mind ?

Ah, Christians, let us act honestly with the God of infinite goodness ; let us serve Him with all possible zeal, and fulfil His will as far as we know how ; let us be true to Him in small things as well as in great ; let us not give even the smallest portion of our hearts to the devil, the world, or the flesh ; but keep them altogether for Him to whom alone they belong of right, and who wishes that we should offer them completely to Himself ! O my Lord and my God, even if Thou wert content with a part of my heart, still it would not be right for me to be so niggardly and so ungrateful towards Thee, as to refuse Thee anything Thou askest of me ! Thou art the only one who hast made me all that I am and given me all that I have ; Thou alone canst help me in

**Conclusion:**  
to serve  
God faithfully in all,  
even the  
smallest  
things.

<sup>1</sup> Quod sumus filii Dei.—Rom. viii. 16.

life and death, in time and eternity ; Thou alone hast given me Thyself as my food on earth, and Thou wilt give me Thyself without reserve as my reward in Heaven ! Therefore I must belong completely to Thee ! Yes, Lord, I will be Thine, and will remain Thine ; I will renounce all that I know has displeased Thee in me hitherto ; I will do with becoming zeal all that I know to be in accordance with Thy holy will ! No sin shall appear to be so small, that I shall dare to commit it deliberately, and thus I shall be able to say with truth, My God and my all. <sup>1</sup> Now do I love Thee from my heart, and with my whole heart, and above everything that is dear to me on earth ! Grant that I may hear from Thee at the hour of death, the joyful words : “ Well done, good and faithful servant ; because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things ; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” <sup>2</sup> Amen.

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

Text.

*Quod minimum quidem est omnibus seminibus : cum autem creverit, majus est omnibus oleribus, et fit arbor. Matth. xiii. 32.*

“ Which is the least indeed of all seeds ; but when it is grown up, it is greater than all herbs, and becometh a tree.”

The kingdom of Heaven is like to a grain of mustard-seed. How can that be ? How can that immense and boundless kingdom be compared to a small seed ? By the mustard-seed, my dear brethren, some of the holy Fathers understand Christ Himself, others the Catholic Church, others the Gospel of Christ and its propagation throughout the world, others again the Apostles and Martyrs of Christ. Cornelius a Lapide, speaking of to-day's Gospel, explains the reason of this difference of interpretation. But we can also understand the mustard-seed to mean every good work of the just man ; for as the mustard-seed is very small in itself, but has such strength that it grows to be a lofty tree, so also the good works that we perform in the state of grace, considered in themselves, are small indeed, but nevertheless they are powerful enough to earn eternal joys in Heaven. Such is the case, for instance, with one sigh to Heaven, a momentary act of the love of God, etc. What small things they are ! And yet

<sup>1</sup> Dens meus et omnia.

<sup>2</sup> Euge, serve bone et fidelis, quia super pauca fuisti fidelis, super multa te constituam : intra in gaudium Domini tui.—Matth. xxv. 23.

small as they are, they gain Heaven and God Himself as their reward. Oh, what happiness for us Christians, that we can, if we wish, merit in this way so many eternities of joys every day of our lives, and with so little trouble ! But I must complain bitterly of the folly and madness of most people, who lose and neglect countless eternities of happiness, either by continuing in the state of sin, or by their sloth and tepidity in good works. But alas, how little is thought of that ! small and trifling things, as we imagine them to be, by which we could frequently please God and gain Heaven ; small and trifling things, as we imagine them to be, in which we often offend God and lose an eternal reward ; these things are generally looked on as of no account ; they are considered as insignificant grains of mustard-seed, which are not worth any care or diligence. Against this sloth and tepidity, etc.—*continues as before.*

*For other sermons on this subject : On The Evil of Beings too Much Occupied, see the first part of this work ; On The Evil of a Luxurious and Easy Life ; see the third part ; On Idleness, see the fifth part.*

# ON SINS AGAINST GOD.

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## *On Superstition.*

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### TWENTY-EIGHTH SERMON.

#### ON THOSE WHO SEEK ADVICE FROM FORTUNE-TELLERS.

##### Subject.

To seek advice from fortune-tellers is a very grievous sin, and must therefore be carefully avoided.—*Preached on the seventh Sunday after Pentecost.*

##### Text.

*Attendite a falsis prophetis.*—Matth. vii. 15.  
“Beware of false prophets.”

##### Introduction.

The vain world is a false prophet, for nearly all its maxims and usages are opposed to eternal truth, and it promises its adherents and followers all kinds of honor, wealth and pleasure, but gives them nothing except trouble, care, labor and misery. Therefore our Lord warns us: “Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world.” “If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him.”<sup>1</sup> Many men in the world are false prophets, because under the appearance of friendship, generosity, or affection, they seduce others, lead them into sin, and devour their souls like ravening wolves. Against those Christ warns us in to-day’s Gospel: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in the clothing of sheep, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.”<sup>2</sup> Besides these, my dear brethren, there are other false

<sup>1</sup> Nolite diligere mundum, nequa ea, quæ in mundo sunt. Si quis diligit mundum, non est caritas Patris in eo.—1. John, ii. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Attendite a falsis prophetis, qui veniunt ad vos in vestimentis ovium, intrinsecus autem sunt lupi rapaces.—Matth. vii. 15.

prophets to be found here and there, who under the pretence of giving good advice or help, most cruelly murder souls and bring them to hell. Against these it is my purpose to speak to-day. There are, as I have frequently heard from different sources, men and women in some of the country districts, who have the name of knowing and being able to do more than their mere natural abilities would account for; they are visited by people who seek their help on different occasions, such as in illnesses for which no natural remedy can be found; and that help is given speedily and efficaciously. If a person has lost anything by theft, or otherwise, they know how to point out the thief or to say where the lost object is concealed. If one wants to know whether an undertaking is likely to succeed or not, they, as many erroneously imagine, are the people to go to for information, etc. And it is to people of this kind, under circumstances such as I have mentioned, that the simple-minded especially have recourse; although there are many who seek their help, not through simplicity, but because they see no harm in doing so. What a grievous mistake they are laboring under; a mistake that should not be tolerated amongst Christians, as I shall now show.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*To have recourse to prophets of this kind, on any occasion whatever, for help or advice, is a mortal sin. Therefore beware all of you, of such false prophets, and warn all who are still ignorant in this matter. Such is the whole subject of to-day's sermon.*

O Holy Ghost, give strength to my words, and light and understanding to my hearers that they may see the truth clearly! This we beg of Thee through the intercession of Mary and the holy angels guardian. I repeat then, "Beware of false prophets."

To make an alliance and a contract with the devil, to ask advice and help from him, to say like the wicked people of whom Isaias speaks: "We have entered into a league with death, and we have made a covenant with hell. When the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come upon us; for we have placed our hope in lies, and by falsehood we are protected;<sup>1</sup> the devil is our helper in the time of need. What a fearful sin

It is a most grievous sin to ask help from the devil.

<sup>1</sup> Percussimus fœdus cum morte, et cum inferno fecimus pactum. Flagellum inundans, cum tranierit, non veniet super nos, quia posuimus mendacium spem nostram, et mendaculo protecti sumus. - Isa. xxviii. 15.

that is! You are shocked, pious Christians, at the bare mention of it, and you refuse to believe that any but idolators and sorcerers could be guilty of such a crime. And you are not very far wrong. Unhappy heathens, what a miserable state yours was! You erected temples, altars and statues to the evil spirit, and adored him on bended knee; you could not undertake a journey, or commence a war, or enter a lawsuit, nor begin a building, nor enter on any important business without first sacrificing to the devil, and receiving an answer from him, through images of wood and stone, as to how and when the affair was to turn out. Unhappy heathens, I repeat, I heartily pity your blindness and stupidity; for you knew not the true God, and therefore tried to make a god for yourselves of the evil one! Endless honor and glory to Thee, O Jesus, who hast taught the world better things by Thy supernatural light! With the exception of witches and sorcerers, that is, the outcasts of the human race, there is no sect in the Christian world which disgraces itself by bending the knee to Satan. To Thee alone, O God, does adoration belong!

This is done by those who have recourse to certain suspicious persons.

But have I reason to rejoice thus, after all? Even in Christendom, amongst Catholics, who appear to be good, and very often too, amongst those who are really good in other respects, (and I have heard too, of particular instances, in which it has occurred, but of them I will say nothing), even amongst those people, Thou, O great God, art passed over, and the devil is prayed to for help and assistance! And this is done by those (you must pay attention to every word I say, my dear brethren, so as not to refer my words to individuals whom I do not at all intend to allude to) who, as I said in the Introduction, in order to obtain the cure of certain fevers and diseases, in man or beast, or to recover lost or stolen goods, or to secure the return of people who have escaped or lost their way, or to know whether a certain enterprise is likely to succeed or not, have recourse to certain suspicious men or women (and these latter are well known, and are frequently spoken of by name; so little are people ashamed of this sinful practice!) and pay them for advice and help; and the man, or woman thus consulted, is expected to cure the disease, or point out the thief, or say where the lost or stolen property is hidden, or compel the person who has escaped to return, or say whether the undertaking will succeed or not; and that by means that are in themselves superstitious and utterly inadequate, naturally speaking, to produce the effects required. All

who either personally, or through others consult such people in any matter whatever, or ask advice from them, are worshipers of the devil, and are guilty of making a contract with their sworn enemy, the evil spirit, and of seeking help from him. Can any one doubt that this is a most fearful sin ?

But, they will say, how can that be ? God forbid that we should have anything to do with the devil ; it never entered into our heads to be so wicked as to ask the evil spirits for help ; we seek help from men on earth, not from the demons in hell, and we nearly always find what we seek. But, I ask you in turn, what is the difference, when you want a favor, between handing in your petition to the prince with your own hands, and getting one of his ministers or friends to hand it in for you ? Do you not ask a favor from the prince in the latter way, just as in the former ? Nay, perhaps you are more likely to obtain your request through the friend of the prince, than if you made it yourself in person. The same is to be said of the subject of which we are now treating. What difference is there between calling up the devil yourself, in order to ask him to help you, and getting help from his agents and ministers, who are sure to help you only by diabolical agency ? Do you not seek help from the devil in one way as well as in the other ?

Because they deal with the devil by means of such persons.

Let us consider the matter sensibly. Where do the people whom you consult get their knowledge of healing ? Who has given to the ciphers and letters that they hand you, to the superstitious devotions that they prescribe, and to other similar means they make use of, the power of effecting cures ? How do they know the thief who has stolen your money, and the place in which he has hidden it ? How can they say whether your undertaking is to turn out a success, or not ? Who gives them the power to bring back people from you know not where ? Perhaps they receive private revelations from God, and are endowed with a special power of working miracles ? But that is not likely to be the case with such people. It is true that God knows all things, that even the most secret recesses of the heart are open to Him, that He sees afar off as clearly as close at hand, that he knows the future as well as the present, and that He has kept to Himself the knowledge of these secret and hidden things. Therefore the Prophet Isaias, in order to show the greatness of the true God, whom alone he adored, over the false gods of the heathens and infidels, brings forward this proof : “ Let them come and tell us all things that are to come ; tell us the former

Otherwise where do such people get their knowledge ?

things what they are. Show the things that are to come hereafter, and we shall know that ye are gods.”<sup>1</sup>

God does not make a special revelation to them, and give them grace to work miracles as He did to the prophets.

There is no doubt that God can communicate to creatures a portion of this knowledge; He can reveal to them hidden and future things: He can give them the grace to work miracles; and He has already bestowed this special grace and knowledge on many saints in the Old and New Testament. In the Old Law, when the Divine Teacher had not as yet appeared on earth, and God was wont to instruct His people by means of men, to whom he spoke, and made known His will, there were always certain prophets, who were called “Seers,”<sup>2</sup> and “Men of God,” of whom the people used to ask advice and help; “Come let us go to the seer,”<sup>3</sup> they used to say. Thus Samuel prophesied to Saul where he would find his father’s asses, and gave him also certain signs by which he might know that God had chosen him King of Israel; “When thou shalt depart from me this day, thou shalt find two men, etc., and they shall say to thee: The asses are found which thou wantest to seek. . . . And when thou shalt depart from thence, and go farther on, and shalt come to the oak of Thabor, there shall meet thee three men, going up to God to Bethel, one carrying three kids, and another three loaves of bread, and another carrying a bottle of wine. And they will salute thee, and will give thee two loaves, and thou shalt take them at their hands. After that, thou shalt come to the hill of God. When therefore these signs shall happen to thee, do whatsoever thy hand shall find, for the Lord is with thee.”<sup>4</sup> And everything happened to Saul as Samuel had foretold. In the same way we read in the Fourth Book of Kings, that Naaman, the general of the king of Syria, had recourse to the Prophet Eliseus to be cleansed from leprosy: “And Eliseus sent a messenger to him,” says the Holy Scripture, “saying: Go, and wash seven times in the Jordan, and thy flesh shall recover health, and thou shalt be clean.”<sup>5</sup> But, we

<sup>1</sup> Accedant, et nuntient nobis, quæcumque ventura sunt: priora quæ fuerunt nuntiata. Annuntiate, quæ ventura sunt in futurum, et sciemus, quia dii estis vos.—Isa. xli. 22, 23.

<sup>2</sup> Videntes.

<sup>3</sup> Eamus ad Videntem.—I. Kings ix. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Cum abieris bodie a me, invenies duos viros, etc. Dicentque tibi: Inventæ sunt asinæ, ad quas iteras perquirendas. . . . Cumque abieris inde, et ultra transieris, et veneris ad quercum Thabor, invenient te ibi tres viri ascendentes ad Deum in Bethel, unus portans tres hœdos, et alius tres tortas panis, et alius portans lagenam vini. Cumque te salutaverint, dabunt tibi duos panes, et accipies de manu eorum. Post hæc venies in collem Dei. Quando ergo evenerint signa hæc omnia tibi, fac quæcumque invenerit manus tua, quia Dominus tecum est.—Ibid. x. 2-5, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Misitque ad eum Eliseus nuntium, dicens: Vade et lavare septies in Jordane, et recipiet sanitatem caro tua, atque mundaberis.—IV. Kings v. 10.

might ask, how could water, and washing in it seven times have the power of curing leprosy? In fact, Naaman himself was disgusted at the cure prescribed for him, and was about to go away. But one of his servants persuaded him to do as the Prophet had said, and he was completely restored to health: "Then he went down, and washed in the Jordan seven times, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored, like the flesh of a little child, and he was made clean."<sup>1</sup> Such was the way in which the prophets in those days declared future things and healed the diseases of those who had recourse to them. But they were holy men, who were publicly appointed by God as prophets, seers and advisers for the people; and the latter were told to go to them, and were assured that they would learn from them, with certainty, the divine will; would be instructed in their doubts, and helped in their necessities. The ordinary expression used by the prophets when making any announcement, was, "Thus saith the Lord."<sup>2</sup> Thus saith the Lord, so and so will happen; thus saith the Lord, so and so shall you do.

But who has made prophets of those other people? When has it been revealed, where is the written promise on the part of God, that He will speak by their mouths, and make known hidden and future things? How can it be proved that they have received from God the power of working miracles? Where are the signs of extraordinary holiness, to prove that God has selected and appointed them to such an office? At all events, neither the prophets of old, nor the saints of our times ever asked money for healing the sick by a miracle, or for making known hidden and future things; while the contrary is the case with those false prophets, who take good care that they are paid for their jugglery. The Holy Scripture says that when Naaman was cured of the leprosy by washing seven times in the Jordan, he offered to Eliseus ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and humbly begged of the Prophet to accept them: "And returning to the man of God with all his train, he came and stood before him and said: In truth I know there is no other God in all the earth, but only in Israel. I beseech thee, therefore, take a blessing of thy servant;"<sup>3</sup> And what

But one cannot believe that God has given to false prophets the grace of prophesying and working miracles.

<sup>1</sup> Descendit, et lavit in Jordane septies, juxta sermonem viri Dei; et restituta est caro ejus, sicut caro pueri parvuli, et mundatus est.—IV. Kings v. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Hæc dicit Dominus.

<sup>3</sup> Reversusque ad virum Dei cum universo comitatu suo venit, et stetit coram eo, et ait: Vere scio, quod non sit alius Deus in universa terra, nisi tantum in Israel. Obsecro itaque, ut accipias benedictionem a servo tuo.—IV. Kings v. 15.

answer did Eliseus make him? "As the Lord liveth," he said, "before whom I stand, I will receive none;"<sup>1</sup> Nay, because Giezi, the servant of Eliseus, took some money from Naaman, the prophet punished him by declaring that he should become a leper; "The leprosy of Naaman," he said, "shall also stick to thee and to thy seed forever. And he went out from him a leper, as white as snow."<sup>2</sup> Such was the way in which the prophets of God acted. Try what those false prophets will do; offer them ten dollars, and see whether they will accept them, or no. You will get very little advice or help from them, unless you pay them for it.

Therefore they must get their knowledge and help from the devil only.

I will not cry them down, my dear brethren, as sorcerers and dealers in the black art; I leave them to enjoy whatever reputation they have, and that cannot be a very good one, at least amongst sensible people. This only I will say, and no reasonable person will doubt me, that they do not get from God, or from His inspiration, the knowledge which enables them to find out where the thief is, or where the stolen property is hidden, and to give help and advice in other circumstances; and therefore, since they cannot get it naturally, it must come from the devil and by his help, in virtue of a compact entered into with him, either orally or in writing. And so it is in reality; the devil has lost none of the pride which made him wish to be equal to God; that pride which was the cause of his eternal ruin, and therefore, he introduced idolatry into the world, in order that, as sacrifice is offered to the true God, he also might have adorers to offer sacrifice to him. But he cannot have those sacrifices from Christians, and he sees, very much against his will, that they have recourse to God alone, generally speaking, in their trials and necessities, and so he endeavors to get the same honor for himself, when he makes use of his agents to disclose hidden and secret things, to foretell the future, and to cure wounds and diseases, so as to induce men to have recourse to him.

Who has but an uncertain knowledge of future events.

But, some one will ask, how can the devil do that? how can he prophesy the future, since God has reserved that knowledge to Himself and to those to whom He reveals it? I answer that, according to the teaching of theologians, neither the good angels nor the devils can by their mere natural powers have any knowledge of future things, or of the secret thoughts of one's

<sup>1</sup> Vivit Dominus, ante quem sto, quia non accipiam. —IV. Kings v. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Lepra Naaman adhaerebit tibi, et semini tuo, usque in sempiternum. Et egressus est ab eo leprosus quasi nix.—Ibid. 27.

mind; for future events depend either on the free will of God, or on that of man; now, it is impossible to have any certain knowledge of either. The good angels, and also the devils, may indeed conclude with a certain amount of probability, from a man's inclinations and the circumstances in which he is, what will be likely to happen to him; but a certain knowledge of it they cannot have, because the man is free, and can, and very often does act against his inclinations and in spite of his circumstances. Thus neither the devil, nor even a good angel, can know, without a special divine revelation, whether I am going to a certain house, or into certain company this evening; nor do they know whether I am going to travel to-morrow, or whether I shall be elected to a certain office or dignity. Therefore, the devil can never tell me such things with infallible certainty. There are some future events, however, which depend on the natural course of things amongst unreasoning creatures, such as the change of the weather, sunshine, rain, thunder-storms, etc.; all these things the good angels and the devils can foresee naturally; but, as Suarez remarks, since God very often changes the course of these things, the devils are often deceived, and cannot have a certain infallible knowledge of them. The devil might foresee with some accuracy the number of years I still have to live, from my constitution and general health, the food and drink I use, the air I breathe, and the country I live in; but since he cannot know whether I will change my diet, or go into a foreign country, or what dangers I shall have to encounter, or whether I shall be shot, or drowned, or meet my death by some other accident; since it is impossible for him to find out whether God will not perhaps shorten my life, or prolong it, contrary to what might be expected from my constitution and habit of body; therefore he cannot tell me for certain whether I have still a quarter of an hour to live. He can foresee, as a consequence of a change in the weather, a great scarcity, or famine, or pestilence, or inundations, earthquakes, etc. but, since all these may be prevented by God, and often are prevented through the prayers of pious people, here again the devil is often at fault. Hence, when he prophesies any of these things, either immediately, or by means of his agents, what he says is mere guess-work; if it turns out true, well and good for him, because it helps him to deceive souls and to seduce them all the easier.

To how many has he not promised a long life, who died immediately after? How often has he not foretold immediate

And generally deceives man.

death to those who lived to a ripe old age? Of many examples that are related to prove this, I will content myself with the following. Galeazzo, Duke of Milan, was once foretold by one of these false prophets, that he would die prematurely. And what, asked the Duke, will be your destiny? Oh, said the other, I will live to be very old. Aha, said the Duke, I see that your art has deceived you considerably on this occasion; you must know that I am a far better prophet than you; you will die before me, and I will prove to you that what I say is true. Thereupon he had him strangled. The unhappy fate of Cardanus, a celebrated physician and astrologer, and at the same time a wicked, abandoned man, should deter any one from allowing himself to be deceived by such people. This Cardanus was dangerously ill; Benedict Pererius, a learned and clever man was doing his best to induce him to repent and receive the last sacraments, but in vain. The sick man asked for the papers on which he had calculated his destiny according to the stars. See, he said, I have foreseen this illness, and I know that it will not be mortal; for in a week's time I shall take a turn for the better and get well again. Nor would he hear a word of repenting, or receiving the sacraments. His prophecy came true in part, but nevertheless it deceived him completely; for in a week, as he had said, his illness took a turn, but for the worse, not for the better; so that he died unrepentant. Thus he experienced the truth of what St. Augustine had said long before: "No one can promise you another day, unless perhaps an astrologer; but how many are there not who have been deceived by astrologers;"<sup>1</sup> This should also serve as a salutary lesson to those who go to those notorious vagabonds (Egyptians or Gypsies they are called) in order to have their fortunes told from the lines of their hands. What a fearful abuse for Christians to be guilty of, and what lamentable folly! As if a swarthy-visaged woman, who very often knows nothing of God or of His commandments, could foretell different changes of fortune and circumstances, or say whether one is to be long-lived or not! For, you must either believe that those people can see the future by natural means in the palm of your hand, and if so you must be silly indeed; or else you believe that they get their knowledge by divine revelation, in which case you are guilty of presumption and tempting God; or you know that

<sup>1</sup> Crastinum diem nemo tibi promisit; aut si forte promisit mathematicus; longe aliud est. O Deus, quam multos mathematici fefellerunt!—S. Aug. tom. 10. de verb. Dom. serm. 49.

they are helped by the devil, and of course you are guilty of the horrible crime of seeking aid from the evil spirit ; or, finally, you are so clever that you do not believe a word of what they say, and yet you consult them, thus giving way to a most scandalous and dangerous curiosity ; scandalous, since you encourage the simple-minded in their superstitious practices ; dangerous, because, although you say you do not believe, yet if their prophecy happens to turn out true, you will commence to think that perhaps there is something in it, and either through hope or fear, you will allow it to influence your mode of life, and thus the indulgence of a vain curiosity will cause you to descend to the lowest depths of superstition.

With regard to lost and stolen things, the thief who took them, and the place in which they are hidden ; since all these are visible things, and have been the objects of outward actions, there is no doubt that the devil knows all about them ; and therefore, if God permits him, he can easily communicate certain knowledge with regard to them. Yet, even in this he is not always to be trusted ; for the father of lies often denounces an innocent person as guilty, either for the purpose of deceiving men, or to cause some greater misfortune. Martin Delrio, in his *Juridica*, states that there was once a peasant, who wrapped up some money he had just received, in a piece of fresh hide, and laid it on a bench outside the door, while he was engaged in doing some work ; as soon as he had turned his back, a pig came up and swallowed down the hide with the money. The peasant looked everywhere for his money, but could not find it. Where can it have gone to, he said ; there was no one near the house ; I must and will find out all about it. So saying, he ran off to a certain woman in the village, who had the reputation of knowing more than other people, to ask her what had become of his money. The witch told him that he must wait a little, and not dare to follow her. She then crept into a dark hole, and after some frightful conjuring and incantations, she cried out in a loud voice : Where is the money that this man has lost ? and a terrible voice answered her, saying, “ The man’s own pig has eaten it.”<sup>1</sup> But you must tell him that his wife has taken it, so that there may be strife and disunion in the house. The witch did as she was directed. But the peasant had seen and heard everything that went on in the dark hole, and when he went home he slaughtered the pig, and found the purse in its stomach. He

The devil can know where visible things are hidden ; but in this too he often deceives men.

<sup>1</sup> *Sus domestica comedit.*

then accused the witch before the judge, who condemned her to be burned alive.

Therefore it is a great sin to have any dealings with such people.

See, it is false prophets of this kind that they have recourse to, who go to certain suspicious characters to get cured of their diseases, or to recover lost property, or to have their fortunes told. And what else is that but asking the devil for advice and help? Yet this is done by Christians, who have sworn fidelity to Jesus Christ, who worship the one true God, and who have solemnly renounced the devil and all his works in baptism! And it is done in a Christian land, and done without shame, as if there was no harm in it! I could wish to cry out in the ears of all who are guilty of such a crime, what God said by the Prophet Elias to king Ochozias, as we read in the Fourth Book of Kings; the latter had fallen from the window and hurt himself severely, so that he became seriously ill, and he sent his servants to Beelzebub, the false god of Accaron, to know what would be the result of his sickness: "And he sent messengers saying to them: Go, consult Beelzebub the god of Accaron, whether I shall recover of this my illness;"<sup>1</sup> What? said Elias to him, "Is there not a God in Israel, that ye go to consult Beelzebub, the god of Accaron? Wherefore thus saith the Lord: From the bed on which thou art gone up, thou shalt not come down, but thou shalt surely die."<sup>2</sup> What? I say to those Christians, is there no longer a God in the Christian world, to whom you can have recourse? Are things come to such a pass that you have to seek help from the powers of hell? Is it to the devil that you now bend the knee, to him that you fly for refuge, from him that you ask help and advice? What a shame and disgrace! What an enormity! Can I believe it to be true? No, I could not even imagine Christians to be guilty of such a crime, if I were not assured that they really commit it!

The usual excuses; the first; I protest that I will have nothing to do with the devil.

But, they say to excuse themselves, what does it matter to me what the man or woman I consult does, or what art is made use of? I for my part protest before God that I wish to have nothing to do with the devil, or with superstitious practices; all I want is to recover my lost property, or to get rid of the fever from which I am suffering, or to find out something that interests me very much; I have no other object than that. Besides,

<sup>1</sup> Misitque nuntios, dicens ad eos: Ite, consulte Beelzebub, deum Accaron, utrum vivere queam de infirmitate mea hac?—IV. Kings i. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Numquid non est Deus in Israel, ut eatis ad consulendum Beelzebub, deum Accaron? Quam ob rem hæc dicit Dominus: De lectulo, super quem ascendisti, non descendes, sed morte morieris.—Ibid, 3, 4.

I protest that I wish to have nothing to do with the devil. Empty excuse! Vain protestation, which does not help you a bit! You may protest a thousand times, if you like, it still remains true that you have dealings with the devil; for you seek help by means that cannot produce the effect required by their own natural virtue, and that therefore must be helped to produce it by diabolical agency, but it is never lawful under any circumstances to have recourse to such means as that. Theologians teach that he who is suffering from an illness caused by witchcraft, as is often the case through divine permission, is not allowed to have recourse to witchcraft or other superstitious means in order to get cured; he should rather suffer a thousand deaths, than seek a cure by such unlawful practices.

That is all fine talk; but it does not prevent those people from helping me. By their means I get back my lost property, or am cured of the fever. Such is the excuse generally brought forward: they help me. Of course they help you, if God allows them, and you get your property back; but it is by diabolical and unlawful means, by using which you commit a great sin, and forfeit Heaven. Of course they help you, and you recover your health; but through the intervention of the devil, and by incurring the eternal death of your soul. Which of these will you choose? Is there not then, a God in Heaven, I must ask you again, who can help you just as well, or even better? Is there no saint, or friend of God, through whose intercession you can recover your lost property, or regain your health? Is there no church in the world, in which you can pray and have recourse to Mary the Mother of God, and get Masses said for your intention? Do you look upon the devil as a better helper, physician and benefactor, than the God of infinite power, wisdom and goodness, from whom we have the infallible promise, "Ask and you shall receive;"<sup>1</sup> come and knock at My door, and I will give you everything, provided only that it is good for your soul.

The second:  
they help  
me.

Yes, you say again; but I might pray for a long time before being helped so effectually. I have prayed, and got others to pray; I have had Masses said, and given candles, and gone on pilgrimages, and called on St. Anthony and many other saints for help; but what have I gained thereby? My lost property is not yet recovered; my child is still sick; my son, my husband is still away from me, and I do not know where he is. Well, have

The third:  
my prayers  
to God have  
hitherto  
been fruit-  
less.

<sup>1</sup> Petite et accipietis.—John xvi. 24.

patience ; I believe that such is really the case with you ; but what then ? Well, there is nothing else for me to do but to go to those people, and they will help me for a trifling sum. No, do not say that ; if you are a good Christian you must not think of such a thing ! If God has not heard your prayer, He knows why ; it would not have been for the good of your soul, had He given you what you asked. Your child is still sick in spite of all you can do lawfully ; well, at all events you have done your part ; that illness is a greater blessing from God, than health would be ; so that you must be satisfied with the divine will. You have failed to recover your lost or stolen property ; you must attribute your loss to the providence of God, and you must say, like the patient Job, when he was reduced to the direst poverty ; “The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord ;”<sup>1</sup> “If we have received good things at the hand of God, why should we not receive evil ?”<sup>2</sup> Why should we not accept trials willingly from the same loving and beneficent hand ? If it is good for you, the Lord can recompense you fourfold in other things for the loss you have suffered. You must not then be so foolish as to add to your temporal loss the loss of the Supreme God, by having dealings with the devil. Besides, God can take away from you the property you recover by the help of the devil, or make you suffer a loss ten times greater in other things. No, you must have recourse to God and appeal to Him alone. Such should be your resolution.

**The fourth :** What I have lost is of great value : that is another excuse **what I have** they bring forward. I have lost a thousand dollars ; must I let **lost is of** them go without an effort to recover them ? If so how am I **great value.** to support my children ? If I can get them back so easily, why should I hesitate ? So easily, you say ? Where is your common sense ? Is it an easy means of recovering your money, to offend God by mortal sin, and thus lose your soul ? You might make good your loss by stealing the amount of it ; but would that be lawful ? No matter what you have lost, even if it were the whole world, and you could get it back in that way for a trifling sum ; while on the other hand you run the risk of being reduced to beggary if you do not get it back ; even then it would be unlawful for you to ask help or advice from those false prophets. Every one should be at all times and under all circumstances will-

<sup>1</sup> Dominus dedit, Dominus abstulit : sicut nomen Domini benedictum.—Job i. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Si bona suscepimus de manu Dei, mala quare non suscipiamus ?—Ibid. ii. 10.

ing to suffer the loss of all he has, not excepting even his honor and good name, his peace and pleasure, and to die a thousand times, rather than offend God by mortal sin. What good then would it be to you to have everything in the world, if you lose God and His friendship ?

But, another will say, I will venture it this once ; I can afterwards repent of my sin and confess it ; and meanwhile I shall have recovered my health, or my property. And has it come to that with you ? Do you think so lightly of a grievous sin, because God is so good and merciful, that He will forgive you when you have repented of and confessed it ? What a wretched thing for a Christian to do ! Go to your false prophets then, if you are determined on it, and ask them to cure you by their juggleries, or to recover your property for you ; I tell you on the part of God, that you will have neither luck nor grace with your property or health. Who knows, my dear brethren, whether it is not sins of that kind, that are the cause of the hard times that are pressing so heavily on all of us now ? How many poor people are compelled to lay aside their shame, and to hold out their hands to beg for a piece of bread ! How many are obliged to pawn what they have, on account of the high prices of things, in order to purchase food ! How many there are even, who actually die of hunger and privation ! And what else could be expected when people neglect the true God, and worship the devil ? Go to your false prophets, you superstitious people, and see whether they can give you bread !

Ah, good Christians, I conclude with the words with which I began, "Beware of false prophets," who, although they seem to benefit you by their help and advice, are in reality ravening wolves that devour your souls. And therefore I beg of you to tell others in town and country what you now hear. There are many simple-minded people who, through ignorance, see no harm in those things, so that they have recourse to the powers of hell without shame. If you come across any of them, warn them, and do all you can to induce them to give up their superstition, that this horrible vice may no longer find place in a Christian country ; threaten if necessary, to denounce them to ecclesiastical authority. Far be it from all of us, my dear brethren, even to think of committing such a crime ! We will unanimously ratify and renew the contract we made with God in holy baptism, and we will say in the name of all the Catholics of this country, "I renounce thee, Satan, and all thy works !"

The fifth : I can repent of my sin when I have profited by it.

Conclusion and exhortation to all, to avoid such false prophets, and to have recourse to God alone.

Away with thee, unhappy spirit; I renounce thee for ever! Never will I have the least thing to do with thy agents! If thou wert to offer me the whole world and all its wealth, as thou formerly didst to the Saviour on the mountain: "All these will I give thee, if falling down thou wilt adore me;"<sup>1</sup> I would say to thee, as He did: "Begone, Satan; for it is written: The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and Him only shalt thou serve."<sup>2</sup> This shall be my constant resolution. Greed of gain will sometimes tempt me, and urge me to get back by unlawful means what I have lost; away, I will say, with everything I have! God is my best, highest and dearest good. As long as I have Him, I am rich enough. Sensuality will whisper to me, that it would be a good thing to recover my health. No, I shall answer, let me be sick and suffer; let me and every one belonging to me die, if necessary; as long as I can live for my God! I shall take what care I can of my property, and do my best to make up for losses, but by lawful means; I shall take care of my health, but by lawful means; and then, whether I am rich or poor, or sick, or in good health, it does not matter, as long as the will of God is accomplished. Thee alone will I adore, O God; to Thee and to Thy saints alone will I fly for refuge. Thee alone will I serve; Thee alone will I love with my whole heart! If you all unite in making this resolution and in keeping it (for I do not think that there are many here present who are addicted to the vice against which I am speaking) you will profit much by this sermon. May that be the case. Amen.

*Another Introduction to the same sermon for the second Sunday of Advent.*

Text.

*Sed quid existis videre? prophetam? Matth. xi. 9.*

"But what went you out to see? A Prophet?"

There is no doubt that the Jews had a great opinion of St. John the Baptist, for they went out into the desert to see him, to admire his wonderful mode of life, and to hear his preaching. On one occasion, as we read in the Gospel of St. John, the priests and Levites sent to ask him, "Who art thou?"<sup>3</sup> Art thou Elias, or perhaps the Messiah Himself? Still they

<sup>1</sup> Hæc omnia tibi dabo, si cadens adoraveris me.—Matth. iv. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Vade, satana, scriptum est enim: Dominum Deum tuum adorabis, et illi soli servis.—Ibid. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Tu quis es? John i. 19.

did not know exactly what he was. From this Christ took occasion to explain to them the great sanctity of His precursor, and to show them that it was not without reason that they went out to see such a great man. "What went you out to see? A prophet? Yea, I tell you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: Behold I send my angel before thy face who shall prepare thy way before thee." There are still prophets to be found here and there in the world, my dear brethren, to whom some people have recourse in certain circumstances to ask them for help and advice, and these latter might be asked in the words of Christ, "What went you out to see? A prophet?" Yes, but not a holy prophet. A prophet? Yes, but a false prophet, who under the pretence of giving you good advice, or helping you, devours your souls like a ravening wolf in sheep's clothing, and brings them to hell. It is my purpose to-day to warn all Christians against those false prophets. There are, etc.—*continues as above.*

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*TWENTY-NINTH SERMON.*

**ON THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF SUPERSTITION AND ITS MALICE.**

Subject.

There are different ways of practising superstition. What kind of a sin it is.—*Preached on the ninth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

*Domus mea domus orationis est. Vos autem fecistis illam speluncam latronum.*—Luke xix. 46.

"My house is a house of prayer. But you have made it a den of thieves."

Introduction.

Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold therein; and in another passage it is added, that He made a scourge and drove them out with it. And with

<sup>1</sup> Etiam dico vobis? Et plus quam prophetam. Hic est enim, de quo scriptum est: Ecce, ego mitto Angelum meum, ante faciem tuam, qui præparabit viam tuam ante te.—Matth. xi. 9, 10.

good reason too, for God was publicly dishonored in His own house; the holy place that was intended only for the humble adoration of the true God, was turned by the people into a market-place and a den of thieves. In spite of His meekness, our Lord could not tolerate this, and He was obliged to give expression to His anger and indignation. Our churches, my dear brethren, are far holier houses of God than the temple of Jerusalem was; but, alas, how often would it not be necessary for our Lord to take the scourge in His hand, and drive out those who dishonor them by all sorts of disrespectful conduct. It is not of that, however, that I mean to speak to-day. Besides the churches, God has another house on earth, namely, the holy Catholic Church, in which alone He receives proper homage and worship throughout the world. But in many places even this house of God is turned into a den of demons, by those who mix up with the true Christian service of God all kinds of diabolical juggleries. I allude to the superstitious practices, which are indulged in almost as a general custom in different places, to the great dishonor of God. Oh, would that I had a scourge to drive away from the house of God, and if it were possible, from every country, and to banish forever, not men, but the superstitious practices of so many simple-minded, ignorant and crack-brained people! Trusting in Thy help, O Jesus, which I beg of Thee through the merits of Thy Mother Mary, and the intercession of the holy angels guardian, I will at all events begin to speak against them.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*And I will now explain the different ways in which superstition is practised, and what kind of a sin it is. Such is the whole subject of to-day's sermon, my dear brethren, in the form of a catechetical instruction.*

May all those who know that they are guilty of this great sin, get the grace to repent of it.

What superstition is.

By superstitious practices, such as are in vogue amongst people nowadays, I mean those vain practices by which some try to forecast the future, or the use of certain means to a certain end; although the signs I observe and the means I use, have not of themselves any natural power to signify a future event, or to cause a certain effect, nor has any such power been given them by the Almighty God, nor by the Catholic Church through the prayers of the faithful, or in virtue of

ecclesiastical ceremonies. In all such practices I am guilty of the sin of superstition ; whether I use holy things, or things pertaining to devotion in them, or earthly and natural things ; and whether the event or the effect follows, or not.

Alas, how common this vice is nowadays, especially amongst ignorant and uneducated people ! Countless almost are the ways in which it is practised every day ; and as nearly every country has its particular language, dress and manners, so we find in almost every country special superstitious abuses. One thing I wish for to-day, and that is, to be able to describe the different superstitious customs at least of this country, so that I might place all their impious folly clearly before your eyes, and warn every one against them. For it is useless to preach in general terms against this vice ; useless to cry out that superstition is a most grievous sin against the first Commandment : “ I am the Lord Thy God. Thou shalt not have strange Gods before me ; ”<sup>1</sup> for what do ignorant people know about it ? They acknowledge that it is true ; but they do not know what superstition is. It is useless to try to explain to them, that superstition consists in using to a certain effect a means that has received no power from God or from the Church to produce that effect. You may tell them that a hundred times, and a thousand times at the back of that, but they will be just as wise as before. How can I know, they say, what natural power this or that thing I make use of, has ? It helps me to effect my purpose, and I want no more ; how it does so, I do not understand. I am not a learned man, and I do not want to understand it. How difficult it is to persuade such people of the truth ! Besides, since the superstitious means they use generally help them to the desired end, they get so blinded by the devil and by self-interest, that they refuse to see anything wrong in them ; nay, since sacred things, and apparently pious works, or at least sacred words and signs are often abused for superstitious purposes, these people become so confirmed in their bad habits, that they not only refuse to see anything wicked in them, but actually look upon them as good and holy, and, as we shall see later on, build on them their hopes of salvation. Therefore, in order to do any good, one should be able to point out one custom after the other, and say, this is not lawful, that is superstitious, if you attempt such a thing, you commit a grievous sin, etc. But it is useless for me to desire knowledge

It is a common vice.

<sup>1</sup> Ego sum Dominus Deus tuus. Non habebis Deos alienos coram me.—Exod. xx. 2, 3.

of that kind. Therefore, I will speak of those things as far as I have read of them in books or heard of them from others or learned them in the course of my own experience. From what I mean to say, all who have a little common sense, will easily be able to see by comparison, whether certain customs of theirs are superstitious or not; or at least they might find reason to doubt whether they are good and lawful, so that they may ask experienced people about them, and thus avoid the danger of committing sin.

Superstition consists in vain observations of certain signs, according to pagan custom.

In the first place then, the sin of superstition is committed when certain signs are looked on as portending a certain event. St. Augustine says of the converted Christians of his time, who had still some relics of paganism left: If two friends are walking together, and a dog runs between them, or a stone falls between them, or a child comes between them, they look on it as a sure sign that their friendship will soon be broken.<sup>1</sup> If one sneezes when putting on his shoes in the morning, it is taken as a sign of an unlucky day, and he goes to bed again. He who stumbles on the threshold of the door when going out, must go back at once, or else some misfortune will happen to him. If a black dog runs into the house, it is a sign that some one in that house will soon die. If the salt-cellar is upset at table, something dreadful is sure to happen. These and countless similar, vain and foolish observations, continues St. Augustine, are in vogue, and they are all sins of superstition, inventions of the devil and relics of old heathenism and idolatry.<sup>2</sup>

And according to the practice of our own times.

Are not the same vain observations prevalent amongst us Christians nowadays, my dear brethren? For instance, when people imagine that certain herbs have more virtue when plucked at night, at a certain hour, or on the feast of St. John; or when one is afraid to undertake a journey on a certain day, or to begin an important business, under the impression that it would be unlucky to do so? There are some who dare not spin or sew on Saturday or Thursday, because, as they say, it was on those days that the rope was made with which Judas hanged himself. It is looked on as certain that whatever is cut on St. Abdon's day will never grow again. From eggs that are laid on Holy Thursday, come fowl that change their color every year. On Christmas night an onion is divided into twelve parts, and exactly as the clock strikes twelve a pinch of salt is placed

<sup>1</sup> Si ambulatibus amicis lapis, aut canis, aut puer intercurret, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Et mille inanissimarum observationum commenta, etc.—S. Aug. l. 2, de doctr. christ.

on each part, to which is given the name of one of the months ; according as the salt melts or remains dry, it may be seen what months in the coming year will be dry or rainy. On New Year's eve a straw rope is tied round the trees, and they are wished a happy and fruitful year ; there is no doubt that after that they will bear abundance of fruit. Father Gobat testifies that in his time it was a common custom throughout Germany for young people who wished to get married, to take meal, water and salt, and make a loaf of it with their own hands, which they themselves had to bake and eat on the vigil of St. Andrew ; they then said a few short prayers in the four corners of the room, and laid down to sleep ; whoever they dreamt of during that sleep, was surely the person whom they were to marry. If two priests are saying Mass, and happen to elevate the Host at the same time, that denotes that some misfortune is about to occur. At certain seasons of the year the wolf must not be named, or else he will come and devour the sheep ; during that time he is called the monster. Some shepherds, in order to be perfectly safe, turn in a certain direction, and then the wolf cannot hurt their sheep. What is sown by the hand of an innocent child, grows best. If the bread that has been begged by the poor is purchased from them and given to hens, they will lay an egg every day. Medicine is never so likely to do a sick man good, after he has confessed and communicated ; it should be given him before. To prevent a dying person from having a long agony, his bed must be so placed, that he sees the planks of the floor in their length, and not cross-ways ; for then the soul can leave the body without trouble. To find out which one of a married couple will die first, count the letters of their names and surnames, and the one who has an uneven number of letters will be the first to die. If you hear a noise in your left ear, it is a sign that some dear friend is speaking, or thinking of you ; if in the right ear, it is a sign that some one is speaking ill of you. If thirteen sit down to table together, one of them will die before the end of the year. This foolish fancy has taken such hold, even of people who are otherwise sensible and well-educated, that if they happen to be one of a party of thirteen at table, they are not ashamed to stand up and go away, preferring to suffer hunger, rather than remain in such a case.

What foolish nonsense all this is ! What connection can there possibly be between such signs, and the effects that are expected to follow them ? What, for instance, to go according

These vain observations are all nonsense.

to what many otherwise intelligent people maintain to be true, is the reason that if thirteen sit down to dinner, one of them will die during the year? Why does not the same thing happen when thirteen horses or oxen are together in the same stable? Why does it not happen in those convents in which thirteen religious are living and eating the whole year round? It is all sheer nonsense; death is not influenced by a consideration of that kind; it comes, as Christ tells us, when we least expect it, and therefore He warns us all: "Be you then also ready; for at what hour you think not, the Son of man will come;"<sup>1</sup> All who believe in those foolish things are guilty of sin. It is a strange thing to think that there are people who speculate curiously about the articles of faith, and begin to doubt them, because they cannot understand them; and yet the same people are so addicted to stupid superstitions, as would excite the laughter of any one who has a little common sense, and that no amount of argument can induce them to give up. How well the devil has succeeded in blinding those people! And men are to be found too, who fear neither God, man, nor devil, and who live as if they were determined to be damned; and yet they are slaves to those vain observations. What folly that is!

Shown by  
an example.

Father Tamburini relates that in Sicily, where the belief holds regarding the thirteen at table, there were once thirteen canons of a cathedral who resolved to show how groundless that belief was, by sitting down to table together and enjoying themselves. But one of them did not like the business. You are too daring, he said to the others; if thirteen sit down together at table, one is sure to die during the year. I will have nothing to do with it; you may do as you like; but I will stay at home. But, as it happened, the only one of the number who died during the year, was he who remained at home. Suppose, now, my dear brethren, that he had allowed himself to be persuaded to join the others, would not his death be attributed to the fact of his having been one of the thirteen guests, and so have confirmed the superstition? A holy and Christian fear of God, says the Holy Ghost, despises all vain fears;<sup>2</sup> and he who loves God, says St. Augustine, will fear nothing in the world, so much as to offend God by sin.

Supersti-  
tious belief  
in dreams.

What has been said hitherto is also to be understood of the folly of believing in dreams. For instance, if you dream that

<sup>1</sup> Estote parati quia qua hora non putatis, Filius hominis veniet.—Luke xii. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Qui timet Dominum, nihil trepidabit.—Ecc. xxiv. 16.

you have lost a tooth, some one of your friends will soon die. If you dream of a fish it is also a sign of death, and so forth. The Wise Ecclesiasticus speaks against these superstitious observations, and calls them fancies of ignorant and foolish men: "The hopes of a man that is void of understanding, are vain and deceitful; and dreams lift up fools. The man that giveth heed to lying visions, is like him that catcheth at a shadow, and followeth after the wind."<sup>1</sup> And again: "Deceitful divinations and lying omens, and the dreams of evil-doers, are vanity. . . . Set not thy heart upon them; for dreams have deceived many, and they have failed that put their trust in them."<sup>2</sup> In the Old Law God expressly forbade believing in vain dreams: "You shall not divine, nor observe dreams."<sup>3</sup> But, it might be objected, there are many passages in the Sacred Scripture which show that the future is foretold in dreams, and those dreams actually came true. Thus, the Patriarch Joseph dreamt in his youth of his future exaltation; Pharaoh dreamt of the seven years of plenty and the seven years of famine; Nabuchodonosor saw in his dream of a tall tree, the punishment of his sins, and in the dream of the statue, the succession of the four great monarchies. So also one of the Madianite soldiers prophesied the victory of Gideon from a dream he had; and many instances similar to these are related. Does it not follow then, that there is often reason for believing in dreams, and that what they portend, really happens? To this I answer in the words of Ecclesiasticus; after saying, "Set not thy heart upon them," he adds, "Except it to be a vision sent forth from the Most High;"<sup>4</sup> that is, unless God for some important purpose chooses to reveal something in a dream. All those dreams in the Holy Scripture that I have mentioned, were in reality so many revelations, and as such deserved to be believed in. It happens occasionally too in our own days, that God, by means of the holy angels, terrifies the sinner in a dream, so that he may be induced to repent at once, or that he gives the good some idea of the eternal glory that awaits them. There is no doubt also, that people have often seen their dreams fulfilled. Thus Father Calinus writes of a young man in Rome, who dreamed that he

<sup>1</sup> *Vana spes et mendacium viro insensato; et somnia extollunt imprudentes. Quasi qui apprehendit umbram, et persequitur ventum.—Ecc. xxxiv. 1, 2.*

<sup>2</sup> *Divinatio erroris, et auguria mendacia, et somnia maleficientium, sanitas est. . . . Ne dederis in illis cor tuum; multos enim errare fecerunt somnia et exciderunt sperantes in illis.—Ibid. 5-7.*

<sup>3</sup> *Non augurabimini, nec observabitis somnia—Levit. xix. 26.*

<sup>4</sup> *Nisi ab Altissimo fuerit emissa visitatio.—Ecc. xxxiv. 6.*

had climbed upon a tree whose branches overhung the Tiber, and that he had fallen into the water, and was drowned. On the following day, he was standing on the bank of the river near the tree of which he had dreamt, and was relating to his companions the subject of his dream ; he then boldly climbed up the tree, but lost his footing, and missed his hold of the branch ; he fell into the river, and was drowned.' I myself knew a man, who dreamt of the manner of his death, and told his companions about it next day, to his and their great amusement, but on the afternoon of that day, he died, fulfilling in his death all the circumstances foretold in his dream. But these effects are not to be attributed to the dream, but to other natural causes. The young man fell down from the tree, not because he dreamt that he would fall ; but because he ventured into danger too boldly and lost his footing, and his hold of the branch. He was sensible enough in laughing at his dream ; but fool-hardy in climbing up the tree. He should not have ventured so far, not because of his dream, but because of the danger which he had no reason for encountering. Ordinary dreams are mere fancies, imaginary images depicted on the brain during sleep, which it would be a most superstitious and sinful folly to believe in.

**Vain observations of the hour of one's birth.**

Further, those observations are also foolish and superstitious, which are taken of the hour of one's birth. He who is born in a certain month, at a certain hour, under a certain constellation, will be happy all his life ; while he who is born in a different month, and at another hour, will be unhappy. Nay, from these observations predictions are made, as we see in some almanacs, as to who will be a priest, and who a layman, who will have a long, or a short life, who will die from natural causes, or through violence, etc. Now, in God's name, what connection is there between those things ? And yet there are people who believe so firmly in that nonsense, that they allow it to influence their mode of life ; so that many make themselves quite miserable through their excited imaginations, while others are so deeply impressed by the fear of misfortune, that they die a premature death. I knew a man, says Father Ambrose Cataneus, who when on his death-bed, could not be induced to make his confession because he believed, according to the scheme of his nativity, that he had still a long time to live ; but death proved that the prophecy was a false one, for it came at once and hurried his soul into

<sup>1</sup> P. Caes Callu.—Tom. 1. in Samuel. serm. 100.

eternity, and in all probability into hell. A married woman once happened to read in a book on astrology belonging to her husband, which she had taken up through curiosity, that if a woman who was born on a certain day were to get married, she should die in child-bed; this made her so anxious and nervous, that, although she had given birth to all her children without difficulty, she died during her next pregnancy through the effects of a too excited imagination. Such is the result of foolish superstitions. God is the Lord of Heaven and the Ruler of the stars, my dear brethren, and His inscrutable Providence has fixed the time of life and death for all of us. "My lots are in Thy hands,"<sup>1</sup> we must say with David; my happiness and my misfortune are in Thy power, O Lord, do Thou with me as Thou pleasest! But, some will say, if it is superstitious to observe signs and constellations, then it is superstition also for physicians to observe certain times and signs of the zodiac for blood-letting, or administering medicines; gardeners, too, are superstitious, because they go by the moon in sowing and planting, in cutting and pruning their trees; those who make almanacs are wrong in foretelling the weather, and whether it will be hot or cold, wet or dry on certain days, from the course of the sun and moon and the other heavenly bodies. And yet who will dare to condemn them? Oh, my dear brethren, it is a different thing altogether with those people; there is not the least doubt that the sun, the stars, and especially the moon have received from their Creator a certain influence on earthly bodies, and that they exercise that influence in a greater or lesser degree, according as they change their position with regard to the earth. Therefore all these observations are not superstitious, but are based on the natural properties of bodies, and are warranted by experience; although they are not always to be trusted in. Vain observations, on the contrary, have no power of producing the effects attributed to them, either from nature, from God, or from the Church.

Many sins are also committed through diabolical superstition, either to recover what one has lost, or to keep possession of what one has. Besides consulting the false prophets, of whom we have already spoken, when anything is stolen, people are wont to tie a knot on a piece of grass or something similar, with the belief that they thus bind the thief. If an animal is lost, they pull the leg out of a chair, and call out the name of the animal through the hole, and then it is sure to come back of its own ac-

Superstitious means to recover lost things, or to keep what one has.

<sup>1</sup> In manibus tuis sortes meæ.—Ps. xxx. 16.

cord. If a man's cattle or horses are dying, and he has reason to believe that their death is caused by witchcraft, he takes the heart of one of the dead animals, cooks it, and sticks it through with a fork, until the witch, who as he thinks, feels the pricking of the fork, is compelled to appear; the same thing is done when cows have been robbed of their milk through witchcraft. How, I ask, can those who are absent, feel the prick of the fork in that case, unless the devil has something to do with it? I have been told that it is a very common custom, when anything has been stolen, or any one has run away, to have a Mass said, which is called the bond-Mass, in the belief that the thief, or fugitive, if he has not already crossed a river, will not be able to go any farther, and will be compelled to return, while the thief will have to give back the stolen property. What nonsense that is? I wonder that a priest can be found to say Mass knowingly for such a purpose as that. The Mass is a most holy sacrifice, there is no doubt of that; but who has given it the power of stopping a thief, or a runaway? And if it has such a power, why can it not be exercised on one side of a river, as well as on the other? The idea is evidently a superstitious one. It is a good thing to have a Mass said in honor of St. Anthony of Padua, in order to recover lost property, provided it is done with a devout and humble confidence that God, through the merits of His holy and faithful servant, will restore what we have lost, if it is good for us. But it would be superstitious to believe that the Mass would infallibly have that effect. The same is to be said of other superstitious devotions, of which I shall speak more fully on another occasion. Shepherds and huntsmen have special practices of their own, to further their interests; such as, for instance, having recourse to some superstitious rite to prevent another man's gun from going off; making the sign of the cross, and saying some words to prevent another from hitting what he aims at. They also know how to employ counter charms when anything is the matter with their own gun. All these things, and several more of the kind are to be found in those little books on the Black Art, which, as they contain nothing but superstition, deserve to be burnt.

To find hid-  
den treas-  
ure.

Thirdly, superstition is practised by using certain means to discover hidden treasure. The best known of these is the divining rod; it is made of hazel wood, and if carried about in the hand, is said to bend down of its own accord, when it comes to the place in which there is water, gold, silver, or other metal hidden

in the earth. Most theologians do not, as a general rule, condemn the use of this rod as superstitious, provided that no superstitious words or signs accompany the use of it ; since the effect it produces, seems to be within the limit of natural powers, and might be ascribed to some vapors ascending from the water, or the metal, which have a special sympathy for the hazel rod ; just as the magnet attracts iron. Now it is the general opinion of the learned, and amongst them are St. Augustine, Layman, Suarez, Sanchez, and others, that we must not ascribe to the devil an effect that can easily be attributed to the forces of nature, although we cannot exactly say how those forces operate. But if, when these rods are being cut, or used, certain words are pronounced, or circumstances observed which have no natural power to help in producing the effect desired, there is no doubt that the whole business is tainted with superstition ; and that is generally the case nowadays. Besides, the use of this rod is superstitious when it is employed to discover not only water, or metals, but also clothing and other things ; because it is impossible to believe that the hazel rod has a sympathy for all sorts of things.

Fourthly, sins of superstition are most frequently committed in healing, or preventing the diseases of men and beasts. I will not say anything now of those suspicious characters who go about healing wounds and diseases by all sorts of blessing and crosses or by saying certain words, or writing them on a piece of paper, who heal the wounds of absent people by rubbing a sword with ointment, or tying it up, etc. These people belong to the false prophets of whom I have already spoken. To stop the flow of blood, two straws are placed on the ground in the form of a cross, and a drop of blood allowed to fall on them ; the flow of blood must at once cease. Warts are cured by making as many knots on a piece of thread as there are warts ; the thread is then buried, and as the knots rot away in the ground, so do the warts fall off. To get rid of a tooth-ache, or of a fever, you must throw pebbles or peas into a well, and run away before you hear the splash they make when falling into the water. Fevers can also be cured by writing certain letters on a leaf of sage, and hanging it round the neck ; or else it must be hung on the neck of a young frog, that one has come across by chance, but not looked for purposely ; or else, according to a plan that is followed in other illnesses also, a copper coin is thrown into a dish, while the names of several saints are repeated ; the saint whose name is being repeated when the coin falls out of the dish, is the one in

To cure diseases.

whose honor a Mass is to be said. To get rid of a goitre, you must stand in the moon-light, place your hand on the goitre, and say : May what I feel, disappear. There are numberless other tomfooleries of that description, which I am actually ashamed to mention. We can only pity the blindness, folly and malice of the many who put their faith in such absurdities, to such a degree, that they do not see how impossible it is for the means they make use of to produce the effect required, unless by diabolical intervention. And yet these customs obtain in Christian countries, in which sermons and instructions are so frequent ! Would it not be enough to make our Lord weep, if He were to look down on many of our towns and villages, and see the number of ignorant, simple people, who are given to the practice of these superstitious absurdities ?

Every kind of superstition is a grievous sin : because thereby the devil is appealed to.

The question now is, are those observations and practices grievous sins ? There is no doubt of it, I answer, unless in the case of inculpable ignorance. Do you wish to know what sort of sins they are ? Try to recall what I said about those who consult false prophets to get advice from them and to be cured of their diseases ; they are guilty of asking help from the devil, and there is no doubt that they commit a most grievous and intolerable sin. The same is to be said of all superstitious practices ; because by them a secret contract is entered into with the devil, the sworn enemy of God and man ; for since those observations, signs and usages have no power of themselves, or from God, or from the Church, to produce the effects intended, they must necessarily produce them by the aid of the devil, who makes use of them as a means of deceiving souls. But, as a last objection, some one will say, how can there be a compact with the devil, since when I have recourse to them, I do not desire any help from him ? Truly, I answer, when you know that these practices are superstitious, you do not expressly ask the devil to help you ; but you do so implicitly and by your acts. Two people go to take a walk out of town ; on the way they get thirsty. Oh, they say, what a pity we have not something to drink. A little further on they see a house with a garland of ivy, or a green bush hanging outside the door. Oh, they say, we are all right ; we can get wine there. But how do they know that ? How could a garland of ivy teach me that wine is to be had in the house ? Certainly the garland has not that power of itself : but since it has been once for all agreed upon that such a thing hung outside the door, is a sign that wine is to be had with-

in, I know at once when I see it, what it means. It is the same, my dear brethren, with superstitious practices. The devil made an agreement once for all, with those agents of his who first began these practices; thus, for instance, he said, whoever shall say such and such words, or do this or that in certain circumstances, shall be looked on by me as desiring my help. As soon therefore, as those words are spoken, or those actions performed, the devil comes at once, as if at a given signal; just as a servant comes when his master whistles for him. Hence when I knowingly have recourse to such practices, it is the same as if I said: I know that whoever does this will be helped by the devil; I do it now in order to get help from him too. It is in this, according to St. Thomas, that the malice of superstition consists; and that is the reason why the evil spirit, who always grudges the Almighty the honor shown Him, and tries to deprive Him of it whenever he can, has introduced into the world so many different superstitious customs, and has taken such pains to keep them alive amongst the ignorant; for in that way he succeeds in depriving God of the adoration due to Him, gradually lessens men's confidence in God, and leads them on imperceptibly, even by means of a hypocritical piety, to commit other sins, to live on in the state of sin, and to die impenitent.

Hence, if any of the clergy, who have the cure of souls, are here present, I would earnestly implore of them, for the sake of God's honor and glory, frequently to instruct their parishioners, in the country districts especially, for there it is most necessary, in sermons and catechetical instructions on the grievousness and malice of this vice, to explain to them the different ways in which one can be guilty of it, and to deter them from it by threats of temporal as well as eternal punishment. I have another request to make of the ignorant and uninstructed, and that is, that if they have the least doubt in matters of this kind, they will not act until they have explained it to their confessor, or pastor. Finally, we must all profit by the warning that St. Paul addresses to the Galatians, regarding vain observations of certain times and days: "But now, after that you have known God, or rather are known by God: how turn you again to the weak and needy elements, which you desire to serve again? You observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest perhaps I have labored in vain among you."<sup>1</sup>

Conclusion  
and exhortation to  
avoid this  
vice, and to  
help others  
to avoid it.

<sup>1</sup> Nunc autem, cum cognoveritis Deum, immo cogniti sitis a Deo: quomodo convertimini iterum ad infirma et egena elementa, quibus denuo servire vultis? Dies observatis et mensis, et tempora et annos. Timeo vos, ne forte sine causa laboraverim in vobis.—Gal. iv. 9-11.

In the same way, my dear brethren, should each one of us think ; God has called me by His admirable light to the one true Church, in which I must place all my confidence, and adore and love a God of infinite power, goodness and wisdom ; I have been born of Catholic parents, in a Catholic country : shall I then be so superstitious, so foolish, so wicked, as to occupy myself with such nonsensical practices, and make common cause with the devil ? No, I protest with St. Ambrose, “ Far from the servants of God be all superstition.”<sup>1</sup> I wish to serve God and to adore Him alone ; not with lies and follies ; but, as the Saviour says, in spirit and truth ; that I may one day adore Him in that place where faith shall have an end, and I shall see Him face to face. Amen.

*Another Introduction to the same sermon for the first  
Sunday of Advent.*

**Text.**

*Erunt signa in sole, et luna stellis.*—Luke **xxi.** 25.

“ There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars.”

What sort of signs shall be seen in Heaven, at which men shall wither away for fear ? Christ describes them in the Gospel of last Sunday ; “ The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from Heaven.”<sup>2</sup> And what shall these terrible signs portend, what have men to understand from them ? That the last day of the world is at hand, and that the Son of man shall soon come to judge the living and the dead. “ And they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of Heaven.”<sup>3</sup> But what connection is there between those signs, and the end of the world and the coming of the Judge ? When the sun was darkened in Egypt long ago, and again at the death of our Lord, nothing of the kind was portended. Besides, the moon is often seen to be blood-red, and the stars change, without our attaching any such meaning to the prodigy. It is true, my dear brethren, that those disturbances of the heavenly bodies have no power of themselves to betoken an effect of that kind ; but since by divine revelation those changes of the planets are to be taken as a

<sup>1</sup> *Longe, longe a servis Dei debet esse omnis superstitio.*

<sup>2</sup> *Sol obscurabitur, et luna non dabit lumen suum, et stellæ cadent de cælo.*—*Math.* **xxiv.** 29.

<sup>3</sup> *Et videbunt Filium hominis venientem in nubibus cæli.*—*Ibid.* 30.

certain sign of the approach of the general Judgment ; therefore we must believe in that sign, and when men see it they will have just cause to tremble with fear. Ah, Christians, would that we were equally anxious to find out the truth in all other things that pertain to our faith ! If we were, there would not be so many shameful abuses to disgrace the Church of God. I allude to those superstitious practices which have become almost a general custom in many places, and those vain and foolish observations, by which people try to divine future events from certain signs, and to produce certain effects by means that are utterly inadequate. Oh, who will give me arms to combat, not men, but, etc.—*continues as before.*

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### THIRTIETH SERMON.

#### ON SUPERSTITION IN SACRED THINGS.

##### Subject.

How superstition may be committed by prayers, devotions and holy things, and how to discern when a devotion is superstitious.—*Preached on the tenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

##### Text.

*Jejuno bis in sabbato, decimas de omnium, quæ possideo.*—  
Luke xviii. 12.

“I fast twice in a week ; I give tithes of all that I possess.”

##### Introduction.

Prayer is a salutary work ; fasting, a meritorious work ; alms-giving, a holy work ; and yet, in spite of them all, the Pharisee, as we read in to-day's Gospel, did not succeed in pleasing God. A public sinner, who could not boast of having done any of those things, and whose vices were well known, was justified before him. What is the reason of this difference, my dear brethren ? Just as one instrument that is out of tune with the others spoils the music of a whole orchestra, so one single bad circumstance destroyed all these good works of the Pharisee, and made them incapable of pleasing God, and that was his pride and hypocrisy. Ah, Christians, when God, the all-seeing, will judge our good works, many of them, I fear, will be rejected as worthless, nay, will be condemned as sinful, al-

though they now appear to be praiseworthy, meritorious and holy, because they are spoiled by some hidden defect. It is not my intention to-day to speak of the different defects which destroy good works ; of such defects as, for instance, the state of sin, hypocrisy, a bad intention, the want of good intention, laziness and sloth, and so forth. I shall continue the subject I spoke on in my last sermon, when I explained the different kinds of superstition that are practised by means of natural things. But even prayer, and apparently holy actions, and exercises of devotion, and the most holy things, can be, and very often are abused for superstitious purposes, not only by pious people through ignorance and simplicity, but also by the wicked through malice and with a bad intention ; and thus these things are used, not to honor God, but to do homage to the devil. To prevent the ignorant, the uninstructed, and the credulous from falling into this intolerable error, and to tear the cloak off all kinds of superstition, I shall explain this at length in to-day's sermon, or rather catechetical instruction.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*How superstition may be committed by prayers, devotions and holy things, and how to discern when a devotion is superstitious. Such is the whole subject.*

O God, open our eyes, that we may henceforth adore Thee alone, as is right, in spirit and truth, and so reject even the least shade of superstition, that the devil may never have the least part of the honor that is due to Thee ; this we ask of Thee through the merits of Mary, Thy Mother, and the holy angels guardian.

Why the devil wishes to have holy things used for superstitious purposes.

It is an old saying, that where God has a Church, the devil builds a chapel. This proud spirit of lies, who is still envious of the honor shown to God, and tries to lessen it in every possible way, caused himself to be adored as the true God by the blind heathens ; but his attempts in that way have been greatly frustrated by our Lord and His Apostles and servants. And what does the wicked spirit try to do now ? He leaves no stone unturned in his efforts to preserve amongst Christians, and to spread throughout the world some relics of ancient idolatry. When the head of a family dies, his portrait is carefully preserved as a memento of him. In the same way, the devil, after idolatry was nearly extinct throughout the world, and reasoning beings had ceased to adore the sun and the stars, and stocks, and stones,

and dumb animals as their gods, tries to preserve at least the memory of that horrible vice in its portrait, that is, in all kinds of foolish and superstitious practices. But even in this he is not always successful with pious and fairly instructed Christians, who, as we have seen already, put no faith in vain observations and superstitious practices. He, therefore, hides his wickedness under a cloak that one would be least likely to suspect of concealing it; that is to say, he tries to deceive the pious by an appearance of holiness, and to lead them on to the vice of superstition by devotion and holy things, nay, even by the sign of the cross, which is so often used to put him to flight. Thus, since he cannot prevent the true God from being adored, he endeavors at least to prevent men from honoring and adoring Him as He wishes.

This he effects by what theologians call a superfluous worship, and a false devotion, that is, one that is not ordained by God, nor approved of by the Church, nor in accordance with the general custom of the Church; or else it consists in attributing to certain prayers and works of piety, a power and efficacy which they have not of themselves, and have not received from God, or from the Church. It is generally women who allow themselves to be deceived by the devil in this way. A certain noble lady, as Father Caesar Cataneus relates, whose only and dearly loved little son was sick, came to a priest of our Society for consolation and advice in her affliction. Father, said she, a certain pious person, who has received special lights from God, has told me of a very efficacious form of devotion, by which I shall certainly be able to secure the recovery of my child; but, influenced probably by humility, and the desire of concealing the divine favors, the person charged me strictly not to say a word of this to any one. What is the devotion, asked the priest. I must have a Mass said, answered the lady, in honor of the Blessed Trinity. Very good indeed, rejoined the priest, the holy Sacrifice is of infinite value; the most Blessed Trinity is infinitely good and powerful; it would be a very good thing to have the Mass said. But why make such a secret of it? Oh, because the Mass has to be said under certain circumstances. In the Blessed Trinity we adore one true God in three distinct Persons; but three and one written in succession make thirty-one; therefore the priest who says the Mass must be exactly thirty-one years old. Again, one and three written in succession make thirteen; therefore the Mass-server must be exactly thirteen years old.

How that  
can be done  
even with  
the Holy  
Mass.  
Shown by  
an example.

Very good ; and is that all ? No, there must be three candles on the altar, and the Mass must begin exactly at nine o'clock ; because three times three are nine ; thus the hour, the priest, the Mass-server, and the candles on the altar all clearly signify the mystery of the Blessed Trinity. Oh, said the father laughing, if that is the idea, I could suggest something much better. Have a High-Mass sung with deacon and subdeacon, and let them all be thirty-one years old ; then there will be three of them on the altar ; besides that, you might have nine choristers, who, like the Mass-server, are also thirteen years old ; and in addition you can have the bell rung three times for Mass ; in that way the Blessed Trinity will be far more honored, and will doubtless be compelled to restore your son's health. It is all nonsense, my good lady, and nothing but superstition. The special lights that your pious acquaintance has received are not from God, but from the spirit of lies. What, in the name of goodness, have the number and those other circumstances to do with the Holy Mass ? The holy Sacrifice has the same value and efficacy, whether it is said at seven, or at nine o'clock ; whether the priest is forty-one, or thirty-one years old ; and whether there are three, four, or two candles on the altar. Go away with your devotion ; if you want to offend God by a grievous mortal sin, and to cure your child by the help of the devil, then you can do as you say. Thus he dismissed the simple-minded lady. The General Council of Trent condemned<sup>1</sup> a custom of that kind, which was then in vogue amongst the people. It was a current belief that the souls in Purgatory could best be helped by seven Masses at which seven candles were to be lighted, and moreover, alms were to be given to the poor seven times. No Catholic doubts that the Mass is the real and holy Sacrifice of our religion, in which Jesus Christ, as the Eternal Priest, offers to His heavenly Father His own Flesh and Blood, and thereby shows Him infinite honor ; therefore nothing is more powerful in satisfying for the sins of the living and the dead, and blotting out the punishment due to them, than the holy Mass ; but that power does not come from a certain number of Masses, but from the infinite value of the Sacrifice that is offered.

The first rule for discerning whether a devotion is superstitious.

The following is a general rule, my dear brethren, by which you can see whether there is anything that savors of superstition in even the holiest practices of devotion. Whenever there is an obligation to observe a certain time and hour, a certain number,

<sup>1</sup> Conc. Trid. de reform.—Sess. 21.

a certain posture in standing or sitting ; for instance, a certain prayer or devotion, no matter how holy it is, must be said, or performed on a certain day at sunrise, at a certain altar, in a certain church, kneeling on a stone; the sign of the Cross has to be made so many times, and so many Our Fathers have to be said ; so that if the time, place, number and manner be not strictly observed, the prayer, or devotion will lose its efficacy ; that is a manifest proof of a shameful superstition. It is far different with the public devotions approved of by the Church ; for instance the devotion of the nine Tuesdays in honor of St. Anthony of Padua, and that of the ten Fridays in honor of St. Francis Xavier, the Apostle of the Indies ; on which days it is the custom to confess and communicate, in order to receive the grace of God through the intercession and merits of those great Saints. Still, if even in this case one were so to put his faith in a certain number or a certain day, that if he missed Confession, or Communion on one of the nine or ten days, or if he did not confess on the Tuesday or Friday, he would think that his devotions were of no good ; then he would be guilty of a superstitious error. (I must beg of you, my dear brethren, to pay particular attention to what I am saying, so that no one may accuse me afterwards of disparaging those devotions.) They are most praiseworthy devotions, and are appointed for the good of souls ; but it would be superstition to attach their merit and efficacy to certain days, or a certain number of days. It is always a good and holy work to confess and communicate in honor of a saint, provided it is done with proper preparation and devotion ; and the oftener it is done, the more pleasing it is to the saint ; but a fixed number of Tuesdays or Fridays, has nothing to do with it. The devotion to St. Francis Xavier, is fixed to ten Fridays, for those who have the opportunity of practising it, in memory of the ten years he labored for the conversion of the heathens in India. The Friday is chosen in preference to another day, on account of the tender love that St. Francis had for Jesus Crucified. Otherwise Confession and Communion on a Sunday, in honor of this Saint, is just as meritorious as on a Friday.

Another general rule for detecting superstition in prayers and holy things, is, when an infallible power and efficacy is attributed to them. Thus, many carry about with them, and repeat daily the Gospel of St. John, with other holy words and many signs of the Cross, in order to make themselves bullet-proof. This is one of the most impious superstitions, and can well be

Another  
rule.

looked on as a compact with the devil. Again, certain written and printed papers are frequently to be seen, which are called "Domestic Blessings and Prayer Books;" they are even hung up openly in houses, and bound with real prayer books; and they contain certain strange characters, crosses, outlandish names of God and the angels, sacred words taken from Scripture and even terrible exorcisms to be used against the devil. In one of those books I recently saw the following words: "the dream of our Lady;" "a letter from God;" "a letter found in the sepulchre at Jerusalem;" "the shield of the spirit;" "a beautiful and well authorized holy blessing to be used against all one's enemies by land and water;" "a beautiful blessing to be used when one goes out, in which the day and night are to be named," etc. He who hangs this up in his house, or carries it about his person, and says the prayers contained therein daily, shall be free from accident by land and water, shall be safe from fire, and from sorcerers, witches, thieves and robbers; he shall not die by violence, nor shall he die an unhappy death; women who carry it about them, shall be saved from the perils of child-bed, etc. The Pope's name too is often printed in those books, and he is said to have approved of those prayers and blessings, and to have sent them to others; sometimes they bear the bishop's name as a sign of approval, as well as the name of the town in which they were printed, the publisher who issued them, etc. Thus ignorant people are convinced that those prayers are holy and of infallible efficacy. In those books is also to be found a superstitious promise, to the effect that, he who says the Our Father and Hail Mary daily seven times, and continues to say them until they have reached the number of drops of blood that our Lord shed during His scourging, will certainly go to Heaven. All this is a barefaced lie, my dear brethren, and a deceit of the devil; and such books and prayers deserve nothing better than to be burned as a mark of the contempt in which they should be held.

By such things the devil betrays and misleads numbers of souls.

Of those who give such books and blessings to others, or advise them to get them, or who sell them, or, what is still worse, publish them to the eternal ruin of thousands of souls, who in their simplicity believe in them, and trust their salvation to them, of those, in order to put every one on his guard against them, we might justly use the words in which God complained to the Prophet Jeremias of similar superstitious people, and warned His own people against them: "Therefore hearken not

to your prophets and diviners, and dreamers, and soothsayers, and sorcerers. . . . For they prophesy lies to you : to remove you far away from your country, and cast you out, and to make you perish. For I have not sent them, saith the Lord : and they prophesy in my name falsely ; to drive you out, and that you may perish.”<sup>1</sup> The same I say in the name of the Lord to you Christians. You must not listen to such advisers, nor believe in them ; for they tell you nothing but lies, to keep you out of your heavenly country, and to bring you to eternal ruin by means of the superstitious hope to which you intrust your salvation. But, the ignorant will say, there is no harm in those prayers and books ; they contain holy words to bless one’s self with ; they are good against witchcraft, and sorcery, nay, even against the devil himself. I answer that no one can defeat one witchcraft by another, and drive the devil away by the devil’s own art. The holier the words, the greater the sin of superstition ; for holy words that should be used to honor God alone, are degraded and dishonored by being used in the service of the devil. That is what the proud enemy of God wishes ; that is the way in which he conceals his wiles ; he mingles holy things with his juggleries, in order the better to deceive and lead astray the ignorant and credulous.

It is not enough for the fisherman merely to cast his hook and line into the water ; if he did no more than that, he would be a long time without getting a bite. He must have good bait, such as the fishes are fond of, and cover the hook well with it, and then cast his line where he knows the fish to be. To kill flies in a room, you must disguise the taste of the poison by sugar, or honey, or sweet milk. In that way the wily fiend acts, as St. John Chrysostom says. If he were to propose to pious people his superstitious practices, which have clearly no power in themselves to produce the desired effect, he would not succeed in catching one of them, nor in making one of them believe in him ; and so he prepares a more agreeable bait for them. “In order to induce them to take the poison, he mixes honey with it. He brings in the name of Christ into his incantations,”<sup>2</sup> and deludes them largely with apparently holy ceremonies ; and he

Shown by a  
simile.

<sup>1</sup> Vos ergo nolite audire prophetas vestros, et divinos, et somnatores, et augures, et maleficos . . . quia mendacium prophetant vobis, ut longe vos faciant de terra vestra, et ejiciant vos, et pereatis. Quia non misi eos, ait Dominus, et ipsi prophetant in nomine meo mendaciter, ut ejiciant vos, et pereatis.—Jer. xxvii. 9, 10, 15.

<sup>2</sup> Ut det venenum, addit mellis aliquantulum, miscet præcantationibus nomen Christi.—E. Chrysost. Tract. 10 in Joan. hom. 21 ad pop. Antioch.

promises those who use them, not only temporal prosperity, but also a happy death, and the salvation of their souls, which of course must be followed by the happiness of Heaven. In this way he catches souls without number.

How and why men should be on their guard against them.

If you wish to know, my dear brethren, what kind of prayers are to be classed with those superstitious blessings already mentioned, you have only to see whether the name of God is frequently mentioned in unknown languages, and whether any false assertion is connected with it ; such as, for instance, “ Christ has had the fever ; ” whether anything ridiculous is said of God, of the angels, or of the saints, such as the prayer that children say at night ; “ four corners on my bed, four holy angels overspread, etc. ; ” whether the sign of the Cross has to be made otherwise than according to the custom of the Church, on the hand, shoulder, or knee, for instance, a certain number of times ; whether they contain all kinds of ciphers and crosses that are not approved of by the Catholic Church ; whether they say this prayer, or blessing must be carried about with one, and must be said daily, etc. If you see anything of that kind throw the thing away at once ; it is suspicious, and is worth nothing. All those too, who possess such books and prayers, are bound to destroy them, lest others should be deceived and betrayed by them. If you have a reasonable doubt about them, ask the advice of some qualified person, before you make use of them. The reason of all this is clear ; neither the collection of words, nor the ciphers, nor the paper on which they are printed can have the least power, naturally, to effect the promised result ; neither has the Catholic Church approved of those books or papers, whatever lies they may contain to the contrary ; much less has God revealed that those things have the power ascribed to them ; therefore, if I try to give them that power by believing in them, I use them as a sign to show that I desire help from the devil ; hence to believe in them, and use them for the object they profess to be able to accomplish, is nothing else but a vile superstition.

It is far different with holy things and prayers that are approved of by the Church.

It might be objected that it is customary to wear relics of the saints, Agnus Deis, and other blessed objects, in the belief that they are a safeguard against witchcraft, and other evils. There are letters of St. Donatus against thunderstorms, pictures of St. Ignatius Loyola against spectres, horns of St. Hubert against mad dogs, letters of the three Magi for travellers, and many more of the same kind. Priests also have certain prayers to ex-

orcise the devil, and to banish witchcraft. These too are nothing but words, prayers and paper. How can they have the power attributed to them? Or must we look on them too, as superstitious? No, by no means. The fact that they are approved by the Church should alone suffice to convince us that they are above suspicion, and are intended for really pious purposes. Besides, the efficacy of those things does not consist, nor must it be supposed to consist in the letters, pictures, words, or prayers; but when the effect follows, it must be ascribed to the blessing of the Church which is given them by a priest, a bishop, or the Pope. The letters and pictures produce their effect through the saints of God, who by their intercession obtain from God the favor required, as a reward for the love, devotion, and confidence shown towards them by those who wear their relics, or the pictures and letters that have touched their relics. Moreover, we do not place full confidence in those things, nor attribute an infallible efficacy to them. I am not sure, for instance, that I shall not be killed by lightning, because I wear a picture of St. Donatus; nor am I infallibly certain that I shall not be hurt by witchcraft, although I wear relics and an Agnus Dei; and so on for the rest. Nor is it said of those things as of the superstitious objects already mentioned, "he who wears this, will be protected from such and such an evil;" the inscription on them is generally in the form of a prayer: "Pray for us St. Donatus, that we may be protected from lightning." So that I do not place an infallible trust in them; but merely hope firmly that God and his saints will help me in my necessities, and will deliver me from all evil both of soul and body; a help that they very often give.

There are, besides, certain prayer books which contain prayers that are good enough in themselves, but to the recitation of which are attached infallible promises of all kinds; for example: he who recites this prayer daily, may expect, when on his death-bed, to see the Mother of God, according to her promise; or, he will not die without the last sacraments; or, Christ will be merciful to him in his last moments; or, he will soon be freed from Purgatory; or even, he will not be damned. Now, what are we to think of these prayers? As far as I am concerned (and I think all sensible people will agree with me), they may be good enough in themselves, and I would not forbid any one to say them; but the promises connected with them I would not give a straw for; because they are mere claptrap invented to de-

What we are to think of the promises attached to certain prayers in some prayer books.

ceive the inexperienced, and to give them a foolish confidence of salvation, on the strength of which they often lead an impious life, thinking that they cannot be lost as long as they say those prayers daily. And I must confess my own shortcomings in this respect too, my dear brethren. In my early youth (I knew no better at the time) I had a short extract from one of those prayer books to which certain promises were attached. When I think of it, I wonder at my zeal in prayer in those days ! I would not on any account go to bed at night, without having said that prayer during the day ; and I firmly believed that I was sure of going to Heaven, no matter how I lived, or what I did ; until at last my own reason, helped by the instructions of others, made me aware of the error I was guilty of, and I threw the prayer aside. They who believe in such promises, should remember the warning of our Lord : “ Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven ; but he that doth the will of my Father,” he who leads a good and holy life, and perseveres to the end, “ he shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven.”<sup>1</sup> Where did those prayers get the authority to promise me that I would make a good Confession, and die a happy death ? God could not have revealed that, because He says that a happy death is due to final perseverance alone. If He had revealed it, and really promised a happy death as a reward for saying those prayers, then the conclusion I came to, when I was a child, regarding them, would have been correct ; namely, I can live as I please, provided I say those prayers regularly I am sure of Heaven. No, my dear brethren, that is not the way to go to Heaven. To pin one’s faith to such things, and trust one’s salvation to them, is very closely related to superstition.

What the faith is, that Christ says we must have in prayer.

But, you will say, does not God tell us all to pray, and does He not generally add that we must believe ? He says in the Gospel of St. Mark : “ All things, whatsoever you ask when you pray, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come unto you ; ”<sup>2</sup> The most excellent quality of fervent prayer is faith and confidence of being heard ; cannot one then, and must one not put his faith in prayer, without being guilty of superstition ? Certainly, my dear brethren. But on what does our faith and confidence in prayer repose ? Not on certain

<sup>1</sup> Non omnis, qui dicit mihi : Domine, Domine, intrabit in regnum cœlorum ; sed qui facit voluntatem Patris mei . . . ipse intrabit in regnum cœlorum.—Matth. vii. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Omnia quaecumque orantes petitis, credite, quia accipietis, et evenient vobis.—Mark xi. 24.

words that we utter ; but on the infallible promises and faithfulness of God, who has promised to give me everything that is necessary for my soul not on account of certain words, but on account of the fervor, humility and perseverance of my prayer. Pray then, and pray humbly and fervently, and God will grant you a happy death. Believe also, and have a firm confidence that God will give you that grace, provided you strive for it during life ; for that is the condition on which it is accorded. Pray, and pray fervently for the grace to live well and to be faithful in the love and service of God to the end ; believe and have a firm confidence that God will give you grace enough to remain constant, provided you co-operate with it. This is another condition that must be fulfilled. And all this you will get from God, whether you pray with the lips, or with the heart, and whether you use this form of words, or that. Therefore, a certain form of words has nothing at all to do with the efficacy of prayer, much less can it make one sure of salvation.

Therefore, they believe and hope in vain, who expect to find salvation by such means. What blindness and folly ! What madness to deceive one's self by superstitious practices of any kind ! For, whom do they expect help from ? From the devil, and no one else ; as we have seen already. And why should I ally myself with that wretched and powerless spirit, who of himself cannot give me the least assistance ? For the devil can do nothing, my dear brethren, unless what God permits him to do, nor can he exceed by a hair's breath the divine permission as to circumstances of time, place or manner. You may read in the Holy Scriptures of this spirit of lies speaking by the mouths of four hundred false prophets, in order to deceive King Achab ; but he had first to ask and receive permission from God to that effect : " I will go forth," he said to God, " and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And the Lord said : Thou shalt deceive him and shalt prevail : go forth, and do so."<sup>1</sup> You will find that he is a cruel spirit, who excites all the elements against the pious Job ; but not before he had asked permission from God to torment that wonderful man ; nor dared he advance a single step, until this permission was accorded him. For, first of all he got leave to attack Job in his worldly goods, but on the express condition of not hurting his body : " All that he hath is in thy hand," said

*How foolish to expect help from the devil through superstition of any kind.*

<sup>1</sup> Egrediar, et ero spiritus mendax in ore omnium prophetarum ejus. Et dixit Dominus : Decipies, et prævalebis : egredere, et fuc ita. -III. Kings xxii. 22.

the Lord to him ; “ only put not forth thy hand upon his person.”<sup>1</sup> After that God gave him permission to torment his body also, but on condition that he would do nothing against the soul : “ And the Lord said to Satan : Behold, he is in thy hand ; but yet save his life.”<sup>2</sup> You will find him an unclean spirit, who wished to enter into a herd of swine ; but not even that could he do until Christ gave him leave : “ And the spirits besought Him,” as we read in the Gospel of St. Mark, “ saying : Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them. And Jesus immediately gave them leave. And the unclean spirits going out, entered into the swine.”<sup>3</sup> See, my dear brethren, what little power the devil has ; he cannot hurt even swine, unless God allows him to do so. How much less then, can he hurt, or help man, who is made to the image of God ! Certainly, if he were able, he would endeavor to help his most faithful servants in their necessities, I mean sorcerers and witches who are in prison under sentence of death. But he is forced to acknowledge his want of power ; for God, who rules the world by His all-wise Providence, and who generally helps those who have to administer justice, does not allow the devil, generally speaking, to help those people in such circumstances, or to free them from the hands of justice. And I ask again, am I to put my confidence in such a weak creature, while I offend the true God by superstitious practices, and drive away from me Him who alone has the power and the will to serve my best interests ?

Conclusion  
and exhortation to  
avoid superstition and  
trust in God  
and serve  
Him alone.

Therefore, my dear brethren, I say to you with David : “ Trust in the Lord, and do good ; and dwell in the land, and thou shalt be fed with its riches. Delight in the Lord, and He will give thee the requests of thy heart.”<sup>4</sup> Away with everything, prayers, devotions and holy things, which savor of superstition. When the plague has left a town, the inhabitants are wont to burn all their bedding and clothes, no matter how beautiful and costly they are, so as to destroy the least remnant of infectious matter, and to avert all danger of the plague return-

<sup>1</sup> *Universa, quæ habet, in manu tua sunt : tantum in eum ne extendas manum tuam.*—Job i. 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Dixit ergo Dominus ad Satan : Ecce in manu tua est : verumtamen animam illius serva.*—*Ibid.* ii. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Et deprecabantur eum spiritus dicentes : Mitte nos in porcos, ut in eos introeamus. Et concessit eis statim Jesus. Et exeuntes spiritus immundi introierunt in porcos.*—Mark vi. 12, 13.

<sup>4</sup> *Spera in Domino, et fac bonitatem : et inhabita terram, et pasceris in divitiis ejus. Delectare in Domino : et dabit tibi petitiones cordis tui.*—Ps. xxxvi. 3, 4.

ing. In the same way, since our Lord has banished idolatry from the greater part of the earth, all the relics of this service of the devil should be burnt; that is, everything that has the least sign of superstition should be rejected, no matter how holy it appears to be. Let us put our hope in the Lord, in His infinite goodness and mercy, and in the intercession and merits of Mary, and of the angels and saints. But we must not be content with that alone; "Trust in the Lord, and do good;" do not only that which is good in itself, but that which will make you good. To hear Mass, and say the rosary, and give alms, are good works; but if you do them in the state of mortal sin, they will not make you good, nor will they help you much to salvation. With a good prayer on our lips, and confidence in our hearts, and good works in our hands, we shall find out the truth of the words: "How good is God to Israel, to them that are of a right heart;"<sup>1</sup> to those who serve Him constantly with faithful hearts. We shall find that the Lord can help us in our necessities, better than the spirit of lies, and that He can confer greater benefits on us. We shall find that he who trusts in the Lord, and serves Him, and loves Him above all things with all his heart, will not be confounded forever. Amen.

*Another Introduction to the same sermon for the fourth Sunday of Advent.*

Text.

*Vox clamantis in deserto: Parate viam Domini: rectas facite semitas ejus.*—Luke iii. 4.

"A voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord; make straight His paths."

Who is it who was crying out in the wilderness? He of whom the Gospel says: "The word of the Lord was made unto John, the Son of Zachary."<sup>2</sup> Therefore he was not one of those false prophets, who are ravening wolves in sheep's clothing, and who by their diabolical advice and help, bring souls to destruction, as we have seen already; but he was a true prophet, called to that office by the voice of God, to instruct the people. What did he teach? "Prepare ye the way of the Lord; make straight His paths." Mark these words, my dear brethren; "Make straight;" the path of the Lord must not be crooked, or uneven; you must keep the commandments with upright hearts,

<sup>1</sup> Quam bonus, Israel, Deus his, qui recto sunt corde!—Ps. lxxii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Factum est verbum Domini super Joannem, Zachariæ filium.—Luke iii. 2.

and adore God in spirit and truth. So that the Gospel excludes all those lying deceits of which I have recently spoken, when I explained the different ways of committing superstition with natural things ; for superstition prepares the way for the devil, not for God. I shall continue the same subject ; for even the divine service, prayer, apparent good works and the holiest things, that should serve to prepare the way of the Lord, are often used superstitiously, by the pious through ignorance, by the wicked through malice, etc.—*continues as before.*

# ON DISRESPECT TO GOD, AND HOLY THINGS.

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## **THIRTY-FIRST SERMON.**

### **ON BLASPHEMY.**

#### Subject.

1. What blasphemy is. 2. What a terrible sin it is.—  
*Preached on the eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

#### Text.

*Hic blasphemat.*—Matth. ix. 3.  
“He blasphemeth.”

#### Introduction.

How blasphemous to think and say of the Most Holy Son of God, “He blasphemeth!” The Jews could not accuse Him of a more abominable, grievous and fearful sin. On other occasions, influenced by hatred and envy, they had called Him a disturber of the people, a drunkard, a sorcerer, who drove out devils in the name of the devil, etc. But all these accusations were as nothing compared to that of being a blasphemer, that is, one who assails the Almighty who is worthy of infinite honor and glory, with curses and injurious expressions. I will take occasion, my dear brethern, from the Gospel of to-day, to speak of this fearful sin, which is so common unfortunately, in order to make some reparation to the divine honor by inspiring all Christians with such a horror of this crime, that they will be shocked at the very name of it.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*What is blasphemy? This I will answer briefly in the first part.*

*What a terrible sin it is. This I will show in the second part. The first part will be a short instruction ; the second will teach us that we must avoid and abhor this sin, more than any other.*

O God of infinite holiness, there is question now of Thy honor ; by the honor shown Thee by the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the holy angels, I beg of Thee to give such force to my words, that I and all here present may henceforth only praise and bless Thee with lips and hearts.

There is reason to be afraid even to speak of blasphemy.

History tells us of the Emperor Nero, that in the beginning of his reign, he was of such a mild and gentle disposition, that when he was asked on one occasion to sign the death-warrant of a malefactor, he cried out, "Oh, why did I learn to write?"<sup>1</sup> Why must I now use my pen to sentence a man to death? I too, might say the same, my dear brethren. Why have I learned to speak ; I might complain, why must I now use my tongue in order to speak to your ears and hearts of such a fearful crime as blasphemy? If the holy Apostle, St. Paul, says that we should not even name the vice of impurity, on account of its foulness: "But all uncleanness . . . let it not so much as be named among you, as becometh saints ;"<sup>2</sup> how much more will not that warning hold good of that most terrible sin which attacks directly the divine honor? But, nevertheless, it must be spoken of, in order, as I have said, to make reparation to the divine honor by inspiring men with the greatest horror of such a crime, so that they will shudder at the very name of it.

What blasphemy is : how many kinds of it there are.

Curses are often uttered in anger and impatience, which ignorant people sometimes look upon as blasphemies, but wrongly ; and there are many expressions in vogue which seem to be pious, but in reality are blasphemous. To be able then, to make the necessary distinction, we must first answer this question. In what does the sin of blasphemy consist? St. Thomas, and all theologians with him, answer that it consists in using injurious or dishonoring expressions towards God, which assail any of His essential perfections, or affirm of Him something unworthy of His supreme majesty, or attribute to creatures what belongs to Him alone ; or else it consists in speaking of Him in a way that could be interpreted as dishonorable and unworthy His sovereign majesty, although the expressions used do not violate the truth.

The first is that which

The first kind of blasphemy is committed by those unfortunate,

<sup>1</sup> Cur litteras didici?

<sup>2</sup> Omnia immunditia . . . nec nominetur in vobis, sicut decet sanctos.—Eph. v. 3.

miserable and wretched men, who, on account of losses, accidents, trials and miseries, murmur against divine Providence, and break out into the following, or similar complaints, (I protest before Thee, O God worthy of infinite honor and glory, that my only object in using words so unbecoming Thy supreme Majesty, is to deter others from using them.) Oh, there is no justice in Heaven any more ; God has forgotten me ; He seems to take a pleasure in tormenting me ; He cannot cause me greater torment than he is causing me now. What have I done that He should treat me so cruelly ? I have not sold Christ, at any rate. I have more to suffer than I deserve. Things have come to such a pass with me now, that God can no longer help me. I will not pray any more, nor do any good works, for God will not hear me in any case. My sins are too great and too numerous, God cannot forgive them, etc. All expressions of this kind are grievous blasphemies, because they attack the infinite wisdom, power, goodness, mercy and justice of God. There are others, whose blasphemous tongues assail the all-wise and inscrutable arrangements of God's Providence. Why, they think or say, should God look after me always ? He has enough to do without taking such interest in me and my belongings. God has not made a fair division of worldly goods ; He gives one too much, another too little, and nothing at all to a third ; one must suffer hunger, while another has abundance of everything, etc. God is not just in allowing that good and pious man to suffer so many afflictions, while He neglects to punish that worthless and wicked fellow. It seems that he who serves the devil, is better off and happier, than he who is faithful to God. It is easy to say that I must abandon myself to the arrangements of God's Providence ; if I do not make my own fortune, I need not expect much from them. It is not right for God to punish a whole country so severely, because thereby many innocent persons suffer along with the guilty, etc. People who indulge in blasphemy of this kind appear to think that they can govern the world better than the Almighty ; like the wicked king Alphonsus, who used to say in his foolish pride, " If I had been God's counsellor in the creation, I could have suggested many improvements to Him." Close your ears, Christians, against such horrid blasphemy !

To the second class of blasphemers, that is, to those who attribute something false or unbecoming to God, belong those who say, for instance, when it thunders : Now God is playing

detracts  
from a di-  
vine perfec-  
tion.

The second,  
that which  
ascribes  
something

unbecom-  
ing to God,  
or attributes  
to creatures  
what be-  
longs to God  
alone.

skittles ; or the drums are beating in Heaven ; or, Heaven is falling to pieces. Such people say sometimes to one who is praying : Oh, you are annoying God ; let Him have a little peace ; He has something else to do besides hearing what you have to say. If one is anxious about the future, they say, oh, leave it to God ; He had a wise mother. I dare not mention the terrible curses that are in vogue in the French and other languages ; such as, May God die, may He be destroyed, may He be accursed ; I tremble when I think of these expressions. Forgive me, O Lord, for having dared to utter them ! To the same class belong those who attribute to creatures, what belongs only to God, or to His saints ; this is done by way of showing affection, when some miserable creature is called by another, his god, his divinity, his chief treasure ; or in the expressions, as true as God lives, as true as Gospel, I am as innocent as the Virgin Mary, etc. Of these latter expressions Suarez says, that, although they may be excused from blasphemy, still they are not becoming, and they are injurious to God, because they affirm a human and fallible truth with a certainty that belongs only to divine truth.

The third  
consists in  
speaking in  
a ridiculous  
and unbecom-  
ing  
manner of  
God and His  
saints.

To the third class belong those who in cursing others, wish that they may be destroyed and ruined by what God has appointed for our welfare and eternal salvation. For instance, may the Blood of Christ, or the Death of Christ, or the Sacrament strike you dead. In a word, all expressions that contain contempt of God or of divine things, whether they are true or false ; as, for example : The man above is not of that kind ; God is a good man ; God is a cunning politician ; God knows me well, and He will not do anything to me ; the weather-man above must give us a good season ; He who is up there knows more about brewing, than we men do (when speaking of the difference between wine and beer) ; all these expressions are unbecoming, and derogatory to the reverence we owe the Most High. Again, there are people, such as half-atheists and desperate characters, who say ; I will believe and live as I will, and then God must give me the place in Heaven that I wish to have ; St. Peter and I are well acquainted, he will not fail to let me in, when I knock at the gate of Heaven ; what have I to do amongst the beggars and other low people in Heaven, I will find far more respectable company in hell. Further, when the words of Holy Scripture are used for a vain purpose, or to excite laughter, as is unfortunately often the case among Catholics ; such as when,

for example, he who encourages another to drink, says ; “ Let the sea be moved and the fulness thereof ; ”<sup>1</sup> or when one has had a good deal to drink, and is said to be, “ in the brightness of the saints ; ”<sup>2</sup> or when the wine is good : “ Give praise to the Lord, for he is good ; ”<sup>3</sup> or else, “ Lord, Thou hast proved me ; ”<sup>4</sup> if the wine is not worth much, they say ; “ Thou art found wanting ; ”<sup>5</sup> or when they want a candle lit at night, “ let there be light, ”<sup>6</sup> and so on. All these expressions are disrespectful to God and to divine things. In this, then, my dear brethren, consists the sin of blasphemy. And what sort of a sin is it ? the most fearful of all ; as we shall see in the

**Second Part.**

We can deduce the grievous malice of a sin from three circumstances ; first when we consider who it is who is thereby attacked and offended ; secondly, who it is who offers the offence ; and thirdly, why it is that the offence is offered. From these three circumstances we shall see that blasphemy is a fearful sin, nay, as St. Thomas, following St. Jerome, says, “ Every sin seems small, when compared with blasphemy. ”<sup>7</sup> For, in the first place, who is thereby attacked and dishonored ? The name itself of the sin tells us that. It is no other than the God of infinite wisdom, power and goodness, who is worthy of all honor and reverence, in whose honor thousands of happy princes of Heaven, Cherubim and Seraphim, with faces veiled through respect, sing their song of praise, “ Holy, holy, holy, Lord God, the heavens and the earth are full of Thy Glory. ” This God is attacked, dishonored and insulted by the blasphemous tongue. And the insult is offered to Him directly. God is dishonored by every sin, as St. Paul says, writing to the Romans : “ Thou, by prevarication of the law, dishonorest God. ”<sup>8</sup> O man, do you think of what you do, when you commit a sin, no matter what it is ? You dishonor God, because you refuse to do as He wishes you to do. But there is a great difference between blasphemy and other sins. I will explain it to you, my dear brethren, by a very common simile. He who transgresses the public com-

Blasphemy is a fearful sin, because it dishonors God.

And that directly, in His own Person.

<sup>1</sup> Moveatur mare, et plenitudo ejus.—Ps. xcvii. 7.  
<sup>2</sup> In splendoribus sanctorum.—Ibid. cix. 3.  
<sup>3</sup> Confitemini Domino, quoniam bonus.—Ibid. cxvii.  
<sup>4</sup> Domine, probasti me.—Ibid. cxxxviii. 1.  
<sup>5</sup> Inventus es minus habens.—Dan. v. 27.  
<sup>6</sup> Fiat lux.—Gen. i. 3.  
<sup>7</sup> Omne peccatum comparatum blasphemie levius est.  
<sup>8</sup> Per prevaricationem legis Deum inhonoras.—Rom. ii. 23.

mand of his sovereign, dishonors him ; but it would be a far greater dishonor to ill-treat his servants ; a still greater one, if he were to ill-treat his courtiers and friends ; worse still if this were to occur at court in the presence of the sovereign himself ; and worse even than that, if he were to incite the subjects of his sovereign to rebellion. But the worst of all such crimes, which is called *lèse majesté*, is when a subject dares to attack and ill-treat the sovereign's own person ; that crime is so grievous that it is not condoned even in the holiest places, in churches, nor before the altar. Now, the gravity of that crime increases in proportion to the dignity of the sovereign. Who then, can explain the grievousness of the malice of him who attacks and dishonors God Himself, the great Monarch of Heaven and earth, whose foot-stool all the potentates of earth are not worthy to be ? And that is done by the crime of blasphemy.

Far worse  
than other  
sins.

Other vices are confined, so to speak, to God's creatures. Pride is a great vice, by which one arrogates to himself praise and honor that do not belong to him, and looks down haughtily on others. Injustice is a great sin, for by it the property of others is stolen and kept. Impurity is a great sin, which defiles both body and soul. Drunkenness is a great sin, by which a man deliberately deprives himself of the use of reason. Anger, hatred, envy, revenge, persecution, injuring others, detraction, cursing and swearing, all these are great sins, by which one gives vent to his ill feelings against the servants of God. Disrespect to priests and religious, indecent behavior in Church, are acts of insolence towards the ministers and servants of the Lord, which are committed in the house of God, and in His very presence. Scandal and leading others into sin are abominable sins, by which the subjects of God are incited to rebel against Him. But it still remains true that all these sins appear small when compared to blasphemy, for that is the only most terrible sin, which attacks God Himself directly, and dishonors Him. "Whom hast thou reproached, and whom hast thou blasphemed ?" was the question that God addressed to king Sennacherib by the Prophet Isaias, "against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thy eyes on high ? Against the holy one of Israel ;"<sup>1</sup> that is, thou hast vented thy anger against the Almighty God.

That insult  
is offered by  
a miserable

And (another circumstance that makes the injury still greater) who is it that dares to offer it ? "Who is this," I might

<sup>1</sup> Cui exprobasti, et quem blasphemasti ? contra quem exaltasti vocem tuam, et elevasti in excelsum oculos tuos ? contra Sanctum Israel.—IV. Kings xix. 22.

ask like the Pharisee in the Gospel of St. Luke, "who speaketh blasphemies?"<sup>1</sup> It is a poor mortal, a worm of the earth. Yes, it is he who, as Ballad describes him in the Book of Job, "is rottenness, and the son of man is a worm."<sup>2</sup> He who is utterly powerless, and who must depend on God for everything, dares to open his insolent mouth against Heaven, and to use the tongue which he cannot even move without God's help, in cursing and reviling the Almighty! And what kind of men are they, who are guilty of such a grievous crime? Are they Turks, heathens, or idolators? It would be less intolerable on the part of such as those. "If my enemy had reviled me, I would verily have borne with it," is the complaint that our Lord makes by the Psalmist, "And if he that hated me, had spoken great things against me; I would perhaps have hid myself from him."<sup>3</sup> But they are Christians, and who would believe it, if he had not experience of it? They are Christians brought up in the house and true Church of God, who have been consecrated in baptism as friends and children of God, relations and brethren of Jesus Christ, who often eat the bread of angels at the table of the Lord, and who are called to be heirs of the kingdom of Heaven. They are Christians who, in preference to all other people, receive abundant graces and benefits every day, every hour, every moment, from God. Christians, who, according to the testimony of St. Peter, are, "A chosen generation, . . . a holy nation," who have been chosen by God for the one purpose only, "that you may declare His virtues, who hath called you out of darkness, into His marvellous light."<sup>4</sup> And I ask, must Christians revile God, blaspheme Him and curse Him? The Turks are severely punished, if they mention even the name of their Prophet Mahomet in anger; nay, although they are sworn enemies of the Christian religion, they dare not curse by the name of Jesus Christ, whom they reverence as a great Prophet. But Christians, who adore Jesus Christ as their God, who uncover their heads and bend the knee, whenever this Holy Name is mentioned, treat that Name so disrespectfully, revile and blaspheme it, whenever they get into the least passion, or anything is said or done to vex them! What a shame! What intolerable wickedness!

mortal, and  
even by a  
Christian.

<sup>1</sup> Quis est hic, qui loquitur blasphemias?—Luke v. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Homo putredo, et filius hominis vermis.—Job xxv. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Si inimicus meus maledixisset mihi, sustinuissem utique. Et si is, qui oderat me, super me magna locutus fuisset, abscondissem me forsitan ab eo.—Ps. liv. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Genus electum, . . . gens sancta . . . ut virtutes annuntietis ejus, qui de tenebris vos vocavit in admirabile lumen suum.—I. Pet. ii. 9.

And that  
without  
reaping any  
advantage  
from it.

And why should we give way to blasphemy? O my God, says St. Augustine with bitter tears, in the second book of his Confessions, how is it possible for a man to be so wicked, as to seek nothing by sinning, but to sin against and offend Thee? Is a man given to the lusts of the flesh? Alas, there is nothing wonderful in that! Corporal beauty and sensual pleasure are very powerful attractions, that offer a gentle violence to the human heart. Is a man given to avarice and injustice? He is blinded by a love of riches, which will help him to supply all his wants. Is a man ambitious? The mind is easily captivated by the praise of others and by the desire of their esteem. And yet, O God, although we are born with those inclinations, not one of them should be sufficient to induce us to violate Thy holy law! But alas, it is for the purpose of satisfying those inclinations that sin is committed! Ask one who has killed another, why he has done so. Either to get his money, he will answer, or through fear of being injured by him, or through desire of revenge and having satisfaction for an insult. If he were to say that he knows not why he killed the man, unless it was to have the pleasure of killing him, we should hardly believe him. Such are the words, my dear brethren, in which St. Augustine bewails the sin of theft that he committed in his youth, by stealing berries out of a garden, not through fondness for them, but through sheer love of mischief. And it is in that way, but very much worse, that blasphemers act, whenever they speak so as to dishonor God; for there is nothing whatever to impel them to such a sin, but a desire of reviling and insulting the Almighty. Tell me, blasphemer, what pleasure or profit do you find in speaking so disrespectfully of God, in cursing by the holy Sacraments, or by the Blood and Death of Christ, in treating the divine Majesty so contemptuously, or in making such a profane use of the word of God? Do you find any bodily pleasure in it? Does it make you richer or more influential in the world? You gain nothing of the kind, as you yourself must acknowledge. What then, induces you to commit such a fearful sin? Nothing but your more than diabolical malice in venting your anger against your Creator.

And with-  
out any  
reason to  
impel one  
to it.

Wretched mortal, what harm has your Creator done you? How has he ill-treated you, that you thus revile Him and insult Him? "O my people," He asks by the prophet Micheas, "what have I done to thee, or in what have I molested thee? answer thou Me."<sup>1</sup> Dear Christians whom I have purchased with My

<sup>1</sup> Popule meus, quid feci tibi, aut quid molestus fui tibi? responde mihi.—Mich. vi. 3.

precious Blood, what harm have I done you? Have I ever given you the least cause to be angry with Me, that you now attack Me and My name so fiercely? Have I not given you countless proofs of the most tender, fatherly love? I never cease doing good to you for a moment, and, ungrateful mortals that you are, you repay My benefits by such shameful injuries. "For seventy years," says St. Polycarp, when his persecutors tried to induce him to deny God, "God has done me nothing but good; why should I deny Him?" Blasphemous Christians, how many years of your lives are now past, during which you have been enjoying the benefits bestowed on you by God? How can you dare to blaspheme His holy Name? No tyrant threatens you with torture, there is neither wheel, nor gallows, nor sword, nor lance, nor rack, nor gridiron to force you to foreswear your God and to curse Him; there is no one in the world who threatens you with death, no one who promises you either pleasure or profit; there is nothing that can compel or induce you to blaspheme, and yet you insult God so grossly! Your sin then, can only proceed from sheer diabolical malice.

From more than diabolical malice, I have said already; for, according to St. Gregory Nazianzen, the devils tremble at the name of Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> Nay, although the devils hate God, they have often showed their horror at the blasphemies of which men are guilty. Athanasius Kircher relates that in Austria there are certain mines of gold and other metals, in which there are often seen demons in the form of dwarfs, who are very industrious in helping the miners to dig out the metals, and never do them the least harm. But, mark this, my dear brethren, if the overseers, or the workmen get into a passion and give way to blasphemy, those demons at once get into a rage, refuse to work any more, and often beat those who are guilty of blaspheming. Whether they do that through pride, and not being able to tolerate the insolence with which man dares thus to insult God; or through hatred of God, so that they cannot bear to hear His name pronounced, even for the purpose of dishonoring it; or through the fear that the name of God inspires them with, even when it is blasphemed; this much at all events, is certain, that they get angry with the blasphemers, and thus put men to shame, who do not hesitate to do what the devils even are shocked at. It may be that the demons in hell are always blaspheming God; still the blasphemies of men are more wicked, and less to be excused.

The blasphemy of men is worse than that of the devils and the reprobate.

<sup>1</sup> *Dæmones ad Christi nomen exhorrescunt.*

For when the demons blaspheme, they do it only in thought and desire ; while you, oh man, do it both with thought and word ! The cursing and blasphemies of the demons and lost souls are certainly great sins ; but at the same time, they are a punishment for sin, which they must suffer forever ; and therefore God is glorified by that punishment ; in the same way that the just judge, who has condemned a malefactor to death, is not hurt, or offended by the insults or abuse that the latter heaps on him ; but rather looks on it as an honor to be so abused. But your blasphemies are sins in which God finds nothing but insult and injury. The reprobate curse God on account of the severe tortures they have to suffer ; and there is pity for the wretch who is impaled alive, or broken on the wheel. But you, oh Christian, who have received nothing but benefits from God, what reason have you to offend Him by your blasphemous tongue ?

How wrong  
to blas-  
pheme  
through  
anger and  
passion.

I do not do it, you say, with deliberation, much less out of hatred towards God. If I let fall a blasphemous expression, it is because I am in a passion ; and if another does something to vex me, I must say something to make him afraid of me. Oh, what a fine excuse that is ! Even if your anger is just (and if it is not, you commit another sin by it), must you give vent to it against One who is innocent, and who has not given you the least cause for anger ? Is God to be blamed, if others vex you ? Did Christ shed His Blood, and institute the Sacraments, only to give you the means of frightening others by dishonoring Him and His holy Name, and His Sacraments ? Suppose that your own son, while you are actually working for his support, had a quarrel with another boy, and came up to you and gave you a box on the ear, saying, immediately after, forgive me, father ; I did not mean to hurt you ; I was in a passion. What would you say in a case like that ? Oh, my son, you would exclaim, why do you beat me ? I have done you no harm ! You should keep your anger for him who has vexed you. Even if I were not your father, but a complete stranger to you, you would have no right to treat me in that way, since I have done nothing to offend you ; and now you dare to attack me, your father ? Me, from whom you have received your life, and to whom you owe your support, and who am occupied at this very moment in working for you ? Have you lost your senses ? See, such, but far more grievous, is the injury you offer to God by your blasphemous words and curses. Your servants happen to break something in your house, or they do not obey you, because they do not understand what

you want; your children are obstinate and disobedient; your wife is sulky and disagreeable; a dog runs between your legs, and trips you; you get into a rage, and curse and blaspeme the name of God. Is your anger any excuse for your blasphemy? Has God done you any harm? No, certainly not; and He has just reason to complain of your conduct; your servant, or child, or wife, He might say, has vexed you, why do you ill-treat Me? If you are determined not to obey My law, and restrain your anger, then at least let it fall on those who have deserved it. If I were not your God, your Creator, your Redeemer; If you had nothing to hope or fear from Me, you would still be acting unjustly towards Me; but as it is, you insult Me, who have given you your being and all that you have, out of pure liberality. You insult Me, who redeemed, and saved you from hell, who have preserved you up to the present moment, and done you more good than you can understand, and who am still actually occupied in doing good to you. Must I then pay for the injuries inflicted on you by others? Yes, O God of infinite glory, so unjustly do many act towards Thee! Reason enough hast Thou to complain by Thy Prophet Isaias: "My name is continually blasphemed all the day long." Canst Thou hear all those blasphemies, O great God, and still remain silent? Dost Thou suffer men to speak so contemptuously of Thee? "How long shall the wicked, O Lord," I might cry out with Thy servant David, "how long shall the wicked make their boast?" How long shall they utter and speak wrong things? Lift up Thyself, Thou that judgest the earth: render a reward to the proud,"<sup>2</sup> who rebel so maliciously against Thee. "Arise, O God, judge Thy own cause;"<sup>3</sup> show by some extraordinary punishment, how deeply Thou feellest an insult to Thy infinite Majesty! Let those daring sinners feel what it is to blaspheme their God!

But I need not continue this prayer any longer, my dear brethren. There is no doubt that God has often shown, and will often show how He hates blasphemy. Wonderful stories are related of the punishment inflicted on blasphemers; some of them were struck by lightning, and dropped down dead on the spot in which their blasphemy was uttered; others were consumed by fire that fell from Heaven; others were swallowed up

Therefore God justly punishes this sin in a remarkable manner.

<sup>1</sup> Jugiter tota die nomen meum blasphematur.—Isa. lii. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Usquequo peccatores, Domine: usquequo peccatores gloriabantur: effabuntur, et loquentur iniquitatem. Exaltare, qui judicas terram: redde retributionem superbis.—Ps. xciii. 3, 4, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Exurge, Deus, judica causam tuam.—Ibid. lxxiii. 22.

by the earth; others were carried off visibly to hell by devils, a punishment that, according to the holy Pope, St. Gregory, who describes it in detail, was inflicted once on a child of ten years of age; this child had just uttered a blasphemous expression it had learned from its father, when the devil appeared, snatched it out of its father's arms, and carried it off to hell. Thomas Cantipratanus writes that Simon of Tournay, a celebrated doctor of Paris, once blasphemed Jesus Christ, and said that He had deceived the world, when he suddenly fell down like a slaughtered ox, and died raving mad in three days. A still more terrible incident is related by Father Theophilus Rainaud. The son of a widow came home one evening with two companions, rather late from hunting; he knocked at the door, but on account of the lateness of the hour, no one came to open it, whereupon he got into a great passion, and began to curse his mother, and then God and the saints, in such fearful language that his companions were quite shocked. At last they were obliged to take shelter in another house, in which the three of them had to occupy the same bed. As soon as the light was put out, the devil, in the appearance of a hunter accompanied by large black dogs, entered the room, took away the blasphemer from between the two others, stretched him out on the table, hacked him in pieces just as a butcher does meat in the shambles, and threw the flesh bit by bit to the dogs, until they had devoured all of it. That is all I have been told to do, said the devil to the other two young men who were more dead than alive, and with these words he disappeared; nor was there ever the least trace of the blasphemer's body found. I will pass over the punishments that an angry God sometimes inflicts on whole countries and kingdoms on account of the sin of blasphemy alone; merely mentioning what occurred to King Robert of France. This pious king was once praying for peace in his kingdom, when our Lord appeared to him and said: "You will not have peace, Robert, until you have extirpated the vice of blasphemy from your kingdom."<sup>1</sup> Those blasphemers who have not such remarkable punishments to suffer in this life, will have all the more to dread in eternity from the anger of God. Hear how the old Tobias speaks: "For they shall call upon the great name in Thee. They shall be cursed that shall despise Thee; and they shall be condemned that shall blaspheme Thee."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Pacem non habebis Roberte, priusquam blasphemias e regno extirpaveris.*

<sup>2</sup> *Nomen enim magnum invocabunt in te. Maledicti erunt, qui contempserint te, et condemnati erunt omnes, qui blasphemaverint te.—Tob. xiii. 15, 16.*

My dear brethren, I can guess what your thoughts are now. You think that this sermon is not of any use to you, because none of you can be accused of this terrible crime. I hope that such is the case. But that your presence here may not be in vain, I beg of you all, by way of conclusion, in the words of St. John Chrysostom, to help in the work of abolishing the vice of blasphemy and defending the honor of God. If you hear any one in your houses, or in the street, speaking disrespectfully of God, or blaspheming His holy name, admonish that person, and if necessary, "sanctify your hand by giving him a blow on the cheek."<sup>1</sup> What judge would punish you for doing that to one who speaks disrespectfully of his sovereign, to defend whose honor one should be ready to shed one's blood? If you cannot, or dare not do that, then at least make an act of heartfelt compassion with your God, endeavor to give Him all the more glory, the more shamefully He is insulted by impious blasphemers. Pious souls, I have another request to make of you, and that is, that you unite your sighs with my voice, in order to atone for the slights and insults that are so frequently offered to the divine majesty. O great God, in the name of all here present, I praise, bless and magnify Thy most holy Name! I implore Thy pardon and mercy if I have ever been in the least irreverent in speaking of Thee. I beg also for mercy for all the blasphemies that the wicked have ever uttered against Thee! To atone for the insults offered Thee, I implore of Thee to accept all the prayers and praises of all pious and well-meaning souls; I offer Thee all the blessings that have been uttered in Thy honor from the beginning of the world; all the praise and homage shown Thee by the choirs of angels; all the thanksgivings that Thy elect shall render Thee through all eternity; all the merits and good works with which the most Blessed Virgin Mary served Thee most perfectly; and besides, I offer Thee all the infinite treasure of satisfaction that the Sacred Humanity of Jesus has left us! Far be it from me, and from all here present, to speak of Thy holy Name and of anything belonging to Thee, otherwise than with the greatest respect! We desire that all our thoughts, words and actions, and all our movements of body and soul should be so many acts of praise to Thee in union with that eternal hymn of praise, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God!" To Thee be praise, honor and glory forever. Amen.

Conclusion  
and exhortation to defend God's honor against blasphemers.

<sup>1</sup> Percussione manum tuam sanctifices.

**THIRTY-SECOND SERMON.****ON UNWORTHY COMMUNION.****Subject.**

1. To approach the Table of the Lord in the state of sin is to treat Jesus Christ most unjustly. 2. Yet there are many who treat Him thus.—*Preached on the second Sunday after Pentecost.*

**Text.**

*Dico autem vobis: Quod nemo vivorum illorum, qui vocati sunt, gustabit cœnam meam.*—Luke xiv. 24.

“But I say unto you, that none of those men that were invited shall taste of my supper.”

**Introduction.**

What a futile excuse that; I have bought a farm! And what if you have? Does that prevent you from going to the Supper? Oh, I must go and see it! You should have done that before buying it, so as to see whether it suits you or not. I have bought five yoke of oxen. Well, does that prevent you from accepting the invitation? I must see them. What? In the evening, with the dark night coming on? I have married a wife. And if you have, do you not want food or drink any more? The fact is, you could all have excused yourselves in shorter terms, and more in accordance with truth, by saying, I will not come. My dear brethren, by the great Supper, we understand the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, to which our Lord invites all men in the most friendly manner, that they may frequently receive His Flesh and Blood in the Holy Communion. But how many refusals He receives from most people, who approach this holy Table but very seldom! How many vain excuses are invented and put forward by people who try to persuade themselves that they cannot communicate frequently! On another occasion I will complain of this tepidity, when I shall exhort you to frequent Communion. To-day I must complain still more bitterly of those Christians who communicate far too often and too readily, and who would do better by abstaining from Communion altogether. If I knew who they were, I should have just cause for crying out to them, when they approach the altar rails:

Away with you! Keep away from here! This Table is not prepared for you! I tell you that not one of you shall partake of it. And who are they? I mean those alone who receive Holy Communion with an impure conscience, in the state of sin. What a fearful sin they commit! And how many Catholics there are who are guilty of it! As we shall now see.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*To approach the Table of the Lord in the state of sin, is to treat Jesus Christ most unjustly. This I will show in the first and longer part. Yet there are many who treat Him thus; as I shall complain in the second part. Sinners, either do penance, and amend your lives; or else abstain from Holy Communion: pious souls, continue to communicate all the more frequently: such will be the conclusion.*

Help us all to this, O dearest Saviour, through the intercession of Thy Virgin Mother Mary, and our holy angels guardian.

As I have said on the former occasion, the greatest insult that a creature can offer to God, is blasphemy; and that, because it is a crime against the divine Majesty. The same truth is the foundation of my present subject, that to receive Holy Communion in the state of sin, is to treat Jesus Christ most unjustly; for amongst the crimes that attack the divine Majesty directly, it is one of the greatest, since by it Christ is shamefully ill-used. To speak insultingly of a king, especially in his presence, is a most intolerable crime against human majesty, and is punished with death; and yet it is committed only by words which are carried away by the wind, and inflict no wound. But to attack the king's person, when he is seated on his throne, surrounded by his attendants and courtiers, or when he is passing in state through the streets, or when he is seated at a public banquet; to attack him then and plunge a dagger in his heart, would be a crime that no one but a madman would commit, or dream of. For where could a sovereign expect the reverence to be shown to him, to which he is entitled, when he is not sure of his life, even on his throne, or seated at his table?

See, oh Christian, such is the insolence, or rather madness you are guilty of, when you dare to receive Holy Communion in the state of sin. You pierce with a sword of sorrow the Heart of Jesus, your Lord, the King of kings, when you receive His most sacred Flesh and Blood with a heart and conscience defiled by sin. "Therefore," says St. Paul to the Corinthians, "who-

To insult a king publicly on his throne, or to kill him, is one of the greatest crimes of treason.

Such is the crime of him who communicates unworthily: he attacks and kills Christ on his

throne, and seated at His table.

soever shall eat this bread, or drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the Body and of the Blood of the Lord.”<sup>1</sup> That is, as the Gloss says: “He shall be punished as if he had actually killed our Lord.”<sup>2</sup> It is the living bread as our Lord says in the Gospel of St. John: “I am the living bread, which came down from Heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give, is my Flesh for the life of the world.”<sup>3</sup> This life you destroy by an unworthy Communion; for you cause its efficacy to be destroyed in you, and you make it kill your soul, instead of causing it to live. It is true, according to St. Paul, that every mortal sin crucifies and slays again the Son of God: “Crucifying again to themselves the Son of God;”<sup>4</sup> still that is done in a moral sense by disgracing His image impressed on the human soul, which dies by sin; but in an unworthy Communion the Prototype Himself has to suffer; since He is present in His own sacred and divine person under the appearance of bread and wine; as St. Peter Damian says: “In other things we offend God in His creatures, but in this, we offend Him in His own person,”<sup>5</sup> and that too, while He is seated at His own table, where He offers Himself to His dear friends as their food and drink; on His throne of glory, surrounded by angels, who wait on Him; and in His public triumph in which He shows Himself to receive the adoration of all.

Where He wishes to be specially honored.

According to the Holy Fathers, the chief end our Lord had in view in instituting the Blessed Sacrament, was, that He might be repaid on earth for all the labor and trouble, the frequent hunger and thirst, the watching and fasting, the pains and torments, the insults and injuries, that His sacred Body had to endure during His thirty-three years’ life on earth; and that all the members of the true Church should henceforth show Him all the more humble homage and all the greater honor, in proportion to the insults and contumely He endured for their sake. From the very beginning up to the present time, the Catholic Church has distinguished herself by paying the greatest honor to the Blessed Sacrament; therefore we build churches, and have them consecrated, because the hidden God,

<sup>1</sup> *Itaque quicumque manducaverit panem hunc, vel biberit calicem Domini Indigne, reus erit corporis et sanguinis Domini.*—I. Cor. xi. 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Ac si Christum occiderit, punietur.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ego sum panis vivus, qui de caelo descendi. Si quis manducaverit ex hoc pane, vivet in eternum, et panis, quem ego dabo, caro mea est pro mundi vita.*—John vi. 51, 52.

<sup>4</sup> *Rursum crucifigentes sibi metipsis Filium Dei.*—Heb. vi. 6.

<sup>5</sup> *In reliquis Deum offendimus in rebus suis, hic autem in persona tua.*

really and bodily present, takes up His abode in them. Altars are erected and adorned, because every day the bread and wine are changed on them into the Body and Blood of Christ; day and night, candles and lamps burn before the tabernacle; all who enter the church, bend the knee in profound adoration before Him; the people follow Him with uncovered heads in public processions; when He is carried through the streets to the sick, all good Christians, who happen to pass by, show Him honor by accompanying Him, and even princes, kings and emperors have not hesitated to do the same. (Good Christians, I say; for they who, having the opportunity, do not show our Lord that much respect, give sufficient proof, either that they have little faith in the great Lord who is present in the Blessed Sacrament, or that they are ignorant of the proper mode of behaving towards Him.) In a word, as the learned and pious Duns Scotus says: "Nearly every devotion of the Church is directed to the Blessed Sacrament,"<sup>1</sup> in order to show honor to it. See now, wicked Christian, what you do, when you dare to receive Holy Communion in the state of sin; you attack the King and Lord of Hosts when He is publicly seated on His throne of honor and glory; you cast Him into the mire of sin, and thus cause Him a moral suffering and death, which He feels far more acutely, than that He had to suffer long ago at the hands of the Jews and the executioners; and therefore the holy Fathers call an unworthy Communion a renewing and increasing of the Passion and death of Jesus Christ.

One of the bitterest pangs our Lord felt in His Passion was caused by the treason of His Apostle Judas; and that, because the traitor kissed his Master under the appearance of friendship. This was the only complaint that our Lord made to His murderers. "Judas," said He, "dost thou betray the Son of man with a kiss?"<sup>2</sup> As if He wished to add: My friend, the kiss I give thee comes from a heart that loves thee truly; but it is not so with thy kiss. If thou desirest to deliver Me into the hands of My enemies, why didst thou not do so in another way? Thou couldst have given them another sign, and said: There is He whom you wish to capture; go and seize Him, and drag Him away. It would Have caused Me less pain, than to betray Me to My sworn enemies by means of a sign of friendship and love. How couldst thou be so wicked as to betray Me by a

The unworthy communion treats Jesus worse than Judas did.

<sup>1</sup> Quasi omnis devotio in Ecclesia est in ordine ad hoc Sacramentum !

<sup>2</sup> Juda, osculo Filium hominis tradis?—Luke xxii. 48.

kiss? This hypocrisy the traitor was guilty of, while our Lord was still on earth, in the garb of poverty, and when He offered Himself freely to His Father, as a sacrifice for our sins. How much more keenly must not His heart feel the pang caused by the hypocrisy of some Christians, His own beloved children, who, while He is actually seated on His throne of honor and glory, approach Him with down-cast eyes, modest and humble demeanor, and folded hands, not merely to give Him a kiss, but to receive Him into their breasts, that they may treacherously stab Him to the heart, and imbue their hands in His Sacred Blood (for, as our faith teaches, that is what unworthy communicants do)? How much more bitterly our Lord could complain of such traitors! "Judas, dost thou betray the Son of man with a kiss?" Treacherous and perjured Christians, what are you thinking of, that you dare to receive Me in that manner? Do you wish to offend Me publicly? Do you wish to treat Me as your enemy, although I have never given you the least cause to do so? If so, then do not come to Me in the guise of friendship; do not give Me any signs of love; dishonor Me if you are wicked and ungrateful enough to do so; but do it in such a way, that all may see what you mean, and what your feelings are towards Me. Remain away from My Table altogether, and you will cause Me less pain, than by burying Me in your polluted conscience, and thus committing a twofold sin.

He mocks  
Christ, as  
the Jews  
did.

The next insult that, in my opinion, must have caused our Lord great pain during His Passion, was the mockery with which the soldiers and executioners treated Him, when they publicly scorned Him as a mock-king. Jesus is the King of glory; but then He was a Teacher of humility, clad in an old purple garment, with a crown of thorns on His head, and a reed in His hands as sceptre, with a hard stone for a throne; in that guise He was surrounded by a crowd of soldiers and executioners, who, amidst bursts of derisive laughter, frequently smote Him on the cheek, and bending the knee before Him in mockery, cried out: "Hail King of the Jews!" Ye heavens, how could you bear that spectacle! And yet, presumptuous Christian, do you not ill-treat in the same manner your glorified Saviour, who is now reigning in triumph as King of Heaven, when you receive Holy Communion in the state of sin? You bend the knee, and bow the head before His altar, you humble yourself and beat your breast, and adore Him with folded hands, and

thus you outwardly show Him all reverence; but what is it all, but mocking and laughing at your God as a mock-king; for your heart is still embittered against Him, and you buffet Him anew by the fearful sacrilege you are committing?

Finally, the Jews nailed our Lord to the Cross, and thus put Him to death. But you, false Christians, nail Him to a far more painful and disgraceful cross than the sinless tree was. For you shut Him up in a foul prison, where He must put up with sin, than which nothing is more intolerable to Him, as his companion. They who crucified Him in former times, knew Him not, and looked upon Him as a poor, lowly mortal, who was condemned to a shameful death by the judge's sentence; "for" as St. Paul says: "if they had known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory."<sup>1</sup> But you, when you approach the holy Table, and receive Holy Communion, know well and believe that He whom you are receiving, is your God, your Saviour, your future Judge, and your greatest Benefactor, for you know and believe that this Sacrament, which you so shamefully abuse with your impure conscience, is the most noble gift of God, a gift that man would never have thought of expecting, if God Himself, the Infallible Truth, had not told us that He had really conferred it on us. On the Cross Christ readily fulfilled the will of His heavenly Father, redeemed the world by His Blood, and restrained the power of the devil; that sweetened the bitterness of His painful death, so that He longed for it, and had no rest until His desire for death was satisfied. But in your sacrilegious Communion He is tortured against His will; on the cross to which you nail Him, He finds nothing but ingratitude, inhuman malice, and everything that can deserve His hatred, His curse, and His reprobation.

It would make one's hair stand on end to hear of the fearful profanations that Christ has had to suffer in the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar, from heretics, Jews, sorcerers and other impious people. The contemptuous names that they have for Him in their writings, as a God of bread, as a blind and ignorant God, are the least virulent expressions of their blasphemous malice. How often have they not plundered consecrated churches, trampled the sacred Host under foot, and given it to the dogs and cats to be devoured by them? How often have not the Jews pierced the sacred Host with knives, until the blood poured miraculously from it, burned it, cooked it, hung it up in their

He hangs our Lord on a more shameful cross, than the Jews did.

And treats Him worse than did all the Jews, heretics and sorcerers who ever profaned this Sacrament.

<sup>1</sup> Si enim cognovissent, nunquam Dominum gloriæ crucifixissent.—I. Cor. ii. 8.

chimneys, and buried it in their secret chambers. What shall I say of those sorcerers and witches who used the Flesh and Blood of Christ, under the appearance of bread, for purposes of witchcraft, sacrificed it to a foul he-goat, that is, to the devil, on their sabbaths, and desecrated it in various ways? There are many such crimes on record, which are enough to make the demons themselves tremble with horror; much more must I shudder at the bare thought of them. And yet, what is it all, when compared to the insult offered to the Son of God by an unworthy Communion? With the exception of the profanations of those unnatural people, which are grievous enough as far as the malice of the will is concerned (although heretics and Jews thus ill-treated the Blessed Sacrament, more out of contempt for Catholics, than through hatred of Christ), all the other profanations are not so intolerable to our Lord's Person, as to be received in the Holy Communion in the state of mortal sin. To be torn to pieces, burnt, and thrown into filthy cess-pools is bad enough; but still those places have not any moral wickedness in themselves; they are clean in the eyes of God, compared to the conscience that is defiled by mortal sin; for that is the only thing that is really repulsive in the sight of God, and if our Lord had to make the choice, He would certainly prefer to be thrown on a dunghill, rather than be buried in the heart of a sinner.

Shown by  
an example.

I will prove this by a short example taken from the Annals of our Society. In the year 1601, in the Philippine Islands, there was a young man who had committed a secret sin, that he was ashamed to confess; he went to Communion, but hardly had he swallowed the Sacred Host, when he felt such violent pains, that he had to crawl rather than walk out of the church. As soon as he got outside he was attacked by a fit of vomiting, and rejected the Sacred Species, which were still intact; when he was immediately freed from the pain. Evidently our Lord wished to show thereby, that it was more tolerable for Him to be thrown into a filthy corner, than to remain any longer in a heart defiled by mortal sin. Yet, that is not saying half enough; for, as a certain author remarks: "Hell is a more suitable place for the Almighty God, than the house of a sinner."<sup>1</sup> And why? Because in hell He is a Lord of vengeance and a just Judge, who punishes His wicked enemies with deserved torments; whereas in the heart of the sinner, He is compelled

<sup>1</sup> *Aptior plane locus Deo esset infernus, quam domus peccatrix.*

to lie, like a prisoner, in a loathsome dungeon, where He is kept, so to speak, only for the purpose of being tortured.

Oh man, see how shamefully you ill-treat your Saviour, when you receive Holy Communion in the state of sin ! What in the name of God can you be thinking of, as you kneel at the altar rails, with your conscience reproaching you, as it must do, with mortal sin ? What does your heart feel, I ask you, when you see the priest coming towards you with the Sacred Host in his hand, and you open your mouth to receive it, into your sinful bosom ? Are you not afraid of your Judge ? Do you not tremble before the Almighty, in whose presence the purest spirits of Heaven are penetrated with a reverential awe ? Do you not fear that the lightning will fall from Heaven, and strike you dead on the spot, or that the earth will open to swallow you up ? Do you not dread the fate that happened to many, that you will be struck blind at the altar rails, or become possessed by the devil ? Ah Christians, is it possible that, among Catholics, any one can be found so presumptuous as to dare to receive Holy Communion in the state of mortal sin ? What do you think, pious souls ? I suppose you can hardly believe that Christians are guilty of such wickedness ? Ah, would to God that such were the case ! For, only too often, as I fear, is that fearful sin committed by Catholics. The cause of this fear I will tell you in the

Therefore, an unworthy communion is a fearful sin.

### Second Part.

There are many kinds of people who generally receive Holy Communion in the state of mortal sin; namely, the unchaste, the vindictive, the unjust, the culpably ignorant ; I will say nothing of those who communicate through sheer malice. First, with regard to the unchaste; how many are there not of both sexes, both married and single, and God grant that there may be none of this kind even among persons consecrated to God ! who make a custom of this sin ? For they sin either with themselves, or with others for years and years ; and during that time their desires tend to illicit intercourse with others, and they either remain in the same house, or otherwise in the proximate occasion of sin with their accomplice, or if the occasion is wanting to them, they have at least a constant desire for sins of impurity, like invalids who, when they are forbidden certain kinds of food and drink, esteem those happy who are allowed to enjoy them. Meanwhile, they communicate several times a year, what are such people thinking of? oh, they say, we go to

There are many who commit that sin ; namely the unchaste.

Confession beforehand. God help them ! what a poor Confession theirs is ! For they can have neither true sorrow nor purpose of amendment, since they remain in the occasion of sin; and thus they burden their souls with a new sacrilege. All their Communion are bad and sacrilegious.

The vindictive.

Secondly, the vindictive. I mean those who for a long time have been at enmity and variance with their neighbor; and who, although they say with the lips, I forgive him, and bear no ill-will to him, yet avoid him through spite and refuse to salute him; burst almost with envy when they hear him praised, and exult with a secret joy when they hear of his misfortunes; and if they are in the same trade or employment, do their best to ruin him. Alas, how many people there are who communicate in that state ! Neighbors, relations, sometimes brothers and sisters go every month to the Table of the Lord, and yet they hardly speak to each other once in the month, through hatred and ill-will. Is that the way to make a worthy Communion ? Does not Christ expressly say in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "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 ; and then coming, thou shalt offer thy gift."<sup>1</sup> If you do not accuse yourselves of those things in Confession, what sort of a Confession do you make ? For you are acting in flagrant violation of the law of Christ : "But I say to you ; Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you, etc."<sup>2</sup> If you confess those sins each time, but without the intention of being reconciled to your enemy, and are nevertheless allowed to go to Holy Communion, what sort of a confessor have you ? You must know that all your Communion are sacrilegious.

The unjust.

Thirdly, the unjust, who possess wrongfully what belongs to others, and do not restore it when they can and ought to restore it. Alas, how many there are who know, or at least ought to know, that that piece of land, that house, that money, or whatever it may be, does not lawfully belong to them, and still continue to keep possession of it ! How many also know that their parents, or ancestors, whose property they have inherited, contracted debts here and there, which have not yet

<sup>1</sup> 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 reconciliare fratri tuo, et tunc veniens offeres munus tuum.—Matth. v. 23-24.

<sup>2</sup> Ego autem dico vobis : Diligite inimicos vestros, benefacite his, qui oderunt vos, etc.—Ibid. 44.

been paid, and who do not pay those debts, because through mistake on the part of the creditors no demand has been made for them! How many who know that they oppress the poor unjustly, and wilfully cause them loss and injury; who know that they defraud their laborers and servants of their wages, either wholly or partially; who know that they have exacted an usurious interest from the needy on account of the distress in which the latter are! How many there are who are conscious of having tried to secure an unjust judgment by bribery and corruption, or otherwise to cheat their opponents out of their rights! How many who have knowingly bought stolen things, or kept what they found without looking for the owner, or cheated in buying, selling, or in other ways; and yet keep all they have thus unjustly gained without the intention of making restitution, or indemnifying the other for the losses caused him, and who remain in that state for ten or twenty years, or even longer, and go to Confession and Communion all the time on the usual days! O my God, what sacrilegious Confessions and Communions those are! who can count the number of them! Still these latter may yet open their eyes, see the gravity of their sins, repent of their unworthy Confessions and Communions and so obtain forgiveness.

But what hope is there for the fourth class, which is by far the most numerous? They flatter themselves when they go to Communion, that they are in the state of grace; and yet they are mistaken. They imagine they have no mortal sin on their conscience, and yet they have enough of them, and that through sheer culpable ignorance, because they do not want to know anything of the sinful lives they lead. They consist, first, of those who have become accustomed to a certain vice, such as drunkenness, detraction, cursing, swearing and other sins, which they confess each time, but never repent of. They think that it is enough for them to tell everything clearly in Confession, and that then they need give themselves no further trouble. They never think of the sorrow and purpose of amendment, which, humanly speaking, it is impossible for them to have with sincerity; at least, the fact of their continued relapses into their former sins shows sufficiently that neither their Confessions nor their Communions have had any effect on their souls; for these two Sacraments, if received properly, frequently, and with good dispositions, must necessarily purify the soul, and sanctify it. There are others who live in a state of indifference; they trouble

Those who  
are in sin  
through  
culpable  
ignorance.

themselves little as to whether their actions are good or bad; they are culpably ignorant of the duties of their employment or state of life, or else they neglect to fulfil them, although they are bound both to know and to fulfil them under pain of mortal sin; and they never accuse themselves of these sins. To this class belong those who fill certain important offices and employments for which they know they have not the necessary abilities; so that they are the occasion of much loss and injury to others. To this class especially belong parents who teach their children nothing but the vanities of the world, and take no care about keeping them from evil, instructing them in good, encouraging them to piety and the fear of the Lord, and leading them on to Heaven. Thirdly, this class consists of all those who live according to the manners and customs of the voluptuous world, and are addicted to many abuses that cannot always be excused from mortal sin, and although they now and then have a reasonable doubt of the lawfulness of their conduct, yet try to banish that doubt by all kinds of false excuses; so that they look upon those abuses as lawful, because many others are addicted to them also. All these people go every month, every fortnight, sometimes every week to Communion, and remain just as they were before; nay, as far as those worldly abuses are concerned, they come to the sacred Table immodestly dressed, to receive their Lord. Ye angels, what think ye of such Communions? St. Paul, what do you say of them? Are the hearts of those people properly disposed to receive the Flesh and Blood of the Most Holy? "Let a man prove himself," you say, to see if he be worthy, "And so let him eat of that bread . . . , for he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself."<sup>1</sup>

**Unworthy  
communi-  
cants are  
entreated to  
abstain  
from com-  
munion.**

Ah, whoever you may be, who are amongst the number of those of whom I have spoken, I have one request to make of you, by way of conclusion; and that is, that you abstain from Communion, even at Easter, even on your death-bed unless you intend to leave the proximate occasion of sin, to give up your illicit intercourse, to lay aside your hatred and ill-will against your neighbor, to restore what you unjustly possess, and to amend your sinful customs and unlawful abuses. Again, I entreat you, abstain from Communion! It is true that if you do not communicate at Easter-time, you commit a grievous sin against the precept of the Church, which I do not wish by any means to advise you to

<sup>1</sup> Probet autem seipsum homo, et sic de pane illo edat. . . . Qui enim manducat et bibit indigne, iudicium sibi manducat et bibit, non dijudicans corpus Domini.—I. Cor. xi. 28, 29.

commit; still you are guilty of only one sin thereby, and that a much less grievous one than you would commit by an unworthy Communion, in which you would offer a most grievous insult to Jesus Christ. If you have not a sincere purpose of amendment, do not communicate, even on your death-bed; it is true that you will then be lost for ever, and I do not by any means wish to advise you to incur eternal damnation; still your damnation will not be so deep as it would be, if you went into eternity loaded with the weight of an unworthy Communion. O my God, what a terrible situation ours is, if we are compelled to choose between one degree of damnation and another! It remains true, then, sinners, your damnation will be less grievous without, than with a sacrilegious Communion.

Reverence due to the most Holy Sacrament, to what dost thou now compel me? To keep souls away from the Table to which our Saviour so lovingly invites all men. "Come to Me, all you that labor, and are burdened, and I will refresh you." "Come, eat my bread and drink the wine which I have mingled for you;"<sup>2</sup> which I have prepared for you out of pure love. Come, and come often; the oftener the better. "My delight is to be with the children of men."<sup>3</sup> To keep them away from that food which is the necessary nourishment and strength of their souls against all temptations; from that food, without which, according to our Saviour's own testimony, we cannot have life in us: "Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, . . . you shall not have life in you."<sup>4</sup> Do I then wish to deter you from receiving this Food? No, my dear brethren, such is not at all my intention; I will forbid no one to approach this table; I say to you all: Come to Holy Communion, and come often; but at the same time I warn you in the words of St. Ambrose, "Let him who wishes to receive Life, amend his life;"<sup>5</sup> Communicate, but with a pure heart; communicate, but not in the state of mortal sin; communicate, but woe to you, if instead of life, you should eat eternal death with the Bread of life! Still there will be many who will refuse to do as I say. They will go on as usual, and offer the most fearful injuries to our Lord by their unworthy Communions, that they may keep up the appearance of being Catholics. That is the way, O Lord, in

Or else to  
amend their  
lives.

<sup>1</sup> Venite ad me omnes, qui laboratis, et onerati estis, et ego reficiam vos.—Matth. xi. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Venite, comedite panem meum, et bibite vinum, quod miscui vobis.—Prov. ix. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Deliciæ meæ, esse cum filiis hominum.—Ibid. viii. 31.

<sup>4</sup> Nisi manducaveritis carnem Filii hominis. . . non habebitis vitam in vobis.—John vi. 54.

<sup>5</sup> Mutet ergo vitam, qui vult accipere vitam.

which Thy Christians thank Thee, for Thy liberality towards them ! Didst Thou not foresee it when Thou wast instituting this Blessed Sacrament ? Certainly, Thou didst, and the future ingratitude of men was not unknown to Thee. Why hast Thou, then, given Thyself thus to a thankless world. Why dost Thou not withdraw from it at once ? On account of the few souls who receive Thee worthily.

**Exhortation to the good, to love God, in this Sacrament with all their hearts, and to receive Him often.**

Pious Christians, this is the thought which, I leave you by way of conclusion. For your sake, to remain with you, to be your refuge, consolation and help, to be your food and drink in life, and your Viaticum in the hour of death; (oh love, who can understand thee !) the great God has been pleased to bear with the most outrageous insults from the wicked; He suffers them still, and will continue to suffer them to the end of time. Think now what a debt of praise, thanksgiving, honor and love you owe your God who loves you so much ! Think and say with the Prophet David: "What shall I render to the Lord?"<sup>1</sup> Is it not our right, O my God, that I should love Thee with my whole heart, in return, and should fulfil Thy holy will, as far as I know it, most exactly ? That I should often visit Thee in this most Holy Sacrament, and adore Thee most modestly and humbly in Thy Church ? That whenever I have the opportunity, I should accompany Thee through the streets, as Thou art carried to the sick ? That, as often as my confessor allows, I should receive Thee, according to Thy wish and desire, with all possible devotion; and thus help in some measure to atone for the injuries thou sufferest, for my sake, from Jews, heretics and wicked Christians. Yes, that I will do with Thy grace. Amen.

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### THIRTY-THIRD SERMON.

#### ON IRREVERENCE TO OUR LORD IN THE BLESSED SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR.

##### Subject.

We have not a perfect faith in the Blessed Sacrament, and therefore we do not always show it proper reverence and respect.  
—*Preached on the Feast of Corpus Christi.*

<sup>1</sup> Quid retribuam Domino?—Ps. cxv. 12.

Text.

*Accedamus cum vero corde in plenitudine fidei.*—Heb. x. 22.  
“Let us draw near with a true heart, in fulness of faith.”

Introduction.

If any mystery revealed by God requires from us a strong and blind faith, that mystery is the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, to the honor and adoration of which this whole octave is dedicated by the Catholic Church; for it is certain that the infinite Majesty of God has exhibited its endless wisdom and power in no other work so gloriously and so wonderfully as in this mystery. A small consecrated Host is a greater work than Christ our Lord ever accomplished, either by Himself, or by His Apostles and servants who came after Him. With reason, then, does St. Thomas call it, “The greatest of all the miracles accomplished by Him.”<sup>1</sup> And therefore the Church calls it “the mystery and the Sacrament of faith;”<sup>2</sup> which is unintelligible, not only to the outward senses but also to human reason. Yet, no matter how wonderful and incomprehensible it is, we surrender our reason to it, O Lord; we believe firmly all that Thou hast revealed of this great mystery, and all true Catholics profess the same faith as we do. Thou hast said it, O Infinite Wisdom and Truth; and that alone is enough for us! But, my dear brethren, there is one thing, which makes me doubt, when I consider the text I have quoted from St. Paul. “Let us draw near in fulness of faith,” he says; that is, we must have that faith firmly and vividly impressed on our memory, so as not to forget who is present in the Blessed Sacrament. Now, I doubt very much whether all Catholics have that lively faith in, and constant recollection of the Real Presence; and I believe I have good reason to doubt, when I consider, first, Him who is present in the Sacrament, and secondly, the little respect that is often shown Him therein. Oh, no; I cannot doubt, or hesitate about it any longer; I say it out boldly; and will now proceed to prove it.

Plan of Discourse.

*We have not always a perfect faith in the Blessed Sacrament, and therefore we do not always show it proper reverence and respect. Such is the whole subject of this sermon and exhortation;*

<sup>1</sup> *Miraculorum ab ipso factorum, maximum.* St. Thom. Opus c. 5-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Mysterium et sacramentum fidei.*

*that it may refresh our memories, and enliven our faith, and encourage us to show due devotion and reverence to the God who has hidden Himself for us.*

Thou alone, O Hidden God, canst effect this in us by Thy grace, which we beg of Thee, and expect to receive through the hands of Thy Dearest Mother Mary, and through the intercession of our holy angels guardian.

If we look only at the outward apparel, we are often liable to mistake a great and wealthy man, for a poor and lowly one.

All is not gold that glitters: nor is everything iron that is black or dark. Many a poor beggar is honored by a lowly reverence; many a rich man is passed by disdainfully. What is the cause of this? Our ignorance, and the easiness with which the senses deceive us. For we generally judge of things by their outward appearance. We look upon one man as a great personage. Why? Because he is dressed in magnificent style. And because we see another poorly and shabbily dressed, we conceive a mean opinion of him. Still, it is not always safe to judge of a man by his clothes. There is many a one who struts along as if the street were too narrow for him, and yet his kitchen and pantry are furnished poorly enough; so that he could borrow a great deal that would be of use to him from those who dress and behave in a manner far more consistent with Christian humility.

Shown by an example.

A young Portuguese, who was poor in worldly goods, but rich in mental endowments, went to the Indies to seek his fortune. He got on so well, that in some years time he returned home with a ship-load of treasures and merchandise of different kinds, and made up his mind to enjoy his wealth in peace for the rest of his life. As he was on the point of disembarking in his native town, a thought struck him. Wait, he said to himself, I will play a trick upon my relations. He put on an old, dirty jacket, and a ragged mantle, and went in that condition to see one of his nearest relatives, and told him how he had been in a foreign land for so many years, and that he had now returned, and begged humbly for a few days hospitality, until he could find shelter elsewhere. My dear cousin, was the answer he got in a few cold words, I would willingly keep you in my house, if I could; but I really have no room. He met with the same reception from three other friends of his whom he visited; not one of them would give him shelter for the night; for they judged from his ragged clothes, that he was not in very good circumstances. After getting the cold shoulder in that way, he went back to the ship, and put on a splendid suit of clothes, more in conformity with his wealth, and then dressed, and ac-

accompanied by a train of servants and attendants, he hired one of the most magnificent houses of the town. It took him several weeks to get all his treasure and merchandise stored. But how his friends stared when they saw how he had deceived them! Each one of them thought that, if he had only known the truth a little sooner, he would not have turned away his relative. But their repentance came too late.

My dear brethren, we Catholics are guilty of the same fault. When there is question of paying proper reverence to the Blessed Sacrament, we do not seem to know who is present in It, or, at all events, we forget very often in whose presence we are. We look upon Him as poor and lonely, because He has chosen to conceal Himself under the humble appearance of the Sacramental Species. True it is, that if we were to judge of it by the senses alone, this Sacrament would appear to us so common, that we should not think it worth while to lift It up from the ground. For, if I ask my eyes: what do you see there, on the altar, in the monstrance, or in the priest's hand? A small, white, round piece of bread, made of flour and water, they would answer. The same answer would be given me by the senses of taste, smell and touch. But, O Lord, if thou wert to lay aside Thy poor mantle for a moment, so as to let us see Thee in Thy glory, how different would not our thoughts, words and behavior be towards Thee then! We should bow down to earth, and cover our eyes from the brilliant light of Thy glory!

But that is not necessary. Christian faith, art thou still alive in us? If so, we have enough in thee! What dost thou say? Who is He who appears on the altar under such humble veils? Is He not the same, true, living and Almighty God, who with a sign, with the mere breath of his mouth, as the Prophet David says, created the universe in a moment? Is He not that infinite God, whom the heavens and the earth cannot contain, "of whose greatness there is no end?"<sup>1</sup> Is He not that mighty Lord on the hem of whose garment, St. John saw written the words, King of kings, and Lord of lords?"<sup>2</sup> At the bare mention of whose name, all the spirits of Heaven bow, crowned heads on earth prostrate themselves, and the devils tremble? Who "looketh upon the earth, and maketh it tremble;"<sup>3</sup> who, with a word restrains the raging sea, and keeps it within bounds

In the same way we look upon the humble outward appearance of the Blessed Sacrament.

And yet the Almighty God is really present in It.

<sup>1</sup> Magnitudinis ejus non est finis.—Ps. cxliv. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Rex regum, et Dominus dominantium.—Apoc. xix. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Qui respicit terram, et facit eam tremere?—Ps. ciii. 32.

that it dare not pass? “And I said: Hitherto thou shalt come, and shalt go no farther, and here thou shalt break thy swelling waters.”<sup>1</sup> Is He not that Lord, who owns all treasures, and who is not in need of any creature? That Supreme Lord, who calls to the stars and they answer Him: here we are; what is Thy wish? That Lord of infinite wisdom, who, concealed under this white mantle, penetrates the most hidden thoughts and desires of men, and who will one day come to judge the living and the dead? Yes, faith tells us that all this is true; that the same Jesus Christ, true God and true man, who redeemed us by His death, and who is now seated on the right hand of His Eternal Father in everlasting glory, is really present in this Sacrament, with His divinity and humanity, body and soul.

If we always remembered this with a lively faith, we should never be wanting in due reverence.

Christians, do we believe that? Do we believe it with a perfect and lively faith? Oh, if so, I need not say any more to urge us to pay due respect and reverence to such a great Lord. If we all have a perfect faith in this truth, then we shall never appear in the house of God, or before His altar without observing a religious silence, with down-cast eyes, modest demeanor, folded hands, bended knees, and every outward mark of the most humble reverence. If we have a perfect faith in this truth, then we shall be filled with astonishment at the great mystery it contains, our thoughts will be collected, our hearts pierced with sorrow for our sins, and inflamed with love for a God who loves us so much; our souls will be ravished with delight, and we shall present ourselves before this Most Holy Sacrament, as poor beggars before a mighty emperor, as slaves before their master, as criminals before their judge. If we have only a perfect faith in this truth, we shall cry out with voice and heart, like the Publican: “O God, be merciful to me a sinner;”<sup>2</sup> or else with St. Peter, when he saw the almighty power of Christ in the miraculous draught of fishes: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord;”<sup>3</sup> or with St. Elizabeth, when she was visited by the Mother of God, we will ask, how is it that such a poor mortal as I, am allowed to enjoy the privilege of visiting such a Mighty Sovereign, of sitting down before Him, nay, if I will, of receiving Him, and bringing Him into my house? In a word, if we only have a perfect faith in this truth we shall

<sup>1</sup> Et dixi: Usque huc venies, et non procedes amplius, et hic confringes tumentes fluctus tuos.—Job xxxviii. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Deus, propitius esto mihi peccatori.—Luke xviii. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Exi a me, quia homo peccator sum, Domine.—Ibid. v. 8.

never be wanting in due respect and reverence to the Blessed Sacrament.

The burning bush, which concealed the Majesty of God, inspired the Prophet Moses, in spite of his almost familiarity with God, with such a reverential fear, that he dare not approach it until he had taken off his shoes out of respect, as we read in the Third Chapter of Exodus. The Ark of the Covenant, which was only a wooden chest, and a mere figure of the Blessed Sacrament, had to be treated with such reverence, that no one dared to approach, or touch it, or even to look at it. The Bethsamites could testify to this; for on one occasion many thousands of them were struck dead, because they were wanting in proper respect towards the Ark, as it was being carried towards them: "But He slew of the men of Bethsames, because they had seen the ark of the Lord: and He slew of the people seventy men, and fifty thousand of the common people . . . And the men of Bethsames said: Who shall be able to stand before the Lord, this Holy God?"<sup>1</sup> And, after all, what did the Ark contain? Two tables of stone, on which the divine Law was written, and a little of the manna with which the Israelites were fed in the desert! That was all! O Christians, where is our faith? Ought we not to humble ourselves far more, and show far greater reverence to the true Living Ark, in which we adore the Almighty God as really present?

What reverence the Jews showed to God although He was present only in figures.

But why do I speak so much of divine things? Princes and kings of earth, you are raised above others, but you still remain in your nature poor mortals like the rest of us; you are, like us, creatures who are always in need of your God; like us, you must knock humbly at the door of the great King of Heaven, and ask Him humbly for an alms; and yet, come forward a moment, and let yourselves be seen. Oh, what respect is shown you; what bowing and scraping, what zealous and respectful attention on the part of all who are in your presence! And that is right; because the power that God has given you, deserves that honor. It would be a grievous crime in the eyes of the world to enter even the ante-chamber of an earthly monarch, without uncovering the head, or to speak therein in a loud voice. And as soon as the words are heard in the ante-chamber, or even in the court-yard of the palace: "The king is coming;" what a sudden change takes place among all the courtiers and attend-

What great respect is shown in presence of a king.

<sup>1</sup> Percussit autem de viris Bethsamitibus, eo quod vidissent arcam Domini: et percussit de populo septuaginta viros, et quinquaginta millia plebis . . . Et dixerunt viri Bethsamitæ: Quis poterit stare in conspectu Domini Dei sancti hujus?—1. Kings vi. 19, 20.

ants ! All conversation is at once interrupted, and every one assumes the most respectful posture he can, ready to bend the knee at a moment's notice, although the king is not yet visible. If, on such an occasion, one of the chamberlains were to continue laughing, or joking, or if one of the greatest lords of the court were simply to remain seated when the door of the royal chamber opens, that alone would be enough to warrant one in saying: that man either does not believe that the king is coming, or else he is an unmannerly clown, who has little respect for his sovereign.

Therefore, if we are not reverent before the Blessed Sacrament, it is a sign of want of faith.

Christians, what a shame it is, says St. John Chrysostom, to have to use such similes to exhort the faithful to their duty ! There is an infinite distance between the majesty of a mortal monarch, and that of the great King of Heaven. Compare all the princes, kings and emperors of earth with God, and they will appear infinitely smaller than a fly would if compared to an elephant, a straw to the tower of Babel, a worm to an emperor ! And yet, (what a shame, I say again !) the great God present in the Blessed Sacrament, receives from His children only half the respect that is paid, even in the streets, to earthly sovereigns, by their servants ! And yet we think that we thereby fulfil our duty ! Would that we did even that much always ! Whenever we enter a church, whenever the Blessed Sacrament is exposed on the altar, whenever the Sacred Host and Chalice are elevated at Mass, whenever the Viaticum is carried to the sick, our faith cries out, " Behold your King," your Saviour, your Judge, your Creator, your God ! If on such occasions I were not to experience any mental emotion, and were not to show any particular sign of reverence in my outward behaviour ; what opinion would you form of me ? You would say without fear of being wrong : that man does not believe that God is present in the Blessed Sacrament, or else he has forgotten his faith.

As is easily seen by our conduct.

A Jewess once presumed to receive Holy Communion with some Catholics ; but she was soon recognized, and severely punished. Do you know, my dear brethren, how she was found out ? As soon as she had received the Sacred Host, she bent forward and covered her face with her hands, as if to keep off distractions ; but those who were near her, heard her gnawing at the Sacred Host with her teeth, as if she wished to avenge herself thereby on Christ. This conduct on her part was sufficient to convince all who noticed it that she must be either a

witch, or a Jewess. Now, my dear brethren, if I see people in presence of the Blessed Sacrament, as is unfortunately too often the case nowadays, staring round on all sides, casting wanton glances in all directions, talking, laughing, hardly condescending to bend one knee, appearing dressed in a frivolous, scandalous, or indecent manner; or if it were possible for me to look into their hearts, and see the impure thoughts and desires that they bring with them to the altar, what conclusion must I come to regarding them? Are they sorcerers, or Jews? No, that I dare not say; but if I were to think to myself: oh, these people have not a lively faith; they do not know, and do not think of the great Lord in whose presence they are; would I do them wrong? Not by any means; there is not the least doubt that they are wanting in proper faith, and that they forget what the Christian faith teaches; otherwise they would behave far differently.

But, if they have a lively faith, are they perhaps so stupid and ignorant, that they do not know how to act in the presence of such a great God, and to show Him due respect and reverence? Then, why do they not learn from others, who know more about it than they do? A peasant knows how to deal with his equals, but not with great lords and princes. He never learned how to behave like a courtier. But in case he has to appear before his sovereign, what does he do? He first asks one of the servants at court what title he has to employ when speaking to his sovereign, and then pays great attention to the conduct of the courtiers. If he sees the latter bowing, or kneeling, oh, he thinks, I am only a poor peasant, I must certainly bow down to the earth; and so he imitates them as well as he can. My dear brethren, we are ignorant and inexperienced in the courtly etiquette of the great King of Heaven, our Lord and our God; and we betray our ignorance by our rude and uncultivated manners in presence of the Most August Sacrament of the altar.

Let us ask God's own privy counsellors, how we are to behave towards Him; I mean, we must see how the angels of Heaven act towards the Blessed Sacrament. St. Basil, and St. John Chrysostom testify to having frequently seen whole hosts of the heavenly spirits in bodily shape, clad in snow-white garments, surrounding the Blessed Sacrament during Mass, or when It was exposed in the monstrance, like an army in presence of the general, with bare feet, arms folded in the form of a cross, bowed heads and bodies, showing in their whole demeanor, the

Or else a sign of rudeness; since we do not know how to behave in presence of such a great Lord.

We can learn from the angels how to behave.

greatest humility and reverence, nay, awe and dread, as if they deemed themselves unworthy to appear in presence of Infinite Majesty. What food this gives us for reflection! For the angels are the great courtiers and princes of Heaven, who far surpass us in gifts of nature and grace; while we are poor and abject mortals, who are no better than dust and ashes! With what humility and modesty, then, with what devotion and reverence should we not behave in presence of this great Mystery! The angels who know well the greatness of this Lord, and the titles and the honor that are due Him, tremble before Him; and I, a miserable worm of the earth, dare to laugh and talk! The angels veil their eyes through humility; but I cannot even keep mine cast down! I must needs gratify my curiosity by letting them wander about in all directions! The angels bow down to the earth; but I hardly deign to bend the knee! The angels fold their arms in the form of a cross; but I am ashamed to fold my hands in church! What intolerable rudeness that is, in presence of so great a Lord, on the part of one who has even a little faith!

And also  
from good  
Christians,  
and even  
great po-  
tentates.

But our eyes are not as good as those of a St. Basil, or a St. Chrysostom, to be able to see how the angels behave in this particular. Still we can, and we should try to learn from the example of pious men, how to behave before the Blessed Sacrament. I will not speak of the different ways in which great saints used to show their reverence; nor of the custom of the early Christians who used to prostrate themselves on the ground as soon as they entered a church, in order to adore their God who was really present on the altar. Great kings and emperors, from whom it was least to be expected, have been seen to crawl on their knees through the church up to the altar, to receive Holy Communion; thus showing that under the Sacramental veils, they acknowledged a far greater Monarch than themselves. Wenceslaus, King of Bohemia, through reverence for the Blessed Sacrament, used himself to till the land, plant the wheat, reap it, and prepare with his own hands the flour for the altar-breads. The celebrated Philip II., King of Spain, whenever he attended a procession of the Blessed Sacrament, never appeared as a king with his attendants, but went amongst the common people like one of them, no matter what the weather was. On one occasion, as he was attending a procession during the summer, the sun beat down fiercely on his head; a lackey noticed it, and tried to shade him with his hat; never mind, said Philip; the

sun will not hurt one on an occasion like this, we must not mind heat or cold, wind or rain. He once accompanied the Blessed Sacrament through a number of narrow, dirty streets, bare-headed, and on foot, to the house of a poor sick man, and returned with It to the church. The priest who carried It, asked him afterwards, if he was not tired. Tired? said he, I never heard my servants, who have to wait on me day and night, complain of being tired; how then can I be tired when I am serving my King? One cannot do enough to honor and serve the Almighty God. The same humble reverence towards the Blessed Sacrament has been kept up amongst the emperors of Austria for many hundred years, as a sacred heir-loom, down to Charles VI., of glorious memory, who, to the edification of the world, has given special proofs of his devotion in this respect; for, if in driving by, they happened to see the Blessed Sacrament carried to the sick, no matter how far away it was, they got down at once from the carriage, fell on their knees, and then, rising up, followed the Sacred Viaticum to the house of the sick person. We are amazed, my dear brethren, at reading such things of these great potentates; but have we not much more reason to wonder at our own amazement, since it is a sign of such an imperfect faith? If we had a clear knowledge and recollection, that God Himself is really present in the Blessed Eucharist, we should not be so much surprised that princes, kings and emperors showed Him such marks of humble reverence. It would not cause us more surprise, than to see a servant pulling off his master's boots, or a beggar taking off his hat to the rich man whom he is asking for an alms; for all the potentates of earth are no better than servants, or beggars, compared to God.

Much more reason have we to be astonished, that even dumb

beasts can teach reasoning and believing men how to behave with reverence and respect towards the Blessed Sacrament. A swarm of bees once gathered together the fragments of a consecrated Host, that had been scattered over a field, put them into a little temple made of wax, and then gathered round, as if to adore their Creator. In the time of St. Anthony of Padua, a mule once threw itself down on its fore-legs, and, although it was very hungry, did not begin to graze, until a procession of the Blessed Sacrament which was going by at the time, had passed. The same honor was shown It on another occasion by a whole flock of sheep. If it were not for the learning and piety of Eusebius and Menochius, we could hardly believe what they relate of a

And even  
from dumb  
beasts.

pastry-cook's dog at Lisbon: this animal, without being trained to do so, used to accompany the Blessed Sacrament; whenever he heard the bell ring, as a signal that the priest was about to bring the Viaticum to a sick person, he would run to the church, wait at the door until the priest was ready, and then follow the procession, sometimes on one side, sometimes on the other, as if to see that everything was in proper order; nor could even his own master hinder him from doing this. Once the signal was given during the night; the dog heard it, and tried to get out of the house, but the door was shut, and he ran to his master's room barking and whining, to show what he wanted; as his master paid no attention to him, he went to the maid-servant, seized her by the dress, and would not let her go, until she opened the door for him. On another occasion, as he was accompanying the Blessed Sacrament, he saw a porter sleeping by the way-side; he went up to him and began to bark until the porter awoke, took off his hat, and knelt down; he did the same to a peasant woman, who came by riding on an ass, nor was he satisfied until he compelled her to dismount and adore the Blessed Sacrament. Sometimes the same bell was rung for a burial; the dog, thinking the Blessed Sacrament was to be carried out, would run to the church as usual, but would return home at once on finding that he had made a mistake. Once, during Holy Week, he remained for twenty-four hours at a stretch before the sepulchre, in which the Blessed Sacrament was placed. If he appeared in a church, especially during exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, no one dared to stand up, or else he would bark at them with all his might, and thus make them quite ashamed. Every means was tried to make him abandon this singular custom; when the signal was given for a procession, the door was shut on him, or a piece of meat was thrown to him, but all in vain; he howled and whined at the door, until they were glad to get rid of him by opening it for him; or, he would make one or two snaps at the meat, and then run off to the procession. There is no doubt, my dear brethren, that the Author of nature implanted that instinct in an unreasoning animal, in order to put to shame both infidels and heretics. But what am I saying? Rather was it to put to shame worthless Catholics, who, although they are infallibly assured by the light of faith, that the divine Majesty is really present under the Sacramental Species, yet show It as little reverence, as if they were merely dealing with a mortal like themselves. O my Lord and my God, pardon my sloth and imperfec-

tion! I say so often, that I wish to serve Thee zealously, and that I know that Thou, who art Almighty and art worthy of all honor and love, art really present in this Sacrament; but how do I act in reality? "Without contrition of heart," as I must confess with St. Augustine, "and without due reverence and fear."<sup>1</sup> The angels in Heaven tremble before Thy Majesty; even dumb brutes acknowledge it; "but I, a miserable sinner, while I am in Thy presence, praising and offering Thee sacrifice why do I not tremble, and grow pale before Thee? Why do not my lips and my whole body shake with fear? Why do I not incessantly deplore my sins with bitter tears?"<sup>2</sup> O faith, faith, thou alone art wanting!

I conclude, my dear brethren, in the words of the text, "Let us draw near with a true heart in fulness of faith." When we enter a church, let each one of us say to himself with the inward voice of the heart: in this church, on this altar is truly present the Incarnate God, who rules Heaven and earth, and whom countless angels adore. Let each one keep this faith alive, while he remains in the church, and re-awaken it whenever the Blessed Sacrament is carried past. Especially should we do so when hearing Mass, or receiving Holy Communion. Let us draw near in fulness of faith; let us approach with a perfect faith deeply impressed on our minds.

Al, if all were faithful in observing this, how carefully would not each one be in cleansing his conscience from the least stain of sin; how zealously he would prepare his heart for humility, devotion and love; how modest he would be in eyes, hands, clothing and outward behavior! What countless treasures of grace we could thus receive in a single Communion! Unworthy Communions, and Sacrifices received or celebrated in the state of sin, or in the proximate occasion of sin, would you then be possible? No, you are not possible where there is a lively faith. Oh, when a lively faith represents this mystery to me, I think to myself: my soul and body, you who daily at the altar become a dwelling in which the great God condescends to enter, how far should you not be from the least shadow of sin? how eagerly should you not strive after true holiness? You, my hands, that have daily the honor of holding God between your fingers, could you ever so far forget yourselves as to be guilty of unbecoming,

Conclusion: always to honor our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament with a lively faith.

Then we shall not be guilty of sin or fault in this respect.

<sup>1</sup> Sine cordis contritione, sine reverentia debita, et tremore.

<sup>2</sup> Ego peccator, dum Tibi assisto, laudes dico, sacrificium offero; cur non corde paveo, vultu palleo, labiis tremo, toto corpore inhorresco, sicque obortis lacrymis coram Te indesinenter lugeo?

or indecent touches? You, my feet, that bring me every day to the church, to see and to receive my God, could you ever bring me amongst dangerous and wicked companions? My eyes, that behold every day in my hands, under the Sacramental veils, Him whom the angels contemplate with dread; could you ever lend yourselves to impure looks? And you, my tongue and my mouth, what honor and happiness is yours! The angels in Heaven cannot do what you can; they must humbly adore Him whom you bring forth by a few words and afterwards receive. How could you dare to indulge in wicked, or uncharitable conversation? And you too, hearts and bodies of Christians, that are so often fed with this Divine Food, which is purer and more beautiful than the sun, how unbecoming it would be for you to still continue to defile yourselves with sin! Ah, dear Lord, it happens only too often! but through no other cause, unless want of faith. Almighty God, who werkest so many and such great miracles in this Sacrament, show now in me, and in many others, a new miracle of Thy goodness, by curing our tepid hearts of incredulity, and giving us a lively and a perfect faith! Then Thou shalt not have reason to complain any more of us, as Thou hast done in the past, namely, that we have believed in Thy presence in this Sacrament, and yet have shown It so little reverence, respect and devotion. Amen.

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**THIRTY-FOURTH SERMON.**

**ON IRREVERENCE IN CHURCH.**

**Subject.**

Many Christians know not, and think not of the Lord who dwells in our churches; or else they know not how to behave towards Him.—*Preached on the Feast of the Dedication of a Church.*

**Text.**

*Vere Dominus est in loco isto, et ego nesciebam.*—Gen. xxviii. 16.

“Indeed the Lord is in this place and I knew it not.”

**Introduction.**

Where are we now, my dear brethren? In the Cathedral of

Treves, the feast of whose Dedication we are celebrating to-day. To what end are we here? Partly to hear the word of God, and partly to offer sacrifice to the same God. A holy end, indeed! How do we behave ourselves here? Eyes, tongues, hands, feet, gestures, attitudes, thoughts and hearts, of all who are present, answer this question. When the Patriarch Jacob saw in a dream the ladder reaching to Heaven, on the top of which God was seated, while numerous angels ascended and descended by it, he woke full of astonishment and reverence: "And trembling, he said: How terrible is this place! this is no other but the house of God, and the gate of Heaven. Indeed the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not." "But, holy Patriarch, what are you saying? Do you not know that God is present in all places? Certainly, I do; but here I see in a special manner the effect of His presence, namely, the extraordinary blessing He confers; and I knew it not. See there, my dear brethren, as St. Gregory says, that is a figure of our Christian churches; there is not one of them which does not resemble a ladder leading to Heaven, by which our prayers ascend to God, and His blessings and mercies come down to us." But perhaps, if I were to inquire into the matter, I should find many Christians who do not know what kind of a place the Church is, nor what kind of a Lord dwells in it. Yet, there is no need of an examination; experience proves clearly enough that it is not without reason that I form this opinion, as I shall now show.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*Many Christians know not and think not of the Lord who dwells in our churches; or else they know not how to behave towards Him. Such is the whole subject. The first arises from want of attention on the part of the understanding, and from a want of a lively faith. The second comes from sloth, and from ill behavior. Both are betrayed by want of reverence in church. Both we must and will renounce to-day.*

Christ Jesus, who through zeal for the honor of the temple, hast taken a scourge in Thy hand, and driven out those who dishonored it, give strength to my words, that I may defend and uphold the honor of Thy holy churches. This we ask of Thee through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary and the holy angels guardian.

<sup>1</sup> Pavensque, Quam terribilis est, inquit, locus iste! non est hic aliud nisi domus Dei, et porta cœli. Vere Dominus est in loco isto, et ego nesciebam.—Gen. xxviii. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Ascendit precatio, descendit miseratio.

David  
thought of  
building a  
house for  
God.

As we read in the 17th chapter of the First Book of Paralipomenon, King David was once walking in his palace with the Prophet Nathan; they were talking about the service, honor, and praise of God, when suddenly David was inspired with that great and holy thought; "Behold," he said, "I dwell in a house of cedar," in a palace with many well-furnished rooms, surrounded with beautiful gardens; "and the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord is under skins,"<sup>1</sup> in a poor tent. I, a servant of God, am in a palace, whilst the ark of God is kept in a tent! How unbecoming that is! I cannot bear it any longer; I will build a more suitable house for the ark; "I had a thought to have built a house, in which the ark of the Lord, and the foot-stool of our God might rest."<sup>2</sup> And he immediately prepares to carry out his design; he begins to collect all the materials for the temple, which his son Solomon was to build, according to God's command, and, as he says himself, in a few years he had got together all the money that was required for the purpose; "I prepared all things for the building."<sup>3</sup>

For which  
he collected  
an im-  
mense sum  
of money.

And how much money do you think he had collected, my dear brethren? Say, a hundred thousand dollars: do you not think that a fine temple might have been built for that sum? Say, six times that amount; could he not have raised a most magnificent structure with such an enormous amount of money? Still, that bears no proportion to the actual sum. Hear what great ideas David had: "The work is great," he says, for you must know that, "a house is prepared not for man, but for God;"<sup>4</sup> for that great God whose palace is the vast Heaven, whose foot-stool is the sun, whose floor is the firmament strewn with stars; it is for this great God that I am going to build a house, so that I must do all I can to make it worthy of Him. Hear what an immense sum he had managed to put together, in spite of his poverty, as he told his son: "Behold, I in my poverty have prepared the charges of the house of the Lord." How much? "Of gold a hundred thousand talents, and of silver a million of talents."<sup>5</sup> That is, according to the calculations of

<sup>1</sup> Ecce, ego habito in domo cedrina: arca autem fœderis Domini sub pellibus est.—I. Par. xvii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Cogitavi, ut œdificarem domum, in qua requiesceret arca fœderis Domini, et scabellum pedum Dei nostri.—Ibid. xxviii. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ad œdificandum omnia præparavi.—Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Opus namque grande est, neque enim homini præparatur habitatio, sed Deo.—Ibid. xxix. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Ecce ego in paupertate mea præparavi impensas domus Domini: auri talenta centum milia, et argenti mille milia talentorum.—Ibid. xxii. 14.

Pineda and other authors, three thousand millions of Spanish ducats. But besides that, there were brass and iron, of which there is no weight, for the abundance surpasseth all account."<sup>1</sup> Nor was there any want of wood and stone.<sup>2</sup> And all this was only for the commencement of the building. On his death-bed he left all his other treasures, "three thousand talents of gold, and seven thousand talents of refined silver to overlay the walls of the Temple;"<sup>3</sup> and in addition to all that, the princes of the tribes of Israel, whom he had summoned for the purpose, gave, "of gold, five thousand talents, and ten thousand solids; of silver ten thousand talents, and of brass eighteen thousand talents, and of iron a hundred thousand talents. And all they that had precious stones, gave them to the treasure of the house of the Lord."<sup>4</sup> These are the words of the Holy Scripture, my dear brethren, I have added nothing to them. Ah! David, what do you intend doing with a treasure so enormous that we could well doubt of its existence, if we were not assured of it by the infallible word of God? Are you going to build a new world, or a house? I am going to build a house; but you must not be astonished, because it is not for men, but for God; it is intended as a dwelling-place for the God to whom the whole world is as a grain of sand; must I not then do all I can to make it worthy of Him?

David dies and Solomon succeeds him, and begins the work ; but he soon exhausted the treasure left him by his father. He had gold and silver brought to Jerusalem for the building, not in hundreds or thousands, but like the stones of the street in quantity: "And the king made silver and gold to be in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar trees as sycamores, which grow in the plains in great numbers."<sup>5</sup> There were seventy thousand laborers who carried loads on their shoulders; eighty thousand men to cut the stone in the mountains, and three thousand six hundred overseers to keep the people to their work, besides the masons and tradesmen who worked at the Temple. All these had to be fed and paid for seven years. What a splendid edifice

To which Solomon his son, added a great deal more, and built a most magnificent temple.

<sup>1</sup> Aeris vero, et ferri non est pondus, vincitur enim numerus magnitudine.—I. Par. xxii. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Ligna et lapides præparavi ad universa indendia.—Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Tria millia talenta auri, et septem millia talentorum argenti probatissimi, ad deaurandos parietes templi.—Ibid. xxix. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Auri talenta quinque millia, et solidos decem millia; argenti talenta decem millia, et æris talenta decem et octo millia; ferri quoque centum millia talentorum. Et apud quemcumque inventi sunt lapides, dederunt in thesauros domus Domini.—Ibid. 7, 8.

<sup>5</sup> Præbuitque rex argentum et aurum in Jerusalem quasi lapides, et cedros quasi sycamoras, quæ nascuntur in campestribus multitudine magna.—II. Par. i. 15.

that must have been! Yes, answers Solomon, “for the house which I desire to build, is great : for our God is great above all gods.” “Who, then, can be able to build Him a worthy house? if Heaven and the Heaven of heavens cannot contain Him : who am I, that I should be able to build Him a house? but to this end only, that incense may be burnt before Him.”<sup>1</sup> The magnificence and glory of the Temple after it was finished, can neither be imagined, nor described.

From which we may infer the great respect and reverence the Israelites had for the house of God.

Besides all this outward splendor, what respect and reverence were required of those who entered the Temple! In order to save time, you can read for yourselves in the Holy Scripture, my dear brethren, of the ceremonies that were prescribed for priests and people. We may form some idea of them from the mere fact, that the high-priest alone could enter the Holy of Holies, and not until he had carefully washed his hands and feet. Christians, why do I describe all this to you so minutely? In order that you may form a clearer idea of the greatness of the Lord who dwelt in the Temple, and of the reverence that the Jews had for their God and His house; for, as they said, “a house is prepared not for man, but for God.”

And yet God was present in it only by figures.

Poor Hebrews, tell me then, how was God present in the temple? He was there by His omnipresence. What? Why, I have Him in my poor room in that way! And is that all? Oh no, He was in the Temple in a special manner, for He promised to hear our prayers in it. But He does that in our small chapels that are built merely of wood and stone. Is that all? No, in the vestibule of the temple we sacrifice our sheep and cattle, which he accepts as an agreeable offering. But you did that in former times in the open air, and God accepted the sacrifices you then offered Him. Is there nothing more? Oh yes, the chief sign of the divine presence is the Ark of the Covenant, and that is kept in the Temple. The Ark of the Covenant? And what was it? A wooden box. What did it contain? The two tables of stone on which God wrote the Ten Commandments for the Prophet Moses, and a little of the manna which fed our forefathers in the desert. Is that all? Yes. There is nothing more? No. And you build such a magnificent Temple for the sake of two stones and a little bread? To two stones and a little

<sup>1</sup> Domus enim, quam ædificare cupio, magna est : magnus est enim Deus noster super omnes deos. Quis ergo poterit prævalere, ut ædificet ei dignam domum? si cælum, et cœli cœlorum capere eum nequeunt, quantus ego sum, ut possim ædificare ei domum? sed ad hoc tantum, ut adoleatur incensum coram illo.—II. Par. ii. 5, 6.

bread you show such honor? For their sake you require all to enter the Temple, to observe the greatest respect?

O Christians, we must hide our faces for shame? Ah, if David or Solomon had known what we are assured of by an infallible faith; if they could have had the Lord as we have Him present shut up in our churches; what would they not have done in His honor? Great God, show Thyself to Thy people, let them see who Thou art, and how Thou art present night and day in this temple, which is consecrated to Thee! Lay aside for a moment the Veil of the Species which hide Thee! But no; rather remain hidden, as Thou art! Our eyes would not be able to bear the splendor of Thy Majesty! Our faith tells us, that Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, as He is seated in Heaven on a throne of endless glory, dwells in this church. And in what manner? Not merely by His omnipresence as God, not merely as a benevolent Father, seated on a throne of mercy to hear our prayers, not by mere figures and shadows, as God was present in the temple at Jerusalem; but He is here present in reality, with His divine and human nature, with His living body and soul. To Him sacrifice is here daily offered; not of sheep and oxen; but He Himself is both priest and sacrifice, who offers Himself to His eternal Father for us in the Holy Mass. Christians, have we been aware of that hitherto? Have we thought of it when we entered the church? Do we believe it now that we are in the church? If so, then, where are the splendor and magnificence that are due to so great a Lord?

God is present in our churches in a far more real and glorious manner.

Be not afraid, my dear brethren, it is not much gold and silver that are required of you. If it were, I might talk to you in vain, and it would be with me, as it was with our Lord in the temple when the woman taken in adultery was brought before Him; He stooped down, and wrote on the ground, and as St. John says: "But they went out one by one, . . . and Jesus alone remained."<sup>1</sup> So also, I say, I should be left alone here, if I required of you to contribute great treasures in honor of this church. If their Prophet Moses were to appear on earth, and, as he did in former times, ask the Jews to contribute to build a tabernacle, they would joyfully consent, and would vie with one another in giving up their most precious objects for the purpose; the men would bring their gold and silver goblets, the women would bring their ear-rings and finger-rings, their necklaces and armlets, and their silken garments. So they did in

God does not require us to bring great treasures to church.

<sup>1</sup> *Autem unus post unum exibant . . . et remansit solus Jesus.*—John viii. 9.

olden times, when Moses had to tell them not to bring any more, they were so generous : “ Moses therefore commanded proclamation to be made by the crier’s voice : Let neither man nor woman offer any more for the work of the sanctuary. And so they ceased from offering gifts, because the things that were offered did suffice, and were too much.”<sup>1</sup> But, O Moses, if you were to come to us Christians, and ask us to give something to a poor church, in which Jesus Christ, God and Man, dwells, in which the chalice is of lead, and the altar linen is torn and worn with age, and in which a small lamp is with difficulty kept burning ; if you were to ask us for something for a church of this kind, in spite of your persuasive oratory, I am afraid you would not find it necessary to prohibit us from giving any more, on account of the abundance of our generosity. I would not even dare to promise you anything from those who carry their treasures about them for show, and who go about clad in silk and velvet, and gold and silver, above their means, adorning their bodies like a magnificent temple ; as the Prophet David says : “ Their daughters decked out ; adorned around about after the similitude of a temple.”<sup>2</sup>

But inward  
and out-  
ward rever-  
ence.

No, my dear brethren, it is not with gold and silver that I ask you to adorn the house of God to-day. I only ask you for an ornament which the poor, as well as the rich, the covetous, as well as the generous can give, and are bound to give ; and that is, inward and outward reverence, respect and devotion in the house of God, a holy silence, downcast eyes, a modest demeanor, folded hands, bended knees, and an humble posture of the body ; a pure conscience, a contrite heart, and a mind free from distractions and collected in God. That is all I ask of you when you come into the church, and as long as you remain in it. Is that too much ? Nay, is it enough to ask for the house and court in which God is really present, seated on His throne, that we may adore and honor Him ? Ought we not to crawl on the ground like a worm of the earth, and annihilate ourselves in His presence ? What less should we, poor mortals, do, in presence of such infinite Majesty ? “ Indeed the Lord is in this place.”

Therefore,  
he who is  
wanting in  
that is either  
ignorant or  
rude ; there  
are many  
such.

But if we see any one behaving otherwise, as is unfortunately so often the case, we can conclude that he does not know, or acknowledge, or think of the great Lord, worthy of all honor

<sup>1</sup> Jussit ergo Moyses præconis voce cantari : Nec vir nec mulier quidquam offerat ultra in opere sanctuarii. Sicque cessatum est a muneribus offerendis, eo quod oblata sufficerent et superabundarent.—Exod. xxxvi. 6, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Filiae eorum compositæ, circumornatæ ut similitudo templi.—Ps. cxliii. 12.

and glory, who dwells in our churches. If he were to contradict us and say: What rash judgment are you forming of me? I am a good Christian; I believe that God is here present in the blessed Sacrament, and I am ready to give my life for my faith; very well, we might answer, but if so, you are an ignorant clown, and do not know how to behave in the presence of the divine Majesty. And he would really deserve that name. Still he would have a great many companions; for even among Catholics, a fact that cannot be sufficiently deplored, there are many quite as ignorant as he.

And in the first place, I would ask those who forget the respect they ought to observe on entering the church, who come dressed in a vain and frivolous, and even scandalous style, whether their intention was, not to pay humble homage to their Lord and their God, but to attract the attention and admiration of others. If those people had lived in the time of St. John Chrysostom, they would hardly have ventured to church in that style, for he would have stopped them at the door, and asked them where they were going and whether they thought the church was a dancing house? And he would tell them to go back and return dressed in a more modest manner, if they wished to adore a humble crucified Saviour; I would ask those people, I say, if they know how to pay due respect and honor to their God, since they hardly even bend the knee before Him? It seems almost that they are afraid of faring like the unfortunate Timagoras, who was beheaded by the Athenians because, when they sent him as ambassador to King Artaxerxes, he bowed lower before that monarch than became the ambassador of such a great nation; in those days, humiliation was looked on as a crime deserving of death. These proud Christians seem to fear a similar fate, if they humble themselves before the King of Heaven, more than the perverse customs of the world allow. But although they think too much of themselves to honor God as they ought in church, they do not forget to greet and salute in most humble manner some poor mortal like themselves, whom they see in church, nor do they hesitate to turn their backs to the altar while doing so. What shameful conduct that is! Is this the place for those vain observances of the world? Or is the great God so little deserving of respect, that it is not worth while to pay Him any outward honor?

In the second place, I would ask whether much is known of the honor due to God, by those who, when they come to church,

Namely, they who enter the church irreverently.

They who behave dis-

respectfully  
in church

are so careful of their clothes, that they dare not kneel down for fear of soiling them, and so they remain either standing, or sitting? From their conduct we can easily infer that, they either think more of their clothes than they do of the Majesty of God, or that they are more anxious, through want of Christian mortification, to secure their comfort, than they are to pay due honor to God. I do not wish to condemn the practice of sitting down in church; there are a few examples of it in the Holy Scriptures which I would be glad if all who sit down in church, were to imitate carefully. In the Book of Judges we read that the Israelites prayed in the house of God sitting down; but under what circumstances? They had come in worn out and tired after fighting and long fasting, and even then they did not forget the respect due to the place in which they were: "Wherefore all the children of Israel came to the house of God, and sat and wept before the Lord."<sup>1</sup> As we read in the following chapter of the same Book, they sat and prayed in the house of God, but they spent the whole day in lamentation and weeping; "And they all came to the house of God in Silo, and sitting before Him till the evening, lifted up their voices, and began to lament and weep."<sup>2</sup> David too, sat down in the house of God, as we read in the Second Book of Kings: "And David went in, and sat before the Lord."<sup>3</sup> But he was wearied out after all he had done the day before to honor the Ark, and while his body was seated, his heart and his tongue were pouring forth most humble sighs: "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me thus far?"<sup>4</sup> In the time of Esdras, the Hebrews did not sit down in the temple, but in the street before it, and that too, when they were tired after a long journey, and in spite of the heavy rain: "And all the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of the sin, and the rain."<sup>5</sup> In the Old Testament I can find no other example of the people sitting down in the house of God. In the New Testament we read that Jesus sat down on two occasions; in the temple, once when He taught therein: "They found Him in the temple sitting in the midst of the doctors, hearing

<sup>1</sup> Quamobrem omnes filii Israel venerunt in domum Dei, et sedentes flebant coram Domino.—Judges xx. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Veneruntque omnes ad domum Dei in Silo, et in conspectu ejus sedentes usque ad vesperam, levaverunt vocem, et magno ululatu cœperunt flere.—Ibid. xxi. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ingressus est autem rex David, et sedit coram Domino.—II. Kings vii. 18.

<sup>4</sup> Quls ego sum, Domine Deus, et quæ domus mea, quia adduxisti me hucusque?—Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Et sedit omnis populus in platea domus Dei, trementes pro peccato, et pluviis.—I. Esd. x. 9.

them and asking them questions;”<sup>1</sup> and again when the offerings were being made: “And Jesus sitting over against the treasury, beheld how the people cast money into the treasury.”<sup>2</sup> Otherwise we read of Micheas, Daniel, Esdras, David, all holy men, honored with the special friendship of the Almighty, praying on bended knees, even outside of the temple: “Wherewith shall I kneel before the high God?”<sup>3</sup> as Micheas says. And the Holy Scriptures say of Daniel: “He went into his house: and opening the windows in his upper chamber towards Jerusalem, he knelt down three times a day, and adored, and gave thanks before his God, as he had been accustomed to do before.”<sup>4</sup> “I fell upon my knees,” says Esdras, “and spread out my hands to the Lord my God.”<sup>5</sup> David’s knees grew weak through constant kneeling, as he says himself: “My knees are weakened.”<sup>6</sup> The great king Solomon prayed before all the people in the temple, kneeling not on a soft cushion, but on the hard floor: “He rose from before the altar of the Lord: for he had fixed both knees on the ground, and had spread his hands towards Heaven.”<sup>7</sup> These, we Christians, have all the more reason for imitating, since we have God present in our churches in a far more excellent and real manner. At least, if fatigue obliges us to sit down, we should, as in the cases I have mentioned, show in our whole behavior the greatest humility, modesty, reverence, devotion and sorrow for sin.

But what is the conduct of a great number? Many sit or stand with as little reverence, as if they were in the market-place; they are ashamed to take a prayer-book, or a rosary in their hands; nay, they are ashamed to make the sign of the Cross properly; while they talk, laugh and hold conversations in the house of God, where they should come for the sole purpose of adoring and praising His infinite Majesty. Do such people know how to act towards their Lord? Oh, certainly, St. John Chrysostom would not have spared them, but would have put them to shame pub-

Those who  
make a  
market-  
place of the  
church.

<sup>1</sup> *In venerunt illum in templo sedentem in medio doctorum, audientem illos et interrogant eos.*—Luke ii. 46.

<sup>2</sup> *Et sedens Jesus contra gazophylacium aspiciebat, quomodo turba jactaret aë in gazophylacium.*—Mark xii. 41.

<sup>3</sup> *Curvabo genu Deo excelso?*—Mich. vi. 6.

<sup>4</sup> *Ingressus est domum suam, et fenestris apertis in coenaculo suo contra Jerusalem tribus temporibus in die flectebat genua sua, et adorabat, confitebaturque coram Deo suo, sicut et ante facere consueverat.*—Dan. vi. 10.

<sup>5</sup> *Curvavi genua mea, et expandi manus meas ad Dominum Deum meum.*—I. Esd. ix. 5

<sup>6</sup> *Genua mea infirmata sunt.*—Ps. cviii. 24.

<sup>7</sup> *Surrexit de conspectu altaris Domini; utrumque enim genu in terram fixerat, et manus expanderat in coelum.*—III. Kings viii. 54.

liely. He would have asked them: "Do you think that the church is a market-place?"<sup>1</sup> Are there no other houses and places in which you can chat and talk? Or do you think perhaps, that you are on such familiar terms with God, that you can act as you please in His house, in His presence, without showing Him the least mark of respect? "I did not know," said the Emperor Augustus once to a senator, who had invited him to dinner, and had given him very poor fare, "I did not know that you were such an intimate friend of mine."<sup>2</sup> Could not Jesus Christ reproach you in the same terms, O tepid Christian, when you show such little respect in church: I did not think that you were on such familiar terms with Me? O perverse maxims of the world! When you are asked to frequent the Sacraments, and to go to Holy Communion several times a month, you say that we must not deal so familiarly with God; and yet, you act in His presence as if He was quite an intimate friend of yours, nay, as if He were merely your equal. To love God with the whole heart, to hear His voice and to receive Him frequently and unite one's self with Him in prayer, that is looked on as too great a familiarity; but to stare around, to laugh and talk and exchange the news in His presence, is considered as respectful. Away with you out of the church, and learn how to behave properly towards so great a Lord, before you venture into His presence!

Those who  
make a  
street of it.

Do they know much about how they should behave in church, who make a short cut of it, to get from one house to another? God has given us the whole wide world to make our journeys and do our business; the church alone He has kept for Himself, that it may be set apart solely for His worship and adoration; and yet we mortals dare to dispute that small space with Him, in order to save a few moments! Tell me, would any one allow you to make a thoroughfare of his house in order to go from one street to another? No, certainly not. No one would allow such a thing as that, for any money. Leave, then, your God in possession of what belongs to Him.

Those who  
commit sin  
in church.

Finally, do they know how to behave in church, who turn it into a brothel, as St. Athanasius says?<sup>3</sup> Who defile their souls with fresh sins, in the place where they should obtain forgiveness of their sins with repentant hearts, as St. Ambrose says:

<sup>1</sup> Numquid forum est Ecclesia?

<sup>2</sup> Nesciebam ego te tam familiarem esse.

<sup>3</sup> Ex Ecclesia Dei lupanar effluunt.

“They come to church with venial sins, and leave it with mortal sins”?<sup>1</sup> I will say nothing of unworthy Confessions and Communions. O consciences of communicants, how strange you are sometimes! If one could see you, what objects of horror he would find you to be! I speak only of the unchaste looks, thoughts and desires with which many Christians defile the church; thus taking occasion from the piety of others, to gratify their sensuality. They come to church, and find therein the means of gratifying an impure passion, through the presence of some person who has come to hear the word of God, to assist at Mass, or to receive the Sacraments. Alas, cries out St. John Chrysostom, “many come to church solely for the purpose of admiring the beauty of others;”<sup>2</sup> and they take every opportunity of gratifying their curiosity, or attracting the attention of others. Nay, it sometimes happens that young persons of different sexes agree to meet in the church, in order to carry on an unlawful passion. “Are you not surprised,” asks St. Chrysostom, “that the lightning does not fall from Heaven to strike you, or that the earth does not open and bury you beneath the ruins? Are you not afraid to disgrace the house of God, by turning it into a place for gratifying your impure passions?”<sup>3</sup> Certainly you would be more cautious on the market-place, lest people should see you; but here, where the great God speaks in sermons, where He admonishes people to avoid sin, here you seek the opportunity of gratifying your passions at least by looks and desires. Would it not be better for you to be stone blind, than to make such a bad use of your eyes? So far, the zealous St. Chrysostom. In one of the wars between France and England, some British nobles bound themselves by oath to wear a shade over the right eye until they had succeeded in conquering the enemy. Priests of Jesus Christ, ah, if you have nothing else, take the altar linen on which the sacred vessels are placed, and bind with it the eyes of that young man, that young woman, whose only desire in coming to church, is to enjoy a sinful pleasure, and to turn the house of God into an idolatrous temple!

How insulting that is to God, the King of Heaven. How unworthily Thou art treated, O Lord, by Thy Christians on

What an insult they offer to God.

<sup>1</sup> Cum parvo peccato ad Ecclesiam veniunt, et cum peccatis multis de Ecclesia recedunt.

<sup>2</sup> Multi ad formas mulierum adspiciendas, ad adolescentularum pulchritudinem curiosius intuemdam ad Ecclesiam veniunt.—S. Chrys. hom. 14. in Matth.

<sup>3</sup> Non miraris quomodo fulmina undique non deferantur; quomodo cuncta funditus non evertantur? Quid facis, O homo? Non horrescis, tanta templum afficiens contumelia? Itane posttribulum tibi videtur Ecclesia, foro ignobilior?

earth. Is it for that, that Thou hast given us such a wonderful proof of Thy love for us, by concealing Thy divinity and humanity under the appearance of bread and wine, that Thou mightest remain with us always? O ye angels, what do you think of our irreverence? You, great princes and courtiers of Heaven, who far surpass us in excellence of nature, surround the altar of your Lord and King, in our churches, trembling with awe and reverence before your God who is present thereon; while we, poor mortals, who are nothing but dust and ashes, are ashamed to adore Him humbly on bended knee and with folded hands! We, vile worms of the earth, dare to be guilty of frivolity, unseemly behavior, nay, even of sin, before His very eyes! What do you think of our conduct, O blessed spirits? Are you not horrified at it? How can we expect you to intercede for us on the day when our Judge and yours will call us to an account for dishonoring His temple, and will visit us with well-merited punishment?

**The heathens will complain of them on the last day.**

But, why do I speak of the angels? If they wished to intercede for us, the very heathens and idolators would cry out against us, and would accuse us, Christians, to our Judge, of disrespect and irreverence in the house of God. How, O Lord, they would say: Thou condemnest us to hell because we have not known Thee; and we acknowledge that we have deserved Thy condemnation, because it is our own fault that we have not known Thee; but, are they deserving of mercy, who knew Thee, and yet behaved so disrespectfully towards Thee? It is true, they have trampled our idols under foot; but were they more reverent towards Thee therefore? It is looked on as a great sin for us to have bent the knee to false gods; is it a lesser sin for them to have been wanting in respect to Thee, whom they knew to be the true God? If we have adored stocks and stones, yet it must be acknowledged by all who know, or have read anything of the ceremonies that we observed in our temples, that we behaved towards our idols with humility and respect; but Thy Christians, who have the most sacred Mystery in their churches, treated It as indecently, as if they had nothing better than wood or stone before them. O just Judge, which of us deserves the severer punishment: We, who had a reverential fear of our lifeless and powerless gods; or they, who treated the true, living and Almighty God with disrespect? We, who honored mere figures, or they who sinned in Thy very presence? We, who were devout even to superstition, in our temples, or

they, who were guilty of the utmost disrespect and irreverence in the house of God? Christians, what shall we have to say in answer to these just complaints? What proofs shall we be able to bring forward against them? How shall we show our innocence?

Ah, my God, I have nothing to say; I can make no reply to these accusations, except to confess with shame and sorrow, that my faith has been hitherto very weak, and to say, "Indeed the Lord," to whom all honor is due, "is in this place, and I knew it not;" I have not thought of it; I have not kept myself reminded of it by a lively faith, whenever I entered Thy holy house, and remained in it. This is the cause of my want of respect. I confess and repent of my indecent conduct, with a contrite heart. Henceforward, I shall be most reverent; as St. Nilus tells me, I shall look on Thy church, as if it were Heaven, and pay Thee my homage with the angels who are in attendance on Thee therein, with the greatest humility, modesty and devotion; nor will I think, speak, or do anything that savors of earth. Let no one in the future dare to speak about other business in the church; I will show by my silence, and by trampling on human respect, that there is a great Lord here present, whom I must treat with the greatest reverence! Let no one think the worse of me, if I forget the politeness of the world, and omit the usual greetings and compliments! I have here before me the greatest of all monarchs, whom alone I must honor in this place. You, my eyes, shall look on nothing but the altar on which God awaits my love and adoration, or else you shall keep yourselves modestly cast down. You, my hands, when you are not occupied with prayer-book, or rosary, shall be folded in adoration of the great King. You, my knees, shall be bent in open confession of that great God whom I believe to be here present. Thus this place will be to me a place of freedom and refuge, in which, like the Patriarch Jacob, I shall receive frequent graces and blessings from the Lord, so that I may one day praise and bless that same Lord in His heavenly place. Let this be your resolution too, my dear brethren. Amen.

Conclusion  
and resolution  
to be-  
have rever-  
ently in  
church.

## THIRTY-FIFTH SERMON.

## ON THE MALICE OF IRREVERENCE IN CHURCH, AND THE PUNISHMENT IT DESERVES.

## Subject.

Irreverence in the Church of God is an act of the greatest contempt towards God, which He, in His anger, punishes most severely.—*Preached on the ninth Sunday after Pentecost.*

## Text.

*Quomodo huc intrasti?* Matth. xxii. 12.  
“How camest thou in hither?”

## Introduction.

“Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the exterior darkness.”<sup>1</sup> What a severe Judge! What a terrible punishment to inflict on the poor man! What fault had he committed? He had come to the marriage-feast, without having on a wedding-garment. That was his whole crime. Is it, then, such a grievous fault to appear at a feast of that kind, without being dressed suitably, that it deserves to be punished with exterior darkness where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth? If that is the case, my dear brethren, how will it then be with those who appear, I will not say without decent clothes, but with a disrespectful demeanor, in the house of the great King of Heaven, to which the faithful come, either to receive Holy Communion, or to hear the word of God in sermons? Christ Jesus, King of Glory, who art bodily present in our churches, and who seest, not only the outward behavior, but the most secret thoughts of men, how many there are who enter Thy house and who remain in it, to whom Thou couldst say, with just resentment, “How camest thou in hither” dressed as frivolously as if going to a dancing house? How camest thou in hither, without bending the knee and showing Me proper honor? How camest thou in hither, to talk and chat, as if you were on the market-place? How camest thou in hither, to allow your eyes to indulge in impure glances? How camest thou in hither, to approach My table with a conscience stained with mortal sin? Quick, ye angels,

<sup>1</sup> *Ligatis manibus et pedibus ejus, mittite eum in tenebras exteriores.*—Matth. xxii. 18.

bind the hands and feet of this impious man who dishonors My house, and “cast him into the exterior darkness.” Yes, my dear brethren, so it will be one day, with all who in any way are irreverent in the church of God. A sin that we generally think little of, although by it the Almighty is treated with the greatest contempt, so that He punishes it with the greatest severity ; as I shall now show.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*Irreverence in the church of God is an act of the greatest contempt towards God, which He, in His anger, punishes most severely. Such is the whole subject of to-day’s sermon. Therefore, before we enter the church, let us always recollect where we are going, that we may never be wanting in due respect and reverence to our God. Such shall be our conclusion.*

Give us Thy grace thereto, O omnipresent God; we humbly ask it of Thee through the merits of Mary, and the intercession of our holy angels guardian.

Every sin has this terrible quality, that it implies a dishonoring and a contempt of God, since a miserable mortal dares to rebel against his Almighty God and Lord, and to trample His law under foot. Therefore every sin merits the just anger and vengeance of God, to such a degree, that, if it is a mortal sin, and is not repented of, it deserves no less a punishment than eternal fires amongst the demons in hell. Still, there is no doubt that, as far as this contempt of God is concerned, circumstances make some sins worse than others. Thus, calumny, by which one accuses another falsely and contumeliously of a crime, is no doubt a greater sin than detraction, or speaking ill of a person in his absence. An insult offered to a prince or a king, seated on his throne and surrounded by his courtiers, is greater than if it were offered to him in his absence, or when he conceals his dignity under a disguise.

As far as contempt of God is concerned circumstances make one sin greater than another.

Now, with regard to the insult that men offer directly to the Almighty God; consider, my dear brethren, what the Holy Scripture says in the Book of Exodus. When the Hebrews were in Egypt, enslaved by Pharaoh, they fell into shameful idolatry, and adored an idol in the shape of an ox. The same people afterwards, when in the desert, at the foot of Mount Sinai, adored a golden calf as their god. A fearful and abominable crime, you think, to adore the likeness of a dumb animal, instead of the true God. And so it is; it is a fearful sin, indeed.

Proved from Scripture.

But there is one thing that astonishes me. God, in His goodness, bore with His people with the greatest patience, as long as they were in Egypt, although they had committed such a grievous crime; for we do not read of their having suffered any special punishment for it then; but when they committed the same crime in the desert, God at once poured out the vials of His wrath on them. According to the divine command, the father had to slay his son, the brother, his brother; the neighbor, his neighbor: "Thus sayeth the Lord of Israel: 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. . . . and there were slain in that day about three and twenty thousand men."<sup>1</sup> But why was that? Was it not the same God who had been grievously offended in Egypt, and by the same crime of idolatry, too? Nay, did not the same people adore the same idol? Why, then, did not the Almighty punish one crime, as well as the other? Tertullian, in answer to this question says, that we must consider the different circumstances in which those crimes were committed, in order to understand the different way in which God dealt with the transgressors. In Egypt, God was present among his people; but not in a way different from that in which He is present everywhere among all His creatures; whereas on Mount Sinai the same God gave evident proof of His presence, when amidst thunders and lightnings He delivered His law to Moses. Yet the Israelites dared to be guilty of idolatry at the very foot of the mountain; and it was that very circumstance which made the insult they offered to God so grievous, that He at once punished them for it, and twenty-three thousand of them were slain, because, as Tertullian says, "they had dared to offend God, who was so close to them;"<sup>2</sup> For the same reason the Holy Scripture says of the sons of Heli, "Wherefore the sin of the young men was exceeding great before the Lord."<sup>3</sup> Why so? for there is no doubt that many far more terrible sins were committed before and after the time of Heli's children. Because these latter sinned in a sacred place, in the Temple, in the tabernacle, before the ark of

<sup>1</sup> Hæc dicit Dominus Deus Israël: Ponat vir gladium super femur suum: ite, et redite de porta usque ad portam per medium castrorum, et occidat unusquisque fratrem, et anicum, et proximum suum. . . . cecideruntque in die illa quasi viginti tria millia hominum.—Exod. xxxii. 27-28.

<sup>2</sup> Quia tam proximum Deum offenderant.

<sup>3</sup> Erat ergo peccatum puerorum grande nimis coram Domino.—I. Kings ii. 17.

God. Oh, certainly their sin was grievous indeed, and could not be left unpunished!

See, my dear brethren, a similar insult is offered to God in our days, by irreverence in church. The whole world, says St. Ambrose, belongs to God, and He has given it to men, to do with it what they please. They can build houses to live in, courts of justice to settle their disputes, markets and shops to buy and sell, streets to walk on, while they can use the mighty ocean to transport their merchandise from one place to another, and they have besides, fields and forests, mountains and valleys, gardens and meadows for their support, business and amusement. The churches alone God has reserved for Himself, to receive therein due homage and adoration from men. "Although the whole world," says the Saint, "belongs to God, He is satisfied with the Church alone as His dwelling-place." <sup>1</sup> As God Himself said to Solomon: "For I have chosen, and have sanctified this place, that my name may be there forever, and my eyes and my heart may remain there perpetually." <sup>2</sup> I do not allow any one to use this place for any other purpose, except to do homage to Me.

For the same reason, the insult offered to God by irreverence in church is greater, because the church is the house of God.

It is true that the great King of Heaven is present in all places, and that honor and reverence are everywhere due to him; but He dwells in the church as in his palace, where He is seated on His throne, that He may be seen and adored by all. When I am in the church, I am in a holy place, where the same God who gave the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai still declares His law to His people; in a place where I can adore the same Lord and Saviour, who was adored in the stable at Bethlehem; in a place where sins are forgiven by the same merciful Lord, who went about formerly in search of sinners; in a place where that loving Lord gives as our food and drink, the same Flesh and Blood which he gave to His Apostles at the Last Supper in Jerusalem; in a place where the Holy Sacrifice of Calvary, in which the Son of God was offered on the Cross as a Victim to His heavenly Father, is renewed daily, in which the same Precious Blood still flows for us that was shed on the Cross. Ah, when we think of this, should we not cry out, like the Patriarch Jacob, when he saw the ladder on which the angels were ascending and descending: "How terrible is this place!

In which He wishes to be adored on His throne.

<sup>1</sup> Cum totus mundus Dei sit, Ecclesia tamen domus ejus dicitur.

<sup>2</sup> Elegi enim et sanctificavi locum istum, ut sit nomen meum ibi in sempiternum, et permaneant oculi mei, et cor meum ibi cunctis diebus.—II. Par. vii. 16.

this is no other but the house of God, and the gate of Heaven. Indeed the Lord is in this place.”<sup>1</sup> Truly the great God has chosen this as His dwelling-place!

Therefore a Catholic who is disrespectful in church, acts most insultingly to God.

Now, my dear brethren, to be disrespectful to God, to be in any way wanting in reverence to Him in such a holy place, is not that to insult and offend the Majesty of God, which deserves infinite honor and love, on His very throne, in His own palace? Therefore, is it not to offer to God one of the greatest possible insults? And can a Catholic Christian dare to do this? Or if any one is so foolhardy, can the all-seeing God allow such conduct to remain unpunished?

He is put to shame by heathens.

A Catholic Christian, I say; for I dare not even accuse heathens and idolaters of such a crime towards their false gods of wood and stone. I feel ashamed when I read what the philosopher Seneca says of the humility, modesty and reverence which the Romans observed in former days in the temples of their gods. I feel ashamed when I read of the bitter complaints that Demosthenes made, when a ship that was used to carry the idolatrous priests from one place to another, to offer sacrifice, was sold to merchants to be used by them for purposes of traffic. Ah! cried out Demosthenes, with tearful eyes and sorrowful heart, what accursed impiety!”<sup>2</sup> Is it come to such a pass with our religion, that the sacred ship, which was used by our priests, is now profaned by being devoted to ordinary commerce? O abominable impiety! If a mere ship, which was used simply to carry about what belonged to the temples of their false gods, was held in such reverence by those heathens; what, I ask, must have been the respect they showed in the temples themselves, when assisting at their sacrifices?

By heretics.

Nor would I dare to accuse even heretics of that crime. Father Joseph Prola, of our society, writes, that a certain bishop relates how he was once travelling through foreign countries, in company with four Roman nobles, and that on one occasion they entered a heretical church in which a sermon was being preached. They were accompanied by a great number of servants and retainers, and of course made no inconsiderable noise when walking up the church; still, not one of those who were present even turned aside to see who was coming in. When the sermon was finished, the people fell on their knees

<sup>1</sup> *Quam terribilis est locus iste! non est hic aliud nisi domus Dei, et porta cœli. Vere Dominus est in loco isto.*—Gen. xxviii. 17, 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Execranda impietas!*

to sing and pray; after which they left the church quietly, modestly and with down-cast eyes; nor even then did any one look around to see who the strangers were, who had visited their church. Ah, Christians! Catholics! must we not blush with shame at being forced to acknowledge the truth of what Tertullian says: "Heathens show more faith" and reverence "towards their religion, than Christians towards the only true faith?"<sup>1</sup>

A Turk was once urged by a zealous missionary to embrace Christianity. No, said he defiantly (and his answer may well put some of us to shame), I will never embrace your religion; I cannot, and must not do so. And why not? Because you Catholics either believe what you all profess, that God is really present in your churches, or else you do not. If you do not believe it, your religion is a mere hypocrisy; if you do believe that you adore the true God, to whom the highest reverence is due, and yet act with such disrespect and behave so badly in His presence, as I myself have seen in your churches, where people appeared dressed in a frivolous style, talking, laughing, staring about them, hardly bending a knee, or stretching out a hand to God, even while their lips were moving in prayer, if, I say, you behave like that, even while the sacrifice you call so holy is being offered, and while your God is elevated to be adored, then, if you still believe in God, you must be the most wicked people on earth. Therefore I will never belong to a religion in which God is so shamefully treated in His own house.

By Turks.

Now, what have we to say to this? Can we deny his accusation and the conclusion he lawfully derives from it? Do not people behave as badly as that, nay, even worse, in many of our churches? If the Turk had been able to see all the sin that is committed in our churches in thought and desire, nay, sometimes even by the outward senses, as I said on a former occasion, alluding to the custom that some young people have of making the church a meeting-place in which to indulge their passions, how would he not have been scandalized? O my God, if such things are done in Thy churches, in Thy very presence, where canst Thou find in the whole world a place in which Thou mayest be free from insult? Sins without number are committed in private houses, in dancing houses, in gardens, in the public promenades, in public houses, in places of resort for young people of both sexes, in hidden corners, by day and by night. Not even

God is insulted in this way by many Christians.

<sup>1</sup> *Mellor est fides gentium in suam sectam, quam Christianorum in suam.*

the church, the holy house which Thou hast reserved for Thyself, that Thou mayest receive due honor therein, is free from sin. Certainly, those sins are concealed from the eyes of the pious, who, keeping themselves recollected as they ought, in the presence of God, are attending to their prayers, and suspect no evil of others; but can they be hidden from the all-seeing eye of the God who is present? That we shall learn in due time.

At which  
the devils  
rejoice.

We read in the little book, called the *Scala Cœli*, or *Ladder of Heaven*, that a pious priest who was making his thanksgiving after Mass, near the altar, once saw a devil in the shape of a man writing rapidly on a piece of parchment, and when he came to the bottom of the page, he took it in his teeth, and pulled it out so as to make it wider. The priest, after various exorcisms, commanded him in the name of Jesus Christ to read aloud for the people what he had written. The devil obeyed and in a loud voice cried out: On this parchment I have written all the greetings, conversations, curious and impure looks, indecent behavior, unchaste desires, and, in a word, all the irreverences and sins that the people of this place have been guilty of this morning in church, in order to present them before the judgment-seat of God; for there are no sins that cause us so much satisfaction, as those which are committed in church, because thereby God is treated with the greatest insult and contempt. Ah, Christians, if one of those hellish spies were to stand here in our midst, and read out the list of sins that have been committed in our churches during a single year; what a fearful number there would be, even of those of which we take not the least notice! But if he were to call out the names of the guilty ones, and to say: such and such a one has thought, looked, spoken, or acted in such and such a manner in the church; he has hitherto behaved disrespectfully in different ways; how many there are who would have to hide their heads for shame! But the time will come, when everything shall be shown plainly to the whole world; although the punishment may not be deferred till then.

But of  
which God  
complains.

For this is that intolerable insult of which God complains by the Prophet Jeremias, and of which He will complain still more bitterly on the last day, when the book in which all the thoughts, words and actions of all men are written down shall be opened and read: "What is the meaning that My beloved hath wrought much wickedness in My house?"<sup>1</sup> As if He meant to say: What

<sup>1</sup> *Quid est, quod dilectus meus in domo mea fecit scelera multa?*—Jer. xi. 15.

have I done to My beloved, that he should sin even in My house? My beloved! If Turks, heathens, or heretics had been guilty of such wickedness, it might still be tolerated to a certain extent; for they could excuse themselves, as people sometimes do, when they have not shown due respect to another. Oh, they say, I beg your pardon, I did not recognize you. But My beloved, My chosen Catholic people, who knew that I, the true God, was present amongst them, they are the guilty ones, and in My own house, too! Have they not room enough to commit sin elsewhere, that they must make choice of My house as a place in which to offend Me? They treat Me badly enough by their horrible cursing and swearing in their own houses, by their calumny and detraction in company, by their drunkenness and impure talk in taverns, by their scandalous dress in dancing houses and theatres, by their injustices in business, by their impurities at night at their own doors, or in the darkness of their rooms, etc. All that I have already written down, and will demand an account for at the proper time, unless it is blotted out by sorrow and timely repentance, through My goodness and mercy. But that sins should be committed in the house that is specially consecrated to Me, in My own palace, before My throne, under My very eyes, that I cannot tolerate, nor overlook for a moment.

No, a sin of that kind must be punished, even before the day of general punishment arrives. I have already announced My determination by My Apostle Paul: "If any man violate the Temple of God, him shall God destroy."<sup>1</sup> The Israelites in the Old Law experienced the truth of this. "Go," said the Lord in His anger, to the Prophet Ezechiel, "show to the house of Israel the temple, and let them be ashamed of their iniquities, and let them measure the building, and be ashamed of all that they have done."<sup>2</sup> After the Lord had shown the same Prophet all the abominations that had been committed in the Temple at Jerusalem, He adds: "Is this a light thing to the house of Juda, that they should commit these abominations, which they have committed here: because they have filled the land with iniquity, and have turned to provoke Me to anger? Therefore, I also will deal with them in My wrath: My eye shall not spare them, neither will I show mercy."<sup>3</sup> And again: "As I live, saith the

Therefore He cannot allow it to go unpunished, as we see in the Old Testament.

<sup>1</sup> Si quis autem templum Dei violaverit, disperdet illum Deus.—I. Cor. iii. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Ostende domui Israel templum, et confundantur ab iniquitatibus suis, et metiantur fabricam, et erubescant ex omnibus, quæ fecerunt.—Ezech. xliii. 10, 11.

<sup>3</sup> Numquid leve est hoc domui Juda, ut facerent abominaciones istas, quas fecerunt hic, quia replentes terram iniquitate conversi sunt irritandum me? . . . Ergo et ego faciam in furore: non parceat oculus meus, nec miserebor.—Ibid. viii. 17, 18.

Lord God: Because thou hast violated my sanctuary with all thy offences, and with all thy abominations, I will also break thee in pieces, and my eye shall not spare, and I will not have any pity. A third part of thee shall die with the pestilence, and shall be consumed with famine in the midst of thee; and a third part of thee shall fall by the sword round about thee; and a third part of thee will I scatter into every wind, and I will draw out a sword after them."<sup>1</sup>

The city and Temple of Jerusalem were often destroyed on that account.

Did not the city of Jerusalem feel that punishment often enough? A wonderful thing it is, too, my dear brethren! Jerusalem was the favored and chosen city of God, the holy city; "But I chose Jerusalem that my name might be there."<sup>2</sup> "He is the God that is in Jerusalem;"<sup>3</sup> "in the holy mount in Jerusalem."<sup>4</sup> So does the Lord Himself speak of this city; nevertheless, how often has not that city been destroyed and laid waste. In the Third Book of Kings, c. xiv., you find that it was taken and plundered by Sesac, the king of Egypt; in the Fourth Book of Kings, c. xiv., that it was plundered by Joas, king of Israel; in c. xxiv., of the same Book, Nabuchodonosor attacked and took it twice; in the First Book of Machabees, c. i., that it was taken by Antiochus the Illustrious, and afterwards by Jason; and in the Second Book of Machabees, that it was captured and sacked by another Antiochus, until at last it was completely destroyed by the Romans. And why was that? If God loved that city, why did He deliver it so often into the hands of its enemies? Did not its magnificent Temple consecrated to God help to save it from destruction? nor its altar? nor its tabernacle, nor the Holy of holies, nor the many sacrifices that were offered in it? No; the Temple itself was plundered, burnt and destroyed along with the city; the altar and tabernacle were carried off, and all sacrifice ceased. And why was that? The three Hebrew youths walked about unhurt in the midst of the flames of the furnace in Babylon, because the Almighty, in order to preserve their lives, changed the heat of the fire into a gentle breeze. "Could not the same God," asks the Abbot Rupert, "who saved the

<sup>1</sup> Vivo ego, dicit Dominus Deus, nisi pro eo, quod sanctum meum violasti in omnibus offensionibus tuis et in cunctis abominationibus tuis, ego quoque confringam, et non parces oculus meus, et non miserebor. Tertia pars tui peste morietur, et fame consumetur in medio tui, et tertia pars tui in gladio cadet in circuito tuo; tertiam vero partem tuam in omnem ventum dispergam, et gladium evaginabo post eos.—Ezech. v. 11, 12.

<sup>2</sup> Sed elegi Jerusalem, ut sit nomen meum in ea.—II. Paral. vi. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Ipse est Deus, qui est in Jerusalem.—I. Esd. i. 3.

<sup>4</sup> In monte sancto in Jerusalem.—Isa. xxvii. 13.

three children, prevent His Temple from being burnt ? ” “ Certainly He could have done so,” is his answer; “ but God wished to teach the world that He has no pleasure in the beautiful stones and gilded walls of a temple made by hands : but in faith, and charity, and purity of heart.”<sup>1</sup> The three youths were full of piety and the fear of the Lord, therefore God dwelt in them, and protected His dwelling from the flames ; but in the Temple at Jerusalem He saw all kinds of sin and abomination, with which the Jews dishonored it, and, as a punishment of their crime, He allowed it to be destroyed, although it had been consecrated to Him.

But, we might ask, when the Jews were threatened with punishments of this kind, did they not take refuge in the Temple, in order to avert them by prayer and sacrifice ? Did not God promise Solomon emphatically, that He would hear every prayer that would be addressed to Him in the Temple ? “ If I shut up Heaven, and there fall no rain, or if I give orders and command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people ; and My people, upon whom My name is called being converted, shall make supplication to Me, and seek out My face . . . then will I hear from Heaven, and will forgive their sins, and will heal their land. My eyes also shall be open, and My ears attentive to the prayer of him that shall pray in this place.”<sup>2</sup> Why then, I ask, did not the Jews take refuge in the Temple, when those calamities befell them, and pray to God to avert the punishment from them ? There is no doubt that they did run to the Temple, and cry to Heaven for mercy ; but in punishment of the crimes by which they had dishonored the Temple, God refused to hear their prayers. And that was what He threatened them by the Prophet Ezechiel, after having shown him the abominations that were committed in the Temple: “ Therefore, I also will deal with them in My wrath : My eye shall not spare them, neither will I show mercy ; and when they shall cry to My ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them.”<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, too, God rejected the prayers that were offered to Him in the Temple.

<sup>1</sup> Non poterat Deus templum suum illæsum custodire, qui tres pueros custodivit? Plane poterat; sed erudendus erat mundus, ut sciret quod Deus excelsus non pulchris lapidibus, aureisque parietibus templi manufacti delectatur, sed fide et charitate, et mundis cordibus.—Rupert de Vic. Verb. l. 6, c. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Si clausero cælum, et pluvia non fluxerit, et mandavero et præcepero locustæ, ut devoret terram, et misero pestilentiam in populum meum; conversus autem populus meus, super quos invocatum est nomen meum, deprecatus me fuerit, et exquiserit faciem meam, . . . . et ego exaudiam de cælo, et propitius ero peccatis eorum, et sanabo terram eorum. Oculi quoque mei erunt aperti, et aures meæ erectæ ad orationem ejus, qui in loco isto oraverit—II. Paral. vii. 13-15.

<sup>3</sup> Ergo et ego faciam in furore: non parceret oculus meus, nec miserebor, et cum clamaverint ad aures meas voce magna, non exaudiam eos.—Ezech. viii. 18.

The same punishment is inflicted on us in the New Law, by God, in allowing our churches to be destroyed.

Christians, do we not experience almost the same punishment in our own days, under the law of grace? How often have not our forefathers, and we ourselves, too, seen, heard, or read that the most venerable Catholic churches in Europe, and especially in Germany (a lamentable proof of which we have before our very eyes), have been plundered, turned into dwelling-houses and stables, and utterly destroyed and burnt to ashes, not only by furious heretics, but also by Catholic soldiers, in war-time? How often have not the consecrated chalices, monstrances and other sacred vessels been profaned in different ways? How often have not consecrated Hosts been trampled under foot and treated with the utmost indignity? We throw the blame of this on a licentious soldiery, or on the blind hatred of heretics towards our holy religion; but if we consider the many profanations that are committed in our churches, we shall probably find them to be the cause of it; so that God might reproach us, as He formerly did His people by the Prophet Jeremias: "Go ye to my place in Silo, where my name dwelt from the beginning; and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel."<sup>1</sup> In the Temple at Silo the Sacrifice had been profaned, the ceremonies were not observed, impure passion had been indulged in, etc. Therefore, says God in His anger, go and see what has become of that place: the ark, the tabernacle, the altar, the Holy of holies, all have been taken away "for the wickedness of my people." Christians, He might say to us, go and see what has become of so many churches consecrated to Me, that have been so magnificently built and endowed by princes and kings; you will find nothing but ruined walls, broken altars, mutilated statues, and the bones of the dead scattered about. Do not wonder at that; it is the punishment of the sins that My people have committed in those churches! For God has ceased to protect His churches, because the faithful no longer observe proper respect in them; He no longer looks on them as His dwelling-places, because they have been turned into dens of sin; nor can they please Him any more, since His people come there to offend Him. Josephus writes, that before the final destruction of Jerusalem, many voices were heard in the Temple, crying out: "Let us go from this place."<sup>2</sup> These were the voices of the angels, who were unwilling to re-

<sup>1</sup> *Ite ad locum meum in Silo, ubi habitavit nomen meum a principio, et videte, quæ fecerim ei propter iniquitatem populi mei Israel.*—Jer. vii. 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Transemus ex his sedibus.*—Joseph. de bell. Jud. l. 7, c. 17.

main any longer in the midst of the abominations that defiled the Temple. I should not be surprised if those pure spirits repeated the same words in many of our churches nowadays. Let us go from this place; why should we remain any longer in the midst of such impurities? We are faithful adorers of our great God, and we tremble with awe in His presence; why should we remain in the midst of the profanations and insults that are constantly offered Him? Let us leave this house! We are here to collect the devout prayers of Christians, and to offer them to God in Heaven; why should we remain to witness nothing but idle compliments and greetings, and to listen to vain conversation? Let us away at once! Yes, God would say to them, go away, My faithful ministers; but first destroy this den of thieves, this place where My enemies come to offend Me, "and begin ye at My sanctuary."<sup>1</sup> The Almighty acts like a prudent general, who destroys a fortress that has been taken by rebels.

Now, if God acts with such rigor towards His own churches, because they are profaned by men, what refuge can they hope to find in the church, or rather, what a terrible chastisement will they not have to expect, who profane the church by their irreverence, and by many sins? A fine refuge they may hope for, surely! The church will help them as little as the tabernacle helped Core and his companions, whom the earth swallowed up before the very tabernacles; as little as the Temple sheltered Joab, who was slain as he was embracing the altar with both arms; as little as the ark protected the Israelites, when thirty thousand of them were slain around it. For such contempt of God cannot but draw down severe punishment. If we knew the judgments of God, could we be surprised that God so often visits us with private and public calamities? If no other sin was committed (and, alas, there are only too many of them, which force the divine justice to use the rod!) the profanations and sins that are committed in the churches by word and thought, I will not say by act, would be enough to draw down the anger of God.

And by chastising those who profane the churches.

Is it to be wondered at, that the prayers we offer up in our necessities before the altar of Jesus Christ are so seldom heard? For we insult God by profaning the place in which He would otherwise hear our prayers, according to His promise. No; He is carrying out the threat He uttered long ago: "And when they shall cry to my ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them."

Especially by not hearing their prayers.

<sup>1</sup> Et a sanctuario meo incipite.—Ezech. ix. 6.

When they are under the pressure of difficulty and in danger of losing a great part of their property, when a decision is about to be given against them to their great detriment, when husband, or wife, or only child, whose help they are in need of, grows dangerously sick even to death, they will run to My church and cry out for mercy with a loud voice, with outstretched hands, on bended knees, and prostrate on the ground; but I will not hear them; I am determined to close My ears to all their prayers and supplications! They will redouble their prayers, promise amendment, go on pilgrimages, make vows, burn candles, have Masses said, and get prayers said in convents; but I will not hear them; I will not pay the least attention to them; the misfortune that threatens them will surely happen, they will lose their case, the husband, or wife, or child, will die. But, O Lord, after so many prayers, sacrifices, and promises? Yes, no matter what they do, I will not hear them. I will despise all their prayers and cries; and that, because they have so often despised Me in the same churches!

Conclusion  
and exhortation to be  
very respectful in  
church.

Ah, my dear brethren, I trust that this threat will not be carried into effect against any of us who are here present, and that my whole sermon may be necessary simply as a salutary warning never to forget the reverence we owe to the house of God. In future, when we are going to church, let us think, on the way, of the great God whom we are going to adore; and while in the church, let us keep up a lively recollection of the great Monarch of Heaven, and imagine that we are quite alone with Him, so that the thought of others may not distract us. If any one attempts to disturb us by the ordinary greetings or salutations, or by talking, let us give them, more by our silence and modest demeanor, than by words, the same answer that Ferdinand II., Archduke of Austria, whispered into the ear of a certain prince, who spoke to him in church: "Let us pray, that we may not give scandal to the devout people;"<sup>1</sup> lest they should think we did not know what reverence is due to God, who is here present. In a word, let us always appear in church with such inward and outward humility, and so watch over our eyes and hands, over the postures of our bodies and the thoughts of our hearts, that we may not make the house of God a house of destruction for ourselves, but that we may one day acknowledge, with joy and gladness, that we have found in that house the eternal salvation of our souls. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Oremus, ne simus supplicanti huic populo scandalo.—La Marin, in vit. Ferdinand, c. 5.

*Another Introduction to the same sermon, for the tenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

*Duo homines ascenderunt in templum, ut orarent.*—Luke xviii.

10.

“Two men went up into the temple to pray.”

These two men had the same object in view, when they went to the temple, namely, to pray to God. Both offered their prayer at the same time. Both went away at the same time, when their prayer was finished; but in very different conditions. For, “this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.”<sup>1</sup> He who went into the temple a notorious sinner, came out of it freed from the burden of his sins; while he who went in apparently a just man, went back to his house with his conscience still burdened with sin. What was the cause of this difference between the two men? The poor sinner, by his humble and sorrowful prayer, at once appeased the anger of God; but the proud and boastful prayer of the Pharisee was an insult to God, rather than an act of adoration; and therefore the one was justified rather than the other. My dear brethren, if we could see into the hearts of the many Christians, who daily enter the churches of God, what a great difference we should find amongst them! We should see great sinners go into the church, and after a good confession, come out friends and children of God; we should see others go in in the state of sin, and come out in the same state; we should see others going in, without the intention of praying, and after a while, coming out without having said a prayer. Still, I do not intend to speak of this to-day. The most astonishing, and yet the most common thing of all, is, that we should see many going into the church with pure consciences, and coming out stained with sin. How can that be? Because they dishonor God and His church, before, after and during their prayer. What a shameful thing that is! I allude to irreverence in the church in general, of whatever kind it may be; a sin of which we generally appear to make little account, etc.—*continues as before.*

*On how to observe reverence when entering the church, and while in it, see the following Fourth Part.*

<sup>1</sup> Descendit hic justificatus in domum suam ab illo.— Luke xviii. 14.

## THIRTY-SIXTH SERMON.

## ON THE PROFANATION OF SUNDAYS AND HOLY-DAYS.

## Subject.

God wishes Sundays and holy-days to be devoted altogether to His honor, and to that of His saints. How that is to be done. Most Christians do quite the opposite.—*Preached on the Feast of All Saints.*

## Text.

*Vidi turbam magnam, quam dinumerare nemo poterat.*—Apoc. vii. 9.

“I saw a great multitude, which no man could number.”

## Introduction.

So that we celebrate to-day the feast of that great multitude of the saints of God, which no man can number. And it is quite right that we should do so! For God wishes us to show public honor to His chosen servants. The most of them He Himself has made illustrious during their lives on earth, by many miracles; all the elements had to help them, and be obedient to their prayers. How much more, then, does He not wish us to honor them now that they are in actual possession of His kingdom as His dearest friends? “Praise ye the Lord in His holy places,”<sup>1</sup> is the exhortation of the Prophet David to all men. The honor, my dear brethren, which the Catholic Church pays the saints, consists principally in her appointing certain feast days in their honor, just as God has reserved to Himself the Sabbath, or, as we now say, the Sunday of every week. But if the Church wished to appoint a day for every saint, many thousand years would not suffice for the purpose, as there are so many of them; therefore, in addition to the usual Sundays, and the holy-days that are devoted to a few of the greatest saints, she has appointed this day in each year to be kept as a feast of all the saints, so that none of them may be excluded from receiving whatever honor she is able to show them, and to make some reparation for her inability to show them all the honor they deserve. And that is quite right, I say again. To Thee be all honor and glory, O Lord, in Thy saints! Meanwhile, I cannot help think-

<sup>1</sup> *Laudate Dominum in sanctis ejus.*

ing, that, if the Catholic Church would appoint a certain day every year to atone for the faults that are committed in profaning the days set apart to honor God and His Saints, this would be not a joyful feast but a day of lamentation, on which we should repent properly of those faults. For, how are the days of the Lord, and of the saints generally kept? Ah, my God! Ah, chosen friends of God, how much more insult than honor do you not receive from many Catholics on those days! Such is, alas, the case, my dear brethren, as we shall see in the course of this sermon.

### Plan of Discourse.

*God wishes Sundays and holy-days to be devoted altogether to His honor and to that of His saints; such is the main point of the sermon, that I shall briefly prove. How that is to be done, I shall show in a short instruction. Most Christians do quite the opposite; such is the just complaint that I have to make. All together form the whole subject.*

My object is, O great God, that we may henceforth celebrate as we ought the days devoted to Thee and to Thy saints; but I cannot effect this; so that Thou must help me thereto by Thy grace, which we humbly beg of Thee through the merits of Mary, of Thy holy angels, and of Thy chosen friends in Heaven.

But after all, is not God the Lord of all time? Does not every day in the year without exception belong to Him? Must we not serve God, love, honor and praise Him every day of our lives? By all means. And every one should say with the Prophet David: "I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall be always in my mouth."<sup>1</sup> Every day, in every thing, in our temporal affairs even, no matter how trifling they seem, we should seek the honor and glory of God, as St. Paul says to the Corinthians: "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do," without any exception, "do all to the glory of God;"<sup>2</sup> because this is the only end for which we are on earth.

Every day should be consecrated to God.

Since that is the case, "Why," as the Wise Ecclesiasticus asks, "doth one day excel another?"<sup>3</sup> In reality, one day is greater than another, not because it has more than four-and-twenty hours, for all days are alike in that respect; but because God requires a special homage and service from us on one day, which

But especially Sundays and holy-days.

<sup>1</sup> Benedicam Dominum in omni tempore: semper laus ejus in ore meo.—Ps. xxxiii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Sive ergo manducatis, sive bibetis, sive aliud quid facitis, omnia in gloriam Dei facite.—I. Cor. x. 31.

<sup>3</sup> Quare dies diem superat?—Eccl. xxxiii. 7.

He does not require on another. Just as, although He is absolute Lord and Master of the whole world, and therefore must be honored and revered in all places, yet He expects to receive special homage and service in the churches and temples that are consecrated to Him; so also He makes a distinction of time with regard to His service. For, there are, so to speak, certain common and ordinary days, which are called week-days; while others are of a higher rank, and are called Sundays, or feast-days, or holy-days. The former God has given to men for their worldly business; the latter He reserves for Himself and His friends in Heaven; and therefore, Sunday is called the Lord's day. It is as if He said to us: I leave the greater part of the year for your temporal affairs; six days in the week you can devote to your lawful business, and attend to the duties that your state or occupation imposes on you, and work for the support and sustenance of your body; you can work on the land for your bread, in the shop for your clothing, in the warehouse for money, in the courts of justice in order to gain your case, you can travel by land and water to carry on your business. I will be satisfied with one day in the week: but that day, along with some other days that are set apart in honor of My saints, I keep for Myself, that it may be devoted wholly to My service. Therefore I will not allow the least part of it to be taken from Me, or to be used for any other purpose.

Nature itself teaches us that.

Could the Almighty make a more reasonable and just request of us, my dear brethren? Even amongst heathens and barbarians there never yet was a nation that did not appoint special days in honor of the false deities, the sun and stars, the stocks and stones, the calves and goats, the snakes and dragons that they worshiped; nay, they had certain days on which they paid special honor to the devil himself!

And the divine command in the Old Law.

In the Old and imperfect Law, which was a mere figure of the Law under which we live, how emphatic was the command given to the Jews: "Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day!"<sup>1</sup> And how strictly they had to keep that day for God alone and for His service! No one dared to move hand or foot to do the least external business that was not necessary for the divine service; they were not allowed even to light a candle, to kindle a fire, to cook food, or to do other things of the kind, although such work as that seems necessary even to the support of the body. "Six days shalt thou labor, and shalt

<sup>1</sup> Memento, ut diem sabbati sanctifices.—Exod. xx. 8.

do all thy works. But on the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: thou shalt do no work on it; thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy beast, nor the stranger that is within thy gates;”<sup>1</sup> such was the command that God gave them, so that being free from all business cares, they might remember that He was their Lord and God, who wished to be specially honored by them on that day.

Christians, how strict must not our obligation now be in this respect, under the New and most holy Law of Jesus Christ, when in addition to the natural and written law, we have also that express command of the Catholic Church, obliging us under pain of sin to devote Sundays and holy-days exclusively to the honor and glory of God! “It seems to me,” says St. Augustine, “that this day of the Lord surpasses all other days in brightness and clearness, and that the stars and the elements rejoice,”<sup>2</sup> on account of the special honor shown to God by His servants on this day.

And the precept of the Church in the New Law.

Now, my dear brethren, if Sundays and holy-days are days of the Lord, what follows? It follows that all servile work and labor, all temporal and worldly business and occupations, all law-suits, contracts, judicial sentences, and everything else of the kind, must be laid aside on those days. They are days sacred to the Lord, on which He must be publicly honored by assisting at the Holy Mass, as a sacrifice of atonement and thanksgiving, with all possible devotion and respect. And is that all? Is the observance of these two points enough to sanctify those days? Yes, the Catholic Church, like an indulgent and loving mother, does not wish to burden her children with many commands which they must observe under pain of grievous sin, and therefore she obliges them to observe only those two points, on Sundays and holy-days under pain of eternal damnation. But does she not expect, or desire any more from her faithful children? Certainly she does; for it is not by any means her intention to prohibit them from practising other works of piety and devotion in honor of God. The same Church commands us all to confess and communicate once a year; does she mean that we should not receive the Sacraments oftener? Not at all. She constantly exhorts her children to

How to observe Sundays and holy-days.

<sup>1</sup> Sex diebus operaberis, et facies omnia opera tua. Septimo autem die sabbatum Domini Dei tui est: non facies omne opus in eo, tu, et filius tuus et filia tua, servus tuus et ancilla tua, jumentum tuum, et advena qui est intra portas tuas.—Exod. xx. 9, 10.

<sup>2</sup> Videtur mihi hæc dies Dominica cæteris esse lucidior astra quoque vel elementa lætari.

have frequent recourse to those channels of grace, and looks on them as tepid and careless of their salvation, if the fear of eternal damnation drives them only once a year to Confession and Communion; and therefore the command of the Church says, "at least once a year;"<sup>1</sup> thereby showing her wish to be that we should often confess our sins, and approach the Table of the Lord to receive the necessary food of our souls. But if he who has the opportunity of going to Holy Communion during the year, does not avail himself of it, he is guilty of a mortal sin, and deserves eternal damnation. In the same way we are to interpret the precept of sanctifying Sundays and holy-days; we must spend those days altogether in honoring God and His saints; but the precept obliges under pain of mortal sin only with regard to hearing Mass and abstaining from servile works. And if we consider the matter aright, my dear brethren, what is the reason that all servile works are forbidden on those days? Is it that we may spend the day in idleness after having heard Mass? Certainly not; for otherwise, God would be much more honored by the work that we do with a good intention on week-days, than by the idleness in which we indulge on Sundays. All servile work, says St. Augustine, is forbidden to the faithful on Sundays and holy-days, that they may more readily attend to the divine service, and, being free from worldly cares, may more easily fulfil the will of God by praying, visiting the church, going to Confession and Holy Communion, attending sermons and catechism, reading spiritual books and the Lives of the Saints, meditating on the many benefits they have received from God, that they may be all the more grateful to Him, and by performing other works of devotion.

Many  
Christians  
do quite the  
contrary.

Alas, when we consider how most Christians, and even Catholics spend those days; when we take all their actions into account, we are almost driven to the conclusion that Sundays and holy-days are not days of the Lord and His saints, but of the perverse and wicked world; not days of salvation, but of damnation; days to serve, not God, but gluttony; days consecrated, not to the divine Majesty, but to the unbridled desires of the flesh; days on which God and His saints are not praised, but blasphemed; days appointed, not to return humble thanks to God for the benefits received from Him, but to heap sin on sin; days on which men instead of receiving new graces from God's mercy, compel Him to visit them with new chastisements! In

<sup>1</sup> Ad minimum semel in anno.

a word, it would appear that those days are the very refuse of the whole year, and are devoted, not to God and His saints, but to the devil and his wicked angels; so that if those days were abolished, millions of sins, that cannot be committed on other days through want of opportunity, would be prevented.

Is it not so, my dear brethren? I do not intend to say much now of those half-Catholics who desecrate the Sundays and holy-days by doing servile works, and by carrying on their usual business so as to seek their own temporal advantage, and who compel their servants and others subject to them to work also, nay, who even sometimes remain away from Mass for the sake of working. Petra Sancta writes of a mill, called after the holy Abbot Luccarinus, the stones of which could not be moved on holy-days; no matter what efforts were made to set them in motion, they absolutely refused to stir. In olden times the Prophet David said to God: "The voice of Thy thunder in a wheel."<sup>1</sup> It would seem, my dear brethren, that the wheels of that mill had heard the thunders of the divine threats, that had escaped the ears of their avaricious master; they cry out to those who profane the Sabbath: Are you not ashamed, O wicked Christians? Do you not know that your heart is harder than a stone, with regard to keeping the Commandments of God and of the Church? No violence can force us to move against the will of our Creator; but you dare to transgress His law for the sake of a vile profit? This reproach from an inanimate creature will suffice for those half-Christians.

By profaning the Sundays and holy days by servile work.

I speak now only of those who, during the week, are busied with temporal cares and labor of all kinds, and who lead an innocent life, and even, if they keep themselves in the state of grace and have a good intention when performing the different duties of their state, a real Christian and holy life. If people of that kind commit a mortal sin, on what day generally does it happen? Unrestrained license, gluttony and drunkenness, dining and gambling with the usual accompaniments of lying and cheating, cursing and swearing, quarrelling and fighting, calumny, detraction, unchaste songs and discourses, bad and dangerous company, dancing, impure liberties, and other crimes that may not be mentioned; on what day, I ask, do men of that kind commit such sins as these? On week-days, when they are occupied with their usual labor? No; for then they have neither time nor leisure for such things. And when then? Generally,

By committing many sins.

<sup>1</sup> Vox tonitru tui in rota.—Ps. lxxvi. 19.

and you will acknowledge that such is the case, on Sundays and holy-days. God be praised, they say, to-morrow is Sunday; to-morrow is a holy-day. What is the meaning of this joy on their part? Perhaps they think: God be praised, I shall have more time to attend to my soul; to-morrow is Sunday, I shall be able to spend the whole day in prayer; to-morrow is a holy-day, I shall be able to hear a sermon, or to attend catechism, and learn something useful; to-morrow is a feast-day, I shall go to Confession and Communion in order to gain the indulgence, and to get the grace of the Sacraments, and I shall visit the church during public devotions and praise and bless God, etc. Is that what they mean? It ought to be; and that is the reason why every good Christian is glad at the approach of a Sunday or holy-day; but is that the reason why many rejoice? God be praised, they say, to-morrow is Sunday. And what then? Oh, I mean to spend a pleasant day. To-morrow is a holy-day. And what then? Oh, I am going to have a good carouse; all that I made during the week must be spent to-morrow with my companions. To-morrow is a holy-day, thank God! Why? Because we can have a game. To-morrow is a feast-day, and I shall have the opportunity of seeing that person, and enjoying myself, etc. And so, off they go to drink and gamble, to amuse themselves in dangerous company, and to commit sins of all kinds. O saint of God, whose feast-day is to be celebrated on the morrow, look down from Heaven and see what men do in your honor!

**In that way  
Christ is  
crucified  
anew on  
Sundays  
and holy-  
days.**

How disgraceful it is, says St. Cyril, to act in a manner so unbecoming a Christian. "Do you celebrate a feast-day by indulging in gluttony and giving a loose rein to your evil passions?" "Do you praise God and bless Him by insulting and offending Him? No, that is not the way to merit the grace and friendship of God, as you should do on Sundays and holy-days; for by your misconduct you drive out of your heart, on the Sunday or holy-day, the God whose friendship you enjoyed perhaps during the week, and you renounce His grace forever. Perhaps this was what our Lord wished to signify when He was lost by His parents, as a child of twelve years of age, on the festival-day in Jerusalem, as Cardinal Hugo remarks:<sup>1</sup> "Jesus was lost on a feast-day, because there are many who lose their God on feast-days, those days on which they should be united to Him

<sup>1</sup> Idne est, O Christiane, celebrare diem festum indulgere ventri, et inconcussis voluptatibus laxare habenas?—S. Cyril. l. 8 in cap. 15 Joan.

<sup>2</sup> Ideo dicitur quod Jesus amissus fuit in die festo, quia multi in diebus festivis, quando magis se deberent conjungere Deo, ipsum amittunt.—Hugo Card. Sup. C. 2, Luc.

closer than ever." Such people seek Jesus on feast-days, in the same way as the Jews sought Him, that is, in order to crucify Him anew: "The Jews therefore sought Him on the festival day, and said: Where is He?"<sup>1</sup> as we read in the Gospel of St. John; where is He that we may vent our rage on Him? Good reason had a priest once to say of his parishioners: On week-days I have none but pious souls in my parish; but on Sundays and holy-days they are devils.

The devils once held council together to see how they could manage to abolish the Lord's day altogether. "Let us abolish all the festival days of God from the land," they said, with those wicked people of whom the Psalmist<sup>2</sup> speaks, according to the explanation of Cardinal Hugo: Do you not see what harm those days are doing our cause? How many souls they snatch out of our hands by means of the confessional? How many by sermons and instructions? How many by 'the Sacrifice of the Mass, the Sacraments and public devotions? No, they will not do for us at all. Let us ask God to put an end to them. My dear brethren, 'tis my firm conviction, that if the Almighty were to grant that request now, there would not be one of the infernal spirits who would not vigorously oppose it; they would all cry out unanimously: Do not grant our petition, O Lord, let things remain as they are; let all the Sundays and holy-days be continued as before; we do not envy Thee the glory Thou gainest on those days! And why so, unhappy spirits? Why do you now wish the feast-days to be observed? Oh, we know why! Those so-called feast-days of God and the saints are real feast-days for us in hell. Why so? Every day we go about seeking to ensnare men's souls, and to lead them into sin; but we are not half so successful on week-days, as on feast-days. On week-days hardly any one is to be seen on the streets, unless pious people who are going to and from church; the drinking, dancing and gaming-houses, in which we make most profit, are empty; people are all occupied in various ways: one is in his study, another in his work-shop, or in the field, the garden, the pasture land, or the forest; all have something to do, and so our temptations and snares are of no avail, against them; our only chance then is to catch them when their work is done in the evening and they are assembled at the doors of their houses; otherwise during the whole week we can do little or nothing.

The devils rejoice on those days, as if they were their own.

<sup>1</sup> Judæi ergo quærebant eum in die festo, et dicebant: ubi est ille?—John vii. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Quiescere faciamus omnes dies festos Dei a terra.—Ps. lxxiii. 8.

For then  
most sins  
are com-  
mitted.

But on Sundays and holy-days, when the streets, gardens and promenades are full of people bent on pleasure, we do a thriving trade. On week-days we are often turned out of the houses, especially by the women, by the frequent repetition of the terrible names of Jesus and Mary while the Rosary is being said; on Sundays and holy-days the same women call us back by their swearing and cursing, when their husbands come home drunk at night and beat them. It is true that a great deal of good is also done on those days, but it is mixed with a great deal of evil. People go to church, and attend devotions, but not for a pious motive; their object is to meet some one for whom they have an impure affection, and to enjoy that person's company as long as possible; thus they act according to our wishes by turning the house of God into a den of thieves, and by making their religion a pretext for gratifying their passions, and indulging in unchaste looks, thoughts and desires. They go to church; but many of them are an occasion of sin to others by their scandalous style of dress; along with that too, there are the sins that parents commit, by allowing their daughters thus to be an occasion of sin to others. What a grand thing that is for us! They hear the Holy Mass, in which the Son of God is offered as a Victim to His heavenly Father; it is true, that we evil spirits must tremble with fear at this august Sacrifice; but many of those who are present at it, are as distracted in thought, as careless in manner, as curious in looking about, and as unrestrained in talking, as if they were on the market-place, looking at a butcher slaughtering an ox. And all this is a two-fold advantage for us; because it goes on before the very eye of God, and in the house in which He wishes to be especially adored and honored. Many useful sermons are preached on Sundays and holy-days, and we know that they are the means of rescuing numbers of souls from our snares; but amongst all the people of a large city, how few there are who hear the word of God, how few even amongst those who are present at it, who hear it with attention and eagerness! How few who try to practise what they hear. A still greater gain for us, is the fact that we shall be able to accuse those people all the more severely at the judgment-seat of God; the former, because they neglected, by not going to sermons, the lights and graces that God offered them; the latter, because, after having learned the will of God, by hearing sermons, they did not fulfil it in their lives and actions. There are many who go to Confession and Holy Com-

munion on Sundays and holy-days; it is true that we suffer great loss thereby; but still, we can write down in our book a great number of sacrilegious Confessions and Communions; for some conceal their sins through shame, or do not tell them properly, or have not true sorrow and purpose of amendment, because they are unwilling to leave the proximate occasion of sin, to restore ill-gotten goods, to remove an occasion of scandal, or to live in peace with their neighbor. They confess and communicate, pray and are devout in the morning; but in the afternoon and evening, nay, frequently during the whole night, they are on our side; so that before they awake next morning, they have abundant matter for another confession, etc. No, O Lord, do not disturb the present order; let the Sundays and holy-days be still devoted to Thy service, as Thou requirest of Thy servants! Nay, if Thou wilt, increase the number of those days; we will not grudge them to Thee by any means! Hear this, O great God, worthy of all love! With reason has Thy servant David said: "They that hate Thee have made their boasts; in the midst of Thy solemnity." They triumph over Thee on the days consecrated to Thee! That is, as Cardinal Hugo says: "The demons boast that more and worse sins are committed on feast-days than on other days."<sup>1</sup>

Ah, Christians, what a disgrace that is! What are we thinking of? How can we hope to save our souls, if we so shamefully misuse one of the occasions and means that God has given us to save them? Sundays and holy-days are appointed that we may praise, honor and love God, atone for the sins we have committed during the week, and purify our consciences from all stain; but if we abuse those days to insult God and to defile our souls with sin, how must our Creator deal with us? what must become of our souls? "Oh, how foolish many people are," I must say with St. Bernardine of Siena, "they work the whole week to support their mortal bodies; and on the Sundays they work for the damnation of their immortal souls."<sup>2</sup> Has then the Church forbidden all servile work on those days, merely that we may have time to enjoy ourselves in drinking and gambling, dancing and amusing ourselves, and gratifying our passions? Certainly, as St. Augustine says, "it would be better to dig the whole day, than to dance."<sup>3</sup> Far better still to dig, than to

How unjust that is to God and to one's soul.

<sup>1</sup> *Gloriati sunt qui oderunt te; in medio solemnitatis tue.*—Ps. lxxiii. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Gloriati sunt, id est dæmones, quod in diebus festis plura et pejora peccata accidissent.*

<sup>3</sup> *Multorum insaniam, per totam septimanam laborare pro misero corpore, in die festo laborare pro damnatione infelicis animæ.*

<sup>4</sup> *Mellius utique tota die foderent, quam saltarent.*

do other things worse than dancing. Work is good and praiseworthy in itself, it has been imposed by God on our forefather Adam, and on all his descendants, it has been sanctified by our Saviour Jesus Christ, who was pleased to earn His bread by the sweat of His brow, and if we do our work in the state of grace, and offer it to God by a good intention, we can thereby gain eternal glory in Heaven ; still, I say, this work is forbidden on Sundays and holy-days, so that he who spends a considerable time on those days in manual labor, without grievous necessity, commits a mortal sin and deserves eternal damnation. What a terrible sin must it not then be to profane those days consecrated to God, by works that are in themselves unlawful and sinful ! Will God allow such a sin to go unpunished ? Certainly not.

Remarkable  
punishment  
inflicted by  
God on  
people who  
profaned  
the Sundays  
and holy-  
days by  
servile work.

If you read the Lives of the Saints, you will find instances of remarkable punishments inflicted by an angry God on those who were guilty of profaning Sundays and holy-days by servile works. You will read of a goldsmith, who was beaten by saints who arose out of their graves for the purpose, because he tried to make some improvements in a work of art he was engaged in, on a feast-day; you will read of a woman who was making clothes on a feast-day, because she was in a hurry to get them finished, and who suddenly found them covered with blood ; of a man whose arm was burnt off his body because he baked bread on a feast-day without necessity ; of another whose hand stuck fast to his hammer, as he was engaged in doing something to his mill on a holy-day ; of hay disappearing off the meadow in smoke, because it was made on a feast-day ; of peasants who worked on a Sunday, losing all they had by fire, and not being able to find out where the fire came from ; of another peasant who, having threshed some corn on the feast of St. James, went afterwards into a bath, and had all the skin taken off his body, so that he died in great torture. Another who was ploughing on a holy-day had his oxen and plough destroyed by lightning. A laborer who was quarrying limestones on the feast of the Assumption was buried under a heap of earth which fell on him. A woman who went out with a hoe to take the weeds out of a field, on the feast of St. John the Baptist, had her face and both hands fearfully burnt by a miraculous fire. Another woman who was spinning on the feast of St. Stephen, although warned not to do so, did not leave off until she was suddenly paralyzed in her hands and feet. The devils have been seen to gather up carefully hair that was cut on holy-days, and to preserve it as

carefully as if it were gold. And many other such incidents are recorded.<sup>1</sup>

O my God, I must think, if Thou takest such revenge on those who profane by servile labor the days consecrated to Thee, although the labor in itself is good and innocent; what a terrible punishment Thou must have in store for those who dishonor those days by unlawful amusements, by gluttony and drunkenness, by dancing, and by abominable sins! Ah, Christians, it is not necessary for us to go to history for a proof of this; otherwise I could relate to you what happened to those people who persisted in dancing before the church-door on Christmas night, and would not leave off, although the priest gently remonstrated with them, until at last, moved by a holy zeal, he cursed them, and they were compelled to keep on dancing for a whole year; nor did their punishment cease till St. Heribert, the then Archbishop of Cologne, released them from it. Still, the women died immediately after, while the others were affected with a trembling in their limbs which never left them;<sup>2</sup> thus giving the world a melancholy example of the punishments inflicted on those who desecrate the days consecrated to God. But, as I say, we do not want proofs of this kind. Whole cities and provinces are often visited by the anger of God, without our being able to say where the evils come from that afflict them. War and devastation, scarcity and famine, pestilence and sickness, how do we know that they are not inflicted as a punishment for the profanation of Sundays and holy-days, as well as for other sins? One thing is certain, and that is, that God who is most jealous of His honor and glory, will not fail to punish severely in the next life those who dishonor Him, unless they blot out their sins by a sincere repentance.

How much more severe punishments they will have to expect, who profane these days by sin.

If then, we are guilty of any fault in this way, my dear brethren, let us try to avoid eternal punishment by always giving to God in future the honor that belongs to Him. Sundays and holy-days are days of the Lord, that He has reserved for Himself and for His chosen servants; therefore, let us spend those days in the service of God, and in preparing ourselves for the eternal rest and the everlasting festival which we hope and desire to celebrate with the saints in Heaven, where, as St. Augustine says, "we shall rest, and love, and praise."<sup>3</sup> Amen.

Conclusión and resolution to observe those days properly.

<sup>1</sup> Meyer, l. 2, *Annal. Fland. A.* 861; Baron. Tom. 10, *Annal. A.* 993. Sur. Tom. 4; *Berluacen. spec. hist.* l. 27, c. 41; *Annal. S. J. A.* 1580; *Snlp. Sever.* l. 2. *Mirac. S. Martin.* c. 75; *Annal. S. J. A.* 1705.

<sup>2</sup> Joan. Trit. in *Chron. Cranzius.* l. 4. Sax.

<sup>3</sup> *Vacabimus, amabimus, laudabimus.*

**THIRTY-SEVENTH SERMON.****ON FALSE AND USELESS PRAYER.****Subject.**

Many pray ; but they do not wish to receive what they pray for. That is a false and useless prayer, which offends God, instead of honoring Him.—*Preached on the fifth Sunday after Easter.*

**Text.**

*Petite, et accipietis.*—John xvi. 24.  
“ Ask, and you shall receive.”

**Introduction.**

There we have a clear promise on the part of the God of infinite truth, who must necessarily keep His promise : “ Ask, and you shall receive.” And yet there is nothing more common than to hear men complaining that their prayers seem to be of no avail. What is the cause of that, my dear brethren ? I am firmly convinced that if ever our hearts and desires are in contradiction with the words we utter, they are so very often when we pray to God ; for, we are not always in earnest in our prayers nor do we really wish to be heard ; in fact, we desire the very contrary of what we ask for. This is the case especially when we ask for heavenly graces and spiritual blessings, which ought to be the chief object of our prayers. Without wasting any more precious time on the introduction, I begin at once, and I say

**Plan of Discourse.**

*Many pray but they do not wish to receive what they pray for. That is a false and useless prayer, which offends God, instead of honoring Him. Such is the whole subject.*

That we may correct this fault, which makes our prayers fruitless, nay, even culpable, we humbly beg Thy grace, O God through the intercession of Mary and the holy angels guardian.

He does not  
pray who  
does not  
wish to re-  
ceive what  
he asks for.

The nature of prayer consists, properly, in the desire of obtaining what we ask for ; because asking is but an outward sign of our inward desire. And this was the first condition that our Lord required from the sick and infirm whom He healed, “ Wilt

thou be made whole?"<sup>1</sup> He asked the infirm man in the Gospel of St. John who had no one to put him in the pond at Bethsaida. "What will ye that I do to you?"<sup>2</sup> He said to the two blind men by the roadside, when they cried out to Him to have mercy on them. If he had seen that those people were not in earnest in their prayers for health and sight, and that they would have preferred money instead, He would certainly not have healed them. In the same way, whenever the Holy Scripture says that God hears the prayers of men, it generally adds that men must cry to God beforehand; "In my trouble I cried to the Lord, and He heard me;"<sup>3</sup> as the Prophet David says. And the Lord promises that He will hear their cries: "He shall cry to me, and I will hear him."<sup>4</sup> Now what does it mean, that crying to God in prayer? Does it mean that we must open the mouth and shout out loud? Oh, no; for if that were the case, a sickly, delicate man, or one who has a weak chest would gain but little by his prayers, while he would fare best who could shout the loudest. To cry to God in prayer, says St. Bernard, is nothing else but to pray with a great desire and wish to be heard; the greater this desire, the more piercing the cry that resounds in the ears of the Almighty; but when this desire is wanting, the prayer is not heard.

And that is perfectly just; for who would force His gifts and graces on one who is unwilling to receive them, and who sets, no store by them? To ask, and not to desire what one asks for, is not to pray, but to deceive and lie; conduct which merits, not grace and favor, but anger and punishment. Such is the complaint that Jesus Christ makes, in the Gospel of St. Matthew, of those hypocrites, who pray to Him with the lips, while their hearts and desires are in utter contradiction with their words: "Hypocrites, well hath Isaias prophesied of you, saying: This people honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me."<sup>5</sup>

Now, my dear brethren, I maintain the opinion I expressed in the beginning, that, namely, if ever our hearts and wills are in contradiction with the words we utter, that is frequently and especially the case in our prayers to God; we are not in earnest

But deceives him to whom he prays.

Such is the conduct of those who ask for heavenly goods and do not wish to get them.

<sup>1</sup> Vis sanus fieri?—John v. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Quid vultis, ut faciam vobis?—Matth. xx. 32.

<sup>3</sup> Ad Dominum, cum tribularer, clamavi: et exaudivit me.—Ps. cxix. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Clamabit ad me, et ego exaudiam eum.—Ibid. xc. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Hypocritæ, bene prophetavit de vobis Isaias, dicens: Populus hic labiis me honorat, cor autem eorum longe est a me.—Matth. xv. 7, 8.

with them, nor do we really wish to be heard. What do you think of it yourselves? A beggar comes to the door and begs most piteously for a piece of bread for God's sake; the maid-servant comes and shows him several pieces that have been put aside for the poor; there, she says, take whichever of them you please. But the beggar will not put himself to the trouble of stretching out his hand for it; nay, if a piece is given him he throws it away at once; he is actually afraid of being forced to take another piece, and still he does not cease to cry out for a bit of bread for God's sake! Is he in earnest with his begging? No; he is a foolish man; he does not know his own mind; he asks for a thing that he does not wish to get; a man like that must be turned away, even with blows. Now, that is the way in which many Christians pray, when they ask for spiritual blessings that concern the salvation of their souls. The mouth speaks and begs, but the hands remain idle, and will not stretch themselves out to seize what is asked for. Outwardly they appear to sigh with longing for it, inwardly, they are filled with anxiety lest their prayer should be granted. The beautiful words they read in their prayer-books express a great desire for good; but in reality the good is rejected and quite the contrary is accepted. See for yourselves whether it is not so.

**They are not in earnest with a single petition of the Lord's prayer.**

I will content myself with proposing for your consideration that most excellent of prayers, which, at the same time is the most common; it is the most excellent, because it comes from the lips of Christ Himself, it was made by Him, and He has recommended it to us, and it contains brief petitions for all that we can expect or ask for in any kind of prayer, that concerns our eternal salvation: it is the most common prayer, because it is recited daily several times by great and small, young and old, learned and ignorant, nay, a Catholic would make a scruple of omitting that prayer for only one day. That prayer is the Our Father, of which Christ says: "Thus, therefore, shall you pray: Our Father who art in Heaven."<sup>1</sup> Let us see now, whether there is a single petition in it, in which the lips and the heart, the words and the will are always in perfect accord.

**They are not in earnest in the first petition: "Hallowed be Thy name."**

"Hallowed be Thy name;" such is the first petition; and its meaning is this; We wish and desire, O Lord, with our whole hearts, that Thy holy name be always praised, honored, glorified, and blessed by all creatures in the world, in a manner befitting Thy infinite Majesty and Sanctity; that Thy glory be every

<sup>1</sup> Sic ergo vos orabit: Pater noster, qui es in cœlis.—Matth. vi. 9.

day increased by us and all belonging to us, and by all Thy creatures; that Thou be always known and loved by all men, above all things. Now, I ask all who say that prayer: are you really in earnest? Have you a sincere desire to obtain your request? Are you in earnest, if you use irreverently and disrespectfully the Most Holy Name of Jesus, at which every knee must bend in Heaven and in hell; if you utter it in astonishment, or in jest? And you, who by your inveterate and horrible habit of cursing, pay more honor to the name of the devil, than to the name of God, and by your bad example teach your children and servants to use a language fit for demons? You who so often speak of God and His saints in contemptuous, profane, or blasphemous terms? You, who are ashamed to pay due respect to God in His church by outward modesty, humility and a humble posture of body? You, who do not like to be thought pious by others, and who therefore are often more influenced by human respect, than by a desire for God's honor? You, who are so jealous of your own honor, that, for the sake of it, you often transgress the law of God? You, who give others the occasion of sin by scandalous behavior, dress, manners, or language, and thus keep them away from God? You, who introduce dangerous abuses that are contrary to the holy Christian law, and spread them, approve of them, or do not prevent them, as far as your position allows? Are you in earnest, I ask, in your prayer that the name of God be hallowed, and His glory increased by all men? Or do you think that you are going the right way about blessing His name? Meanwhile, all these people say every day, "Hallowed be Thy name;" but they do not take the least trouble to amend their own conduct. Away with such beggars as those! Either they do not know what they are asking for, or they do not want it.

The second petition is, "Thy kingdom come." Do we know what it means, my dear brethren? If there was question here of a great and glorious earthly kingdom, such as, according to the Holy Fathers, the two Apostles imagined, when their mother asked our Lord: "Say that these my two sons may sit, the one on Thy right hand, and the other on Thy left, in Thy kingdom," then, indeed, I should have no doubt of the earnestness of our prayer, and like the two Apostles, we should do everything in our power to have it granted. Unceasingly, should we cry out: grant, O Lord, that Thy kingdom may

What the second petition, "Thy kingdom come," means.

<sup>1</sup> Dic, ut sedeant hi duo filii mei, unus ad dexteram tuam, et unus ad sinistram in regno ton.—Matth. xx. 21.

come! It is my most ardent wish! Let me be the first in Thy kingdom! I desire with all my heart to sit next to Thee! But that is not the meaning of those words, and therefore, although we pray a hundred times a day, "Thy kingdom come," there is little earnestness in our prayer. The kingdom of God, which is the object of this petition, is twofold; one is in the present, the other, in the future life. Of the former our Lord says: "Lo, the kingdom of God is within you,"<sup>1</sup> and that is the case when, after having destroyed the kingdom of the devil therein, God takes possession of our hearts by His grace, and rules over them as their Sovereign Lord. The other is the eternal kingdom of Heaven, for which the royal Prophet sighed so eagerly, when he said: "As the hart panteth after the fountains of waters: so my soul panteth after Thee, O God. . . . When shall I come and appear before the face of God?"<sup>2</sup> I shall enjoy neither rest nor ease until I enter the house of my Lord!

They are not in earnest in asking for it.

But how few Christians who repeat that petition are really in earnest? How many, who while they say with the lips, "Thy kingdom come," Thou, O Lord, shalt alone rule in my heart! cry out far louder with their hearts, which are already possessed by something else, what the citizens said to the nobleman who went to receive for himself a kingdom: "We will not have this man to reign over us."<sup>3</sup> No; the Lord is too severe, and He is opposed to our desires; we do not want Him to rule over us. Like the wicked Jews, when Pilate showed them Christ, saying, "Behold your King," they cried out; "We have no king but Cæsar."<sup>4</sup> Thus many Christians really cry out, when they pray: we have no king but our unmortified flesh, whose desires we always are willing to gratify; we have no ruler but that person to whom we have sold our heart, our love and our freedom, and whom we adore as an idol; we will have no master but the world, whose laws we observe most obediently; no lord but the devil, whose slaves we make ourselves by sin. Again, how few Christians there are, who pray earnestly for the eternal kingdom of Heaven! If the Lord were to come and knock at their door, while they are praying over and over again, "Thy kingdom come," oh, what troubled countenances there would be! with what fear and dread they would cry out: give us

<sup>1</sup> Ecce enim regnum Dei intra vos est.—Luke xvii. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Quemadmodum desiderat cervus ad fontes aquarum, ita desiderat anima mea ad te, Deus. . . . Quando veniam et apparebo ante faciem Dei?—Ps. xli. 2, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Nolumus hunc regnare super nos.—Luke xix. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Ecce, rex vester. Non naemus regem, nisi Cæsarem.—John xix. 14, 15.

till to-morrow! give us till to-morrow! Wait a little, O Lord; we have had no time to prepare! Give me a few years longer; I am not so old yet! There are many who, if the choice were given them between Heaven and earth, between eternal joys and the allurements of the world and the delights of the flesh, would cry out at once, in the words of the Psalmist: "The heaven of heaven is the Lord's: but the earth he has given to the children of men,"<sup>1</sup> therefore I prefer to remain on earth amongst men. Oh, you may pray as much as you like "Thy kingdom come," you will not be one bit better; for you are not in earnest; you do not want it.

The third is a beautiful petition, if we were only in earnest about it; "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven," by the angels and saints, who desire and wish for nothing more, and rejoice in nothing more, than that the will of their God be perfectly accomplished; nay, who resign themselves so fully to that holy will, that if God were to banish them from Heaven, they would rejoice in obeying Him and in loving Him in the midst of torments. "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven;" such is our prayer, O Lord! Let everything on earth be according to Thy will! Do with us and all belonging to us, with our bodies and souls, our lives and fortunes, at all times, in all places, according to Thy good will and pleasure! We wish and desire nothing, but what Thou wilt, and how, when, how long, and because Thou wilt! What a beautiful, angelic and heavenly prayer that is, I say again! Are you all in earnest with it, my dear brethren? If so, you are not in need of any more virtue; you are all perfect and holy.

In earnest, indeed! A likely thing, to be sure! you, poor, oppressed and needy Christians, see how this prayer of yours, "Thy will be done," chimes in with your actions! God has been pleased to place one man in humble and reduced circumstances; another He has deprived of honor and respectability before the world; a third He has commanded to work hard for daily bread; a fourth He visits with sickness, or bodily pain, or with temporal losses or with different crosses and trials; the husband, the wife, the father, the mother, must look on while the object of their dearest affection lies dangerously ill, and may die at any moment. All these people say, "Thy will be done;" but how do they say it? What a want of resignation they show! What tears they shed! How impatient they are!

The third,  
"Thy will  
be done."

They are  
not in ear-  
nest with it.

<sup>1</sup> Cœlum cœli Domino: terram autem dedit filiis hominum.—Ps. cxlvi. 16.

How they murmur and complain! They almost give way to despair. No advice, nor remonstrance will do them any good. And why? You are praying to God and saying to Him, "Thy will be done;" rejoice then, and thank God for having heard your prayer; He cannot please you better than by granting what you ask. The trouble you are in, is according to the will of God; it is God's will for you to be poor, or humbled, to suffer loss, or to be unfortunate; it is His will for your son, or daughter, or father, or mother, or husband or wife to be dangerously ill and to die; such is the will of God. And are you dissatisfied? Do you murmur against it? Then you cannot be in earnest in your prayer; you do not wish it to be granted; nay, you desire the very opposite of it! But what sort of a prayer is that? Do you wish that God should arrange everything so as to please you? If so, you must change the Lord's prayer, and say, not, "Thy will be done," but, my will be done! And, I say again, if you continue to say the Lord's prayer, as Christ has made it, you are not in earnest; you say one thing with the lips, and another by your actions: in a word, you do not really desire what you ask for. Be sure that you understand me aright, my dear brethren. I speak of a complaining, murmuring, discontented, despairing sorrow; for, it is natural to weep and be afflicted at misfortune, nor can we help feeling pain and grief; that is the reason why God sends us crosses; we must feel them; we must weep and be afflicted; but our sorrow should not interfere with patience and resignation to the will of God. Job certainly felt his sufferings when he was lying on the dunghill; he cried out: "Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you my friends, because the hand of the Lord hath touched me."<sup>1</sup> And yet he was patient in the highest degree, and was quite satisfied with the punishment inflicted on him by God; for he said: "Blessed be the name of the Lord."<sup>2</sup> David wept bitterly when he heard of the death of his son Absalom: "My son Absalom, Absalom, my son," said he, "would God that I might die for thee;"<sup>3</sup> but at the same time, he praised God with the most humble submission to His will. Jesus Christ Himself, the Son of God, was troubled in the garden of Gethsemane at the thought of the sufferings that were in store for Him, and he was sorrow-

<sup>1</sup> Miseremini mei, miseremini mei, saltem vos amici mei, quia manus Domini tetigit me.—Joh XIX. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Sit nomen Domini benedictum.—Ibid. 1. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Fili mi Absalom, Absalom fili mi: quis mihi tribuat, ut ego moriar pro te.—II. Kings XVIII. 33.

ful even to death: "My soul is sorrowful even unto death,"<sup>1</sup> He said to His Apostles; He even asked His heavenly Father to free Him from such a shameful death: "He fell upon His face, praying, and saying: My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me;"<sup>2</sup> but at once, with the utmost resignation, He added: "nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt."<sup>3</sup> So that sorrow is not a sign of dissatisfaction and discontent, when he who suffers it, says and thinks: O Lord, it is Thy will for me to suffer; Thy will be done! But this is where most people go astray, and therefore, they do not wish what they pray for.

If we are to be in earnest about any petition, we surely should be so, in my opinion about the fourth, "Give us this day our daily bread." That is, bestow on us, O Lord, temporal blessings, and all that is necessary for our bodily welfare, such as food and clothing. I do not think that any one would refuse to pray earnestly for this, or to stretch out both hands eagerly to seize hold of any blessings of the kind that are bestowed on him; in fact the more one receives of those blessings, the better he is pleased. Still, surprising as it is, even in this petition we are not always in earnest. And why? Consider what we ask for; "bread," that is, whatever is necessary to support life, but nothing superfluous. According to the well-known exhortation of St. Paul: "Having food, and wherewith to be covered, with these we are content;"<sup>4</sup> nor should we desire any more: "For they that will become rich, fall into temptation, and into the snare of the devil, and into many unprofitable and hurtful desires, which drown men into destruction and perdition."<sup>5</sup> Give us "our bread;" that is to say, our neighbor must share with us, and he to whom God has given much, must help the poor and needy. Give us our "daily bread," by which we acknowledge our constant and humble dependence on the great Lord of Heaven, and like poor beggars expect our food from His hands. Give us "this day;" we do not say, to-morrow, so as not to show too great an anxiety for the future, and to prove our confidence in the common Father of all, who feeds the birds of the air and the worm of the earth.

From this, my dear brethren, you can see what your desire is They do not

<sup>1</sup> Tristis est anima mea usque ad mortem.—Matth. xxvi. 38.

<sup>2</sup> Procidit in faciem suam, orans et dicens: Pater mi, si possibile est, transeat a me calix iste.—Ibid. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Verumtamen non sicut ego volo, sed sicut tu.—Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Habentes alimenta, et quibus tegamur, his contenti sumus.—I. Tim. vi. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Nam qui volunt divites fieri, incidunt in tentationem, et in laqueum diaboli, et desideria multa inutilia et nociva, quæ mergunt homines in interitum et perditionem.—Ibid. 9.

"Give us this day our daily bread," the meaning of this petition.

wish it to be granted.

regarding this petition. Judge yourselves, if they are satisfied with their daily bread, who squander away their lives in immoderate pleasures, and indulge in too great an extravagance in dress. They are not content with their bread, although there are so many poor who have no bread, whom they could and should help out of their superfluous wealth. Do they ask for "our" daily bread, who are concerned for themselves alone, and do not trouble themselves about others, while they look upon the law of alms-giving as not binding in conscience, and very often resort to all kinds of tricks to plunder poor widows and orphans? Do they expect from God their "daily" bread, who think they owe their prosperity to their own skill and cleverness, and, blinded by pride, hardly ever think that it is all due to Him alone who can, in a moment, humble the mighty, and send away the rich empty-handed? Are they content with their daily bread for "this day," who through greed of gold, are most anxious to save all they can, and to increase their treasures, as if they expected never to die, but to live in this world for ever? All these people do not really desire what they ask for; they are not satisfied with that for which they pray to God.

"Forgive us our trespasses,"—this too, is against their will.

What says the fifth petition? "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us;" as we deal with our neighbor, with him who has offended and injured us, and who says he is our sworn enemy; so also, O Lord, do we wish and desire that Thou shouldst deal with us, and with our sins! Oh, vindictive man, do you mean that? You cannot bear the man who has injured you, or with whom you have a difference or a law-suit; you do not speak a friendly word to him; your heart is full of bitterness towards him; you will never forget the harm he has done you; if you wish him no harm, neither do you wish well to him; you seize every opportunity of paying him off in his own coin; and do you now wish and desire that the just God should deal with you in the same way, and take vengeance on you for the sins you have committed against Him? Do you really mean that? I ask you again. Oh, woe to you, if He were to do as you ask! And yet you say every day to Him; "forgive us, as we forgive!" No; I cannot believe that you really wish to be heard; and so you do not desire what you pray for. I will say no more about this now, my dear brethren, as I have spoken of it more at length on a former occasion.

"Lead us

"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," that is,

keep off from us, O Lord, the evil spirit, that he may not deceive us by his wiles, temptations and suggestions; keep down in us the unruly desires of the flesh, that we may not be led by them to transgress Thy law; keep our souls from all dangerous occasions; turn away our eyes and ears that we may not see or hear anything that would lead us into evil; save and “deliver us from evil,” and especially from the greatest of all evils, sin! Such is the tenor of our prayer; but what is really our wish and desire? Oh, how readily we should be heard in this petition, if we were only in earnest in making it!

not into temptation Deliver us from evil.”

Truly, the devil is not always to blame for every temptation and sin! Much less is God an occasion of evil to us. He permits us to be tempted, but not more than we can bear; and His only object in doing so, is to prove our virtue, and to increase our merit and eternal glory. But very often we tempt ourselves, and do our best to lead ourselves into evil; we go without necessity into the dangerous occasions of sin; we give full liberty to our eyes, ears, tongue and all our senses; we are fond of, and seek conversations, friendships and acquaintances that the holiest and most mortified servants of God shunned through fear of falling, and which we must acknowledge in conscience, to be dangerous to innocence; we read books, novels and love-tales, and think about what we read, until it would be a miracle indeed if we did not give way to evil desires. And still we pray daily, “Lead us not into temptation!” Truly there can be little earnestness in our prayer!

They are not in earnest about the first.

“Deliver us from evil;” fine talk that! I think that, if I could read the hearts of many, I should find them like St. Augustine when he was still young and given to impurity. As he himself confesses, he had neither rest, nor peace when he considered his miserable condition, and the danger he was always in of being lost forever; so that he was often driven to have recourse to God in prayer, and to ask to be freed from his misery by a powerful grace. “But alas,” he says, “I was afraid, O Lord, that Thou wouldst hear me too quickly, and wouldst heal me of the disease of concupiscence.”<sup>1</sup> I dreaded breaking off my old habits, as I would dread death itself; I looked forward with fear and trembling to the time when I should no longer have the beloved object before my eyes, nor enjoy the wonted pleasure. Oh, terrible time, I thought, oh, bitter solitude, in which I shall have nothing to think of but Heaven, nothing to

Still less are they in earnest about the last petition.

<sup>1</sup> Timebam, Domine, ne me cito exaudires, et cito sanares a morbo concupiscentiæ.—  
.. Aug. l. 8; Confess. c. 7.

love but God. I prayed, and was full of fear at the same time, that in Thy mercy, O Lord, Thou wouldst hear me too readily and too quickly. There are many in our own days who act in just the same way. Change my heart, O God; free me from this dangerous state; keep my soul safe; be merciful to me, a poor sinner! so they say a hundred times, like St. Augustine. But, tell me, would you be satisfied if your prayer was granted, and if God loosed in a moment the bonds which keep you in such an agreeable captivity? If He were now to embitter for you all those joys and pleasures that you have hitherto so eagerly desired? If He were to make you hate the person whom you have hitherto so ardently loved, and by whom you are, so to say, bewitched? If He were all at once to deprive you of the opportunities and company that are so dear to you? If He were to depose you from that office which has hitherto been the sole occasion of your sins? Would you, I ask, be satisfied? oh, many a one would say, quite frightened at the idea: "I fear that God may hear me too quickly." Do you then love your own misery? You secretly rejoice when you find an opportunity of gratifying your passions, and you weep through sorrow if the person with whom you sin, goes away: therefore you do not really desire what you pray for.

"Lord, what wilt Thou have me do?" says another, when his confessor advises him to pray in order to find out that state of life he should choose; but if we could look into his heart, we should find it full of fear that God would call him to the religious state; he does not want that; he does not want an inspiration that interferes with his freedom. Lord, enlighten me; give me grace to know my duty in all circumstances, and to fulfil Thy holy will! Such is the prayer of a third, who is afraid of asking advice from others, or to come to a sermon, lest he should be taught his duty, and learn truths that he would find disagreeable to live up to. In a word, they who are in the state of sin come to the church and pray, "deliver us from evil," without the least earnest desire or resolution to abandon the evil, that is, sin, and to amend their lives. Thus they are not in earnest even when they say the last word of the Lord's prayer, which is Amen, "so be it;" as the Catechism says, "that we may show our hope and desire to obtain what we ask in those seven petitions."<sup>1</sup> See, my dear brethren, nearly every word in our prayers is false and deceiving!

There are other prayers also which they do not wish to be granted.

<sup>1</sup> Hoc est, fiat; ut spem desideriumque monstremus, accipiendi ea quæ septem his petitionibus continentur.

But what an absurd and ridiculous kind of prayer that is. It reminds me of what students say in school when they want to be questioned on the lesson: "let me answer;"<sup>1</sup> they shout and sometimes it happens that he who shouts the loudest, would turn red and pale, and get into a fearful state if he were asked a question, because he does not know a word of his lesson, and shouts with the others in order to make it appear that he can answer, so that he may get off without being questioned. And the trick succeeds very often; for it is not impossible to deceive the school-master in that way, now and then; but if the trick is found out, woe betide him! Now, do we really think that we can deceive, in that way, our God who can penetrate the inmost recesses of our hearts, and that we can say anything we like outwardly, without His perceiving that we really do not mean a word of what we say? Still, we think that if we spend a few hours praying in that way, we have done great things for God's honor, and we look upon ourselves as very devout and pious! What nonsense! In reality, we are insulting God, and trying to befool Him; for when we ask Him for that which we cannot receive, and He, in spite of His omnipotence, cannot give us, it is the same as saying: O Lord, do not allow my heart and my conscience to be stained by sin, while I still wish to keep them in the state of sin! Keep me from all the vanities of the world, while I love nothing but the world and its customs; save my soul from all dangerous occasions, although I deliberately seek them; let my flesh be subject to the spirit, although I gratify all its inordinate inclinations; let me not be blinded by ambition, although through pride I extol myself above others; give me meekness and patience, although I am determined not to bear the least word of contradiction. That is as much as saying: O God make me humble and proud, patient and impatient, chaste and sensual, an enemy and a friend of the world, virtuous and vicious, pious and wicked; grant that I may save my soul, and lose it! What an extraordinary prayer that is! Can God be honored by it?

Prayer of that kind is an insult to God.

Suppose that we address a prayer of that kind not to God, but to a mortal like ourselves; would not that man feel offended when he finds out that we are not in earnest, and that we are afraid of receiving what we pretend to desire from him? What could he think but that we wish to put his goodness and generosity to the test, or else that we are trying to make a fool

Therefore He rejects with displeasure.

<sup>1</sup> Licet mihi, mihi!

of him? And what could he do but turn us away in displeasure? And that God, who, as the Apostle says, "is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things;"<sup>1</sup> who knows not only the words we speak, but also the desires of our hearts; will He listen with favor to a prayer which our own conscience tells us to be false and deceitful? Will He force upon us gifts and graces which we do not value nor desire, and are actually afraid of receiving? Can He hear a prayer of that kind?

Or else He hears it to their destruction.

Yet, He will hear it; but you must not rejoice on that account, for you have reason rather to fear. He will hear it, not according to the words you speak, but according to the desires of your hearts. "Be it done to thee as thou wilt;"<sup>2</sup> He will say, as He formerly did to the woman of Chanaan; I will grant the prayer of thy heart, but not that of thy lips! You speak of the salvation of your soul, and the kingdom of Heaven; but in reality you desire your eternal ruin; "be it done to thee as thou wilt!" You say with the lips to Me, "Thy will be done;" but you have no intention of being satisfied with My will; "be it done to thee as thou wilt;" remain in your impatience and discontent. You say that I must forgive you your trespasses, as you forgive those of others against you; but you refuse to forgive; I will do the same; "be it done to thee as thou wilt." You ask Me to free you from the danger of sin; but you run wilfully into the danger; go on then, to your own destruction, "be it done to thee as thou wilt." You say that I must convert you; but you remain in the state of sin; "be it done to thee as thou wilt." Amen! so be it! You will live and die in that state. And why? Because such is your will. Alas, what a fearful Amen that is! God grant that it may never be said to any of our prayers!

Conclusion and exhortation to be earnest in prayer.

Christians, let us pray; but at the same time, let us really desire to receive what we ask for; let us ask God for His help and grace, but at the same time co-operate with that grace, and show that we really wish our prayers to be heard. If we find that our corrupt nature is not inclined to do this, and that our will is opposed to good, then let us at least beg of God earnestly and unceasingly to change our will, and to give us an earnestness of purpose in good, according to the prayer of the Church; "graciously compel our rebellious wills to turn to Thee."<sup>3</sup> We know, O Lord, that very often our hearts contradict our lips in prayer; now we ask of Thee a grace, that we intend asking of

<sup>1</sup> Major est Deus corde nostro, et novit omnia.—I. John iii. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Fiat tibi sicut vis.—Matth. xv. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Rebelles nostros ad te propitius compelle voluntates.

Thee every time we say, "Thy will be done;" and that is, that Thou wouldst draw forcibly our obstinate wills to Thee, and grant us the grace of earnestness in prayer; show the might of Thy arm in us; and use to that end whatever means Thou foreseest will best succeed, whether they are pleasing to our sensuality or not; so that, detached from earthly things, we may labor with all our hearts to gain Thee and Thy heavenly goods. Amen. So be it!

*On other Faults and Qualities of Prayer, see the following  
Third and Fourth Parts.*

**END OF THIRD VOLUME.**

# SERMONS

ON THE

## SEVEN DEADLY SINS,

AND THE DIFFERENT SINS AGAINST GOD AND OUR  
NEIGHBOR WHICH FLOW THEREFROM.

ADAPTED TO ALL THE SUNDAYS AND 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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## CONTENTS OF VOLUME II.

### ON INGRATITUDE.

SERMON	PAGE
xxxviii. On Ingratitude as a Vice hateful to God, and yet very common, - - - - -	7
xxxix. On the odious Ingratitude of Those who are under most Obligations to God, - - - - -	20
xl. On Ingratitude towards the Holy Guardian Angels, -	31
xli. On the Punishment of Ingratitude, - - - - -	43

### ON THE NEGLECT AND ABUSE OF DIVINE GRACE.

xl.ii. On rejecting the Light of the Holy Ghost, - - -	56
xl.iii. On rejecting the Divine Inspirations, - - - -	69
xl.iv. On Those who refuse to acknowledge the Divine Inspirations, - - - - -	80
xl.v. On Those who do not at once Follow what they Know to be Divine Inspirations, - - - - -	93

### ON NEGLECTING TO HEAR, AND MAKING A BAD USE OF, THE WORD OF GOD IN SERMONS.

xlvi. On the dangerous State of Those who seldom Hear the Word of God, - - - - -	107
xlvii. On Those who Hear the Word of God without Fruit, -	120
xlviii. On Those who Hear the Word of God with hard Hearts,	133
xl.ix. On Those who do not Practise what They Hear in Sermons, - - - - -	146
l. On the small Number of Those who Hear Sermons properly, - - - - -	158

### ON DISGRACING THE SEASON OF SHROVE-TIDE.

li. How unjustly They act, who disgrace the Season of Shrove-Tide, - - - - -	171
lii. On Those who, during Shrove-Tide, prefer to follow the Devil, rather than Christ, - - - - -	184
liii. On the Indecency and the Bitterness of the Pleasures of Shrove-Tide, - - - - -	197
li.v. On Nightly Promiscuous Gatherings of Young People,	209

### ON HUMAN RESPECT.

lv. On the Deformity of Human Respect, - - - - -	225
lvi. On the Injustice of Human Respect, - - - - -	237
lvii. On unlawful Fashions and Customs, - - - - -	250

ON SINS AGAINST OUR NEIGHBOR.		PAGE
<b>SERMON</b>		
LVIII.	On the small Number of Those who love their Neighbor,	264
ON SCANDAL.		
LIX.	On the Manifold Ways and the Wickedness of giving Scandal, - - - - -	279
LX.	On the evil Effects of Scandal, - - - - -	292
ON WICKED TONGUES.		
LXI.	On the Multiplicity of Sins of the Tongue, - - -	108
ON FAULT-FINDING, AND INTERPRETING IN A BAD SENSE THE ACTIONS OF OTHERS.		
LXII.	On the Injustice of finding fault with, and interpreting in a bad Sense, the Actions of Others, - - -	323
LXIII.	On the Injury done to One's Self and to God by Fault-Finding, - - - - -	336
ON INJURING THE CHARACTER OF OUR NEIGHBOR.		
LXIV.	On the Wickedness of Defaming the Character of Our Neighbor, - - - - -	352
LXV.	On the Irreparable Injury caused by Defaming Another's Character, - - - - -	364
LXVI.	On the Manifold Ways of Defaming Our Neighbor's Character, and the Excuses that are generally made for this Sin, - - - - -	376
LXVII.	On Those who Hear uncharitable Talk, - - -	388
ON CURSING AND SWEARING.		
LXVIII.	On the Depravity of Cursing, - - - - -	401
LXIX.	On the Malice of Cursing, - - - - -	414
LXX.	On the Necessity of Correcting the Habit of Cursing, - - -	426
ON OTHER SINS OF THE TONGUE.		
LXXI.	On the Impure Tongue, - - - - -	439
LXXII.	On the Loquacious Tongue, - - - - -	451
LXXIII.	On the Lying Tongue, - - - - -	463
LXXIV.	On the Shamelessness of Those who boast of their Sins,	475
LXXV.	On the Hopeless State of those who boast of their Sins,	485
LXXVI.	On the Presumption of Every Sinner, - - - - -	495
	Index of Sermons, - - - - -	509
	Alphabetical Index of Subjects, - - - - -	516

# ON INGRATITUDE.

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## THIRTY-EIGHTH SERMON.

### ON INGRATITUDE AS A VICE HATEFUL TO GOD, AND YET VERY COMMON.

#### Subject.

Ingratitude towards God for benefits received is an abominable vice, hateful to God, and yet a very common vice.—*Preached on the thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

#### Text.

*Non est inventus, qui rediret, et daret gloriam Deo.*—Luke. xvii. 18.

“There is no one found to return and give glory to God.”

#### Introduction.

Of the ten lepers who were cleansed, only one returned to give thanks to his beneficent Physician; “There is no one found to return and give glory to God, but this stranger.” Why was he the only one who showed his gratitude? Did not the other nine receive just as great a benefit? Why did they not also return thanks for it? That is what Christ complains of in to-day’s Gospel; “Were not ten made clean? and where are the nine?” The same complaint was always a common one, and might be made too, in our days; for gratitude is a rare virtue in the world. Sir Thomas More, the great English chancellor and martyr, used to say that, “we write benefits on sand and injuries on marble;”<sup>1</sup> so that we never forget the latter, while the former soon disappear from our memory. To-day’s sermon, my dear brethren, will be directed against ingratitude, not that of which men are guilty towards each other, but that of which most men are guilty towards God, and I say,

<sup>1</sup> Beneficia pulvert, et si quid patimur marmori sculpimus.

## Plan of Discourse.

*Ingratitude towards God for benefits received is an abominable vice, hateful to God, and yet a very common vice. Such is the whole subject.*

O God of goodness, one benefit we ask of Thee, which will however ensure our receiving all future graces, and that is, that we may have grateful hearts, so that we may always praise and bless Thee for the countless benefits Thou hast hitherto bestowed on us; this we ask of Thee through the intercession of Mary and our holy angels guardian.

In what in-  
gratitude  
consists.

It is not ingratitude for one who has received a benefit to make no return for it, if it is impossible for him to do so, as long as he humbly acknowledges the obligation he is under, and honors, praises and loves his benefactor; in that way even a beggar can show gratitude. We see an example of it in the stranger whom our Lord cured of leprosy; he was very poor, and yet he showed the greatest honor to Christ by coming back and prostrating himself before Him, and publicly thanking Him in presence of all the people. Our Lord thought more of this man than if the treasures that Naaman offered to Eliseus, had been presented to Him. So that ingratitude does not consist in not making a return for benefits received, but in not acknowledging and fulfilling one's duty and obligation. And according to the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas, there are three kinds of it. The first causes us not to acknowledge our benefactor, or the benefits we have received from him; the second makes us forget the benefits that have been conferred on us, so that we do not return thanks for them; the third is the worst of all, and it consists in repaying with injuries the benefits received.

It is odious  
to man but  
especially to  
God.

This vice is so hateful to every one, that Ausonius did not hesitate to say that, "the earth brings forth no greater monster, than an ungrateful man;"<sup>1</sup> while it is, so to speak, intolerable to God; nay, St. Bernard says, that there is nothing so displeasing to God as the vice of ingratitude; "nothing is so displeasing to God, especially in the children of grace, as ingratitude."<sup>2</sup> We have another instance of this in the ten lepers: "Were not ten made clean?" said our Lord with displeasure, when He saw that the stranger was the only one who returned to thank Him, "and where are the nine?" But, O dear Lord, what a question for

<sup>1</sup> Nihil homine terra pejus ingrato creat.

<sup>2</sup> Nihil ita displicet Deo, præsertim in filiis gratiæ, quam ingratitude.—S. Bern. Serm. d' Septem panibus.

Thee to ask, as if Thou didst not know where they were! Art Thou not infinite Wisdom, whose all-seeing eye penetrates all places, more searchingly than the rays of the sun? Art Thou not that God before whom the deepest abysses of the earth, as well as the most secret recesses of the heart are bare and open? whom nobody can escape, either above the earth, or on it, or under it? Dost Thou not know well then, where the nine are? Why then dost Thou ask where they are? The reason of His asking that question was, as the glossa says, to show how He disliked and detested ingratitude; for, whenever God speaks as if He did not know a certain thing, as is frequently the case in the Gospel, and as He will speak to the wicked on the last day, "I know you not" His intention is to show the special hatred and anger He has conceived against that thing: "thus He looks on the ungrateful as if they were unknown to Him, and He asks where they are."<sup>1</sup>

St. Bernard gives us the reason of that hatred; "ingratitude blocks the way against grace, and grace finds no entrance where it is."<sup>2</sup> Imagine, my dear brethren, the state of one who has a passionate affection for another: he desires nothing more than to please the object of his love, and to shower benefits of all kinds upon him. But nothing troubles him more than to find that the latter attaches no value to his proffered services, or that other people interfere to prevent him from bestowing his favors on the object of his love. If the sun in the heavens had reason, it would be greatly angered if its rays were intercepted from falling on the earth; if the spring of water were capable of feeling pain, it would suffer very much if it was stopped up and not allowed to flow freely; because both the sun and the water would then suffer violence against the natural tendency which God has given to the one, to shed its light, and to the other, to render the earth fruitful. Now, there is no created thing which has a stronger natural tendency to bestow itself on others, than the living Sun of justice and the perpetual Spring of all goods, God Himself, has to shower down His graces and blessings on all, especially His rational creatures. What black cloud can intercept the rays of this beneficent Sun? What can stop this Spring from flowing? What violence can set bounds to the Omnipotent, and compel Him to restrain His wishes and desires, so that He may not distribute His benefits as He wills? He is the Lord of all, and who can re-

Because He is thereby hindered from bestowing His favors.

<sup>1</sup> Sic habet ingratos quasi ignotos; ubi sunt, inquit Dominus.

<sup>2</sup> Vias enim obstruit gratiæ, et ubi fuerit illa, jam gratia accessum non invenit.

sist Him? No angel in Heaven, no demon in hell, no potentate on earth. Ingratitude alone is able to do this; for its hateful malice violently binds the hands of the good God, so to speak, and keeps them closed, so that they dare not show their generosity and bestow their blessings. Truly, as St. Bernard says, "ingratitude is a burning wind which dries up the fount of goodness, the dews of mercy and the springs of grace."<sup>1</sup> Just as we deserve new favors by acknowledging and returning thanks for those already received, so by ingratitude we close the way to all favors. From this we can see how very displeasing and hateful this vice must be to God, who is by nature infinitely good, merciful and generous, and how true are the words of St. Bernard; "nothing is so displeasing to God, especially in the children of grace, as ingratitude."

The only return God expects from His creatures, is gratitude and love; the ungrateful man deprives Him of this.

Another circumstance that increases the malice and deformity of ingratitude, is the fact, that it steals away from God the only good that He expects from His rational creatures, namely, their grateful recognition of His benefits, and the honor and love they owe Him. In order to show His people how unjust they were to Him in this respect, He says publicly to them by His Prophet David: "Hear O my people, and I will speak O Israel, and I will testify to thee," and will tell thee what thou hast to do; "I am God, thy God."<sup>2</sup> Thou must acknowledge Me as thy God from whom thou hast all that thou art; everything thou possessest is a benefit of mine; all thou desirest and hopest for must come from My generous hand; and therefore it is only right and just that thou shouldst make Me some return. And what canst thou give Me for all the gifts and blessings I have lavished on thee? I am not in need of the temples thou buildest in My honor, for, "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof;"<sup>3</sup> the whole world belongs to Me, and yet it is only a narrow dwelling for Me. Do you think perhaps that I am satisfied with the holocausts and sacrifices, with the sheep and oxen you offer on My altars? Oh no; these things are not enough for Me; "I will not take calves out of thy house; nor he-goats out of thy flocks. For all the beasts of the woods are mine, the cattle on the hills and the oxen;"<sup>4</sup> they are all gifts which thou hast re-

<sup>1</sup> Ingratitudo ventus urens est, siccans fontem pietatis, rorem misericordiae, fluenta gratiae.—S. Bern. Serm. 51 in Cant.

<sup>2</sup> Audi populus meus, et loquar, Israel, et testificabor tibi: Deus, Deus tuus ego sum.—Ps. xlix. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Domini est terra et plenitudo ejus.—Ps. xxiii. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Non accipiam de domo tua vitulos, neque de gregibus tuis hircos. Quoniam mæxæ sunt omnes feræ silvarum, jumenta in montibus, et boves.—Ps. xlix. 9-10.

ceived from Me. If I were in need of any of those things, I should not have to ask thee for it; “If I should be hungry, I would not tell thee. Shall I eat the flesh of bullocks? or shall I drink the blood of goats? I know all the fowls of the air.”<sup>1</sup> Nor have I any need of thy treasures; for, “with Me is the beauty of the field.”<sup>2</sup> Turn whither thou wilt, look about thee on all sides, thou canst find nothing with which to make a return to Me for the benefits I have conferred on thee, unless what I, as Sovereign Lord, already fully possess. There is only one thing which I have left to thy free will, and which I can receive from thee, namely, the gratitude and thankfulness, the honor and love that thou owest Me for the countless blessings I have bestowed on thee; this is the only return that I expect. “Offer to God the sacrifice of praise, and pay thy vows to the most High. The sacrifice of praise shall glorify Me.”<sup>3</sup> That alone will be a sufficient return for all My benefits. “And now Israel,” says the Lord elsewhere, “what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but that thou fear the Lord thy God, and walk in His ways and love Him, and serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and keep the commandments of the Lord,” and that too, “that it may be well with thee.”<sup>4</sup> Ungrateful man, who either refuse to acknowledge the benefits you have received from God, or forget them, or even return evil for them, see how you take from God by your ingratitude the tribute of honor and praise which is due to Him for so many reasons, and which is the only one He expects!

And from this, too, you can have a clearer idea of the hideous deformity and injustice of the vice to which you are subject; inasmuch as you refuse to make to God that return which you could make Him so easily at any moment, and which depends on your own free will. In the Old Law God forbade fish to be offered as a sacrifice to Him. What was the reason of that, my dear brethren? Are there not good fish which have a delicate flavor? There are, says Abulensis, but they cannot be caught without trouble; they live in the depths of the waters where no one can see them; they have their hiding-places under the banks

The ungrateful man acts odiously, because God does not require anything difficult from him.

<sup>1</sup> Si esuriero, non dicam tibi: Numquid manducabo carnes taurorum? aut sanguinem hircorum potabo? Cognovi omnia volatilia cœli. --Ps. xlix. 11-13.

<sup>2</sup> Pulchritudo agri mecum est.—Ibid. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Immola Deo sacrificium laudis, et redde Altissimo vota tua. Sacrificium laudis honorificabit me.—Ibid. 14, 23.

<sup>4</sup> Et nunc Israel, quid Dominus Deus tuus petita te, nisi ut timeas Dominum Deum tuum, et ambules in viis ejus, et diligas eum, ac servias Domino Deo tuo in toto corde tuo, et in tota anima tua: custodiasque mandata Domini, ut bene sit tibi?—Deut. x. 12-13.

of rivers and among reeds, in which they can easily conceal themselves, so as not to be caught; and therefore God did not wish to have them offered to Him in sacrifice, because He requires no gift from us mortals, unless one that is always at the disposal of our free will, so that we can offer it to Him with little trouble. For the same reason too, He would not accept wild animals in sacrifice, because it takes some trouble to hunt them. All He required was what people had at hand every day, such as oxen, sheep, goats and other domestic animals. He would accept no birds but doves, because they were tame and easily caught. And now in the New Law God has abolished all those sacrifices among Christians, because it would be too difficult for the poor to provide them; and He is perfectly satisfied to receive from us, as a return for the benefits He has conferred on us, what we can give Him without the least difficulty, namely, our grateful acknowledgment of His goodness. "For if the will be forward," says St. Paul to the Corinthians, "it is accepted according to that which a man hath, not according to that which he hath not."<sup>1</sup>

But a very easy thing, which man nevertheless refuses.

O God of infinite goodness, how much easier it is to show gratitude to Thee, than to the most abject of mortals! How more is required to satisfy a mere mortal for some trifling service he has rendered, than to satisfy Thee for the countless benefits Thou bestowest on us at every moment! Let some one who has received a favor from a rich man, go and say to him, I thank you; and see whether he will be satisfied with that, if it is in the power of him who has received the favor, to make any other return. With what frowns and signs of ill-humor this expression of mere gratitude will be received! Oh no; in this case something else is expected; one must not come empty-handed; a thankful heart, and words to express one's gratitude are not at all sufficient. Let a rich man say to his lawyer, who has gained an important case for him, or to his doctor, who has cured him of a dangerous illness: Sir, I thank you, and will always be grateful to you for what you have done me; I will never forget you, and during my whole life I shall hold you in special honor and esteem. Oh, the other would answer, that is all very fine; but what is the good of your gratitude or esteem to me? It will not fill my purse, nor help me to support my

<sup>1</sup> Si enim voluntas prompta est, secundum id, quod habet, accepta est, non secundum id, quod non habet.—II. Cor. viii. 12.

family. I have used my skill and knowledge, and given myself a great deal of trouble for you; I have therefore earned a certain amount of money, to which I am justly entitled, and I should be very glad indeed if you paid me; you can then be as grateful to me as you will, and hold me in esteem if that is any satisfaction to you. But Thou, O God of goodness, from whom we have received every good thing we have, Thou art content with that which hardly any one in the world would consider a sufficient return for an act of kindness! "God does not want a reward," says St. Augustine, "but honor"<sup>1</sup> and gratitude. And not even that little can He get from us, for ingratitude robs Him of it.

Even inanimate creatures pay their daily tribute of praise and honor to their Creator; "The heavens show forth the glory of God," as the Prophet David says, "and the firmament declareth the work of His hands."<sup>2</sup> The three youths in the fiery furnace invite all creatures to unite with them in singing the praises of God: "All ye works of the Lord bless the Lord; praise and exalt Him above all for ever. Sun and moon, shower and dew, fire and heat, ice and snow, nights and days, mountains and hills, seas and rivers, all ye fowls of the air, all ye beasts and cattle, praise and exalt Him above all for ever. Oh, give thanks to the Lord because He is good; because His mercy endureth for ever." But how can those creatures praise and thank their God? They have neither reason nor understanding to recognize the benefits of God, nor a tongue to praise and thank Him. But the wonderful diversity of their natures, their beauty, their usefulness, their power and the different effects they produce, are all so many tongues with which they cry out to men: See how God loves you; for your use and benefit, for your wants or pleasures, we are all created; and thus they admonish us, although they are dumb creatures, that we owe a debt of gratitude, honor and praise to our Creator and sovereign Benefactor. And shall man, a reasoning being, be the only one who refuses to contribute his share in thanking and praising God?

He is put to shame by inanimate creatures.

Alas, such is the case. In former times, as Plutarch writes, there was a common saying to the effect that, "no one except Pyrrhias ever sacrificed an ox in testimony of his gratitude."<sup>3</sup>

A great number of men are ungrateful to God.

<sup>1</sup> Non premium postulat, sed honorem.—S. Aug. Serm. 219, de temp.

<sup>2</sup> Cœli enarrant gloriam Dei, et opera manuum ejus annuntiat firmamentum.—Ps. xviii,

1.

<sup>3</sup> Nemo bene merito bovem immolavit, præter Pyrrhiam.

The saying arose from the following circumstance. As Pyrrhias was one day walking along the sea-shore, some pirates happened to land; amongst the captives they had in their ship there was an old man, who begged Pyrrhias most piteously to ransom him from slavery. Pyrrhias yielded to his prayer, and having paid the pirates the sum they required, brought away the old man, and with him a barrel of pitch which he insisted on carrying off. When they came into the town, the old man told Pyrrhias that the barrel contained golden pitch, which he gave as a present to his liberator. Pyrrhias opened the barrel and found that in reality it was half full of gold. He was so delighted with this discovery, that he treated the old man ever after as a father, and even as a god, and actually sacrificed an ox in his honor. From that arose the saying. Could not the same be said of us, my dear brethren? Is it not true that countless numbers of men are to be found nowadays who are utterly ungrateful to God, and hardly one in ten, or one in twenty can be found to return Him thanks properly for His goodness?

For they  
do not ac-  
knowledge  
His benefits.

For if it is ingratitude not to acknowledge one's benefactor, or the favors received from him; how many there are who are blessed with special gifts of the soul, such as a good understanding and memory, prudence and skill; of the body, such as health and strength, and beauty, and who have besides temporal blessings of fortune, such as riches; how many there are of that kind who never think that they owe all they have to God, and never dream of showing Him the gratitude they owe Him. Riches they look on as the fruit of their own labor, or as an inheritance they receive as a matter of course from their ancestors, or else they ascribe them to blind chance; the gifts of body and soul they consider only as objects of a vain self-complacency. Every thing they possess they use like swine feeding in the forest, which wander about all day eating all the acorns they can find, and when they are filled lie down to sleep without once looking up at the beneficent tree that furnished them with such abundance of food.

They forget  
them.

If it is ingratitude to forget the benefits one has received, oh, what bad memories we have in this particular! St. Peter Damian writes of the lynx, that it is such a forgetful animal, that while it is actually looking around, it forgets what is going on in its very presence. Such, I imagine, is the state of most men, when there is question of remembering the divine benefits. While

Pharao's butler was still in prison with Joseph who interpreted his dream, there was no end of his promises to speak to the king for him. But in spite of all his promises, as soon as he was set at liberty, he forgot all about Joseph who had to languish in prison for some years longer. "But the chief butler," says the Sacred Scripture, "when things prospered with him, forgot his interpreter."<sup>1</sup> As long as we have the gifts of God directly before our eyes, that is, while we are actually receiving them from His hand, then we thank Him, if we have so much gratitude left; but hardly have we turned our backs and enjoyed what was given us, than we completely forget our Benefactor. And that is what the Lord complains of by the Wise Ecclesiasticus: "Till they receive, they kiss the hands of the lender, and in promises they humble their voice."<sup>2</sup> Hardly have they got what they desired, than they are like the ungrateful people that God complains of; "They forget His benefits, and His wonders that He had showed them."<sup>3</sup> How many there are who, occupied with temporal cares the whole week, hardly think of God, although they are in need of the benefit of the divine help in the very midst of their work? How many Christians would we find, if we were to examine them, who think of returning thanks to God for the many benefits they have received from Him, even once in the day before retiring to rest? Hardly one in ten, or fifty, or even a hundred.

Finally, if it is ingratitude, and the worst kind of it, to return evil for good, oh how many there are who act like that thankless bird, of which Aldrovandus writes! Henry VIII., king of England, had a parrot which was very clever at talking. One day the bird with its cage fell out of the window into the Thames; when it saw itself in danger of being drowned, it cried out as loud as it could, "a boat, a boat; twenty pounds sterling for a boat." A waterman who was near, heard the cry, and thinking that he had a good chance of making some money, sprang into his boat, saved the parrot from drowning, and brought it to the king, whom he asked for the promised reward. Certainly, said the king; but let us first hear the bird say how much it promised. The man was full of joy, and kept repeating to him-

And return  
evil for  
them.

<sup>1</sup> Et tamen succedentibus prosperis, præpositus pincernarum oblitus est interpretis sui.—Gen. xl. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Donec accipiant, osculantur manus dantis, et in promissionibus humiliant vocem suam.—Ecc. xxix. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Obliti sunt benefactorum ejus, et mirabillum ejus, quæ ostendit eis.—Ps. lxxvii. 11.

self, "twenty pounds sterling, twenty pounds sterling;" but the parrot only stared at him, and at length cried out, "give the rascal a hundred blows of a stick;" such was its gratitude to the man who had preserved its life. Have we not reason to be angry with such a thankless bird, my dear brethren? And yet it had not reason, and could only repeat what it had heard from others. But we have certainly reason enough to be angry with ourselves. Have not many of us Christians acted far more ungratefully to God, since, after having been redeemed from eternal death, and preserved so long in life, we are not ashamed to offend and insult such a good God by sins of all kinds, instead of returning Him thanks? And how many of us can say that we are free from this abominable ingratitude? Who can say with truth, I have never offended by a single mortal sin, the good God from whom I have received every good that I possess?

And even after the great benefit of having their sins forgiven.

And would that we always could say with truth: I have offended my God by sin, and been ungrateful to Him; I have returned Him evil for good; but I am heartily sorry for it, and will never do so again! St. Thomas asks which of the two has the greater reason to be thankful to God: he who has never committed a mortal sin, and by a special grace been enabled to preserve his baptismal innocence, or he who, having committed mortal sin, has received the grace to repent and thus to save his soul from hell? What do you think of the matter, my dear brethren? Is it not a precious grace, that of preserving one's baptismal innocence, so that one has never lost Heaven, nor made an enemy of God? Certainly, answers the holy Doctor, this grace is in itself the more excellent and rare, and is more to be desired, than the grace of repentance; still, since this latter grace is less due to him who has offended God grievously, and since God has less reason for giving such a grace to His enemy, whom He could at once and without further delay, hurl into the eternal fires of hell; the converted sinner has more reason to thank God, than the innocent man who never deserved hell. Just as a malefactor, who after having been condemned to death, is pardoned by his prince, is certainly under a greater obligation to the latter than one who was publicly declared by him to be innocent.

They offend God by fresh sins.

Ah God of goodness, how few of us there are who really acknowledge that incomparable benefit as we ought! Has not our dear Saviour, Jesus Christ, far more reason to make of His ungrateful Christians the complaint He made of the nine lepers,

who did not return to thank Him after He had cured them? “Were not ten made clean; and where are the nine?” Is not absolution given in the holy Sacrament of Penance to hundreds of thousands of sinners, whose immortal souls were infected with a deadly leprosy? And amongst that great number there are hardly a few who prove their gratitude as they ought, for such a benefit; hardly a few who endeavor to continue in Thy grace and friendship by serving Thee zealously; hardly a few who do not return to their former sins and vices! Thy heart overflows with mercy and compassion when Thou seest unhappy souls bound in the slavery of the devil; Thou openest their eyes by the light of Thy grace, and softenest their hearts by sorrow and repentance for their past sins; Thou loosenest the bands of their tongues and sayest to them, “Go, show yourselves to the priests,” and make an open confession to them of the bad state of your consciences, and they will cleanse you from the foul leprosy of sin. They did as Thou hast commanded, and Thou hast admitted them to Thy Table, and fed them with Thy own Flesh and Blood; and that too, more than once. Yet after all these benefits, there is hardly one who makes a proper return to Thee. Where are the nine whom Thou hast made clean? Where are all the sinners whom Thou hast so often freed from hell? They are in the same state as before, in their former sins. They are as full as ever of pride and vanity, of avarice, usury and injustice, of abominable impurity, through which they seduce many immortal souls; of hatred and vindictiveness, of gluttony and drunkenness, of swearing, cursing, fault-finding and blasphemy; nay, they are worse than before. Such is their gratitude to Thee!

But, Thou wilt say, O Lord, let them go on; their intolerable ingratitude will soon exhaust My patience. “Thus saith the Lord God; Because thou hast forgotten Me, and cast Me off behind thy body,” along with the benefits I conferred on thee, “bear thou also thy wickedness;”<sup>1</sup> that is, thou shalt bear the punishment of thy wickedness. What punishment is that? We are told by the Prophet Osee: “I will not add any more to have mercy on the house of Israel, but I will utterly forget them.”<sup>2</sup> Hear, ungrateful Christian, for these words are said to you; I will not have mercy any more, but, since you thus shamefully

God will also forget and despise them.

<sup>1</sup> Hæc dicit Dominus Deus: Quid oblita es mei, et projecisti me post corpus tuum, tu quoque porta scelus tuum.—Ezech. xxiii. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Non addam ultra misereri domui Israel, sed oblivione obliviscar eorum.—Osee i. 6.

forget Me, I will allow you to drop out of My memory, and I will abandon you to your unbridled desires. O most terrible of all punishments, which brings with it eternal damnation!

Conclusion  
and exhortation  
to be grateful to  
God.

Ah, my dear brethren, let us not expose ourselves to that fearful threat, that terrible punishment, but without delay atone for whatever faults we have committed through ingratitude. If we have hitherto failed to acknowledge our sovereign Benefactor, as He deserves, let us henceforth show Him our gratitude whenever He sees fit to send us trials and crosses, by bearing them with patience and humility; and let us not forget that it serves us perfectly right to be so tried on account of our past ingratitude to so good a God. If we have hitherto forgotten the divine benefits, let not a day pass in future, on which we shall not remember them in order to return due thanks for them. The best time for this is the evening, during the examen of conscience, a practice that no Christian ought to omit before retiring to rest. Some say they can remember nothing when they try to think of their sins. If you have committed no sin that you can remember during the day, well and good; but even in that very circumstance you have reason enough for the greatest gratitude to God. Examine then this, and all the other countless benefits that He has bestowed on you, and you will find reason enough to thank Him, and also to feel a hearty sorrow for ever having offended such a generous God by deliberate sin. If we have hitherto made a bad return to God for His goodness to us, let us now make atonement by avoiding even the least wilful sin, by serving Him more zealously, by doing His will more exactly, and by loving Him more sincerely. Let no word proceed from our mouths, no work from our hands, no thought form itself in our minds without being directed by a supernatural intention to His honor and glory; so that, according to the exhortation of St. Paul, we may “offer the sacrifice of praise always to God.”<sup>1</sup> O God of goodness, give us the grace to do this, in addition to the countless benefits Thou hast already bestowed on us, the value of which we do not properly know, and for which we cannot sufficiently thank Thee! Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Offeramus hostiam laudis semper Deo.—Hebr. xiii. 15.

*Another Introduction to the same sermon for Easter Sunday.*

**Text.**

*Maria Magdalene, et Maria Jacobi et Salome emerunt aromata, ut venientes ungerent Jesum.*—Mark. xvi. 1.

“ Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought sweet spices, that coming they might anoint Jesus.”

So that no one but these three pious women determined to show the last honors to our dead Saviour, Jesus Christ, and to anoint His sacred Body in the sepulchre. And yet, I cannot help thinking, were there not many people in the city of Jerusalem on whom our Lord had conferred great benefits during His life? Did none of them go to the sepulchre? No; they had already forgotten His benefits: in fact many of them were amongst those who cried out to Pilate, “ Crucify him, crucify him.” But had none of His Apostles, whom He had made choice of before all the others, and taught for three years, courage or good will enough to visit His grave? Not one. They hid themselves for fear of the Jews, and already had begun to doubt of the divinity of Christ. With reason might our Lord have complained on this occasion, as He did when He cured the ten lepers and only one of them returned to thank Him: “ There is no one found to return and give glory to God, but this stranger.”<sup>1</sup> All my friends and acquaintances have abandoned Me; there is no one to pay Me the last honors but those three women. That very complaint, my dear brethren, was a common one at all times, and in our own days too, it is common enough; namely, that gratitude for benefits received is such a rare thing in the world. Sir Thomas More used to say, etc.—*continues as before.*

<sup>1</sup> Non est inventus, qui rediret, et daret gloriam Deo, nisi hic alienigena.—Luke xvii. 18.

## THIRTY-NINTH SERMON.

## ON THE ODISIOUS INGRATITUDE OF THOSE WHO ARE UNDER MOST OBLIGATIONS TO GOD.

## Subject.

Those who are under most obligations to God are generally speaking, the most ungrateful to Him. How abominable their conduct is.—*Preached on Easter Tuesday.*

## Text.

*Nullam causam mortis invenientes in eo, petierunt a Pilato, ut interficerent eum.*—Acts. xiii. 28.

“And finding no cause of death in him, they desired of Pilate that they might kill him.”

## Introduction.

Who were those cruel men who insisted on Pilate condemning our Lord to death, although they knew Him to be innocent? As we read in to-day's Epistle according to St. Paul, who reproaches the Jews with their ingratitude and wickedness, it was “they that inhabited Jerusalem,” who were guilty of that crime; that is to say, they whose sick were healed, whose blind were made to see, whose lame were made to walk by the loving Saviour; they through whose city He passed daily doing good. These I say, had neither peace nor rest, until they put their greatest Benefactor to death. And so it is in the world, my dear brethren; God is continually showering down benefits on us mortals; He bestows them on us most lavishly; but what little gratitude we show Him for them; as I complained in my last sermon when I spoke of the vice of ingratitude which is so hateful to God and yet so common. And what is still worse, if we wish to know what real ingratitude is like, we must seek it amongst those who, like the inhabitants of Jerusalem, are favored more than others by the divine liberality; as I shall now show.

## Plan of Discourse.

*Those who are under most obligations to God, are generally speaking, the most ungrateful to Him; how abominable their conduct! Such is the whole subject of to-day's sermon; the object of it is, to teach us the deformity of this sin, and how we ought to be always grateful to God for the benefits He daily bestows on us.*

Give us Thy light and grace thereto, O God, through the intercession of Mary and the holy angels guardian.

It is hard to believe what Herodotus writes of a certain people, who have such a hatred of the sun, that when they see him rise in the morning, they gnash their teeth at him, assail him with all kinds of abuse and curses, and even throw stones and shoot arrows at him to drive him away. What foolish people they are, to be sure! If they were the people who live where the sun is very sparing of his rays, so that they seem to be only step-children of Heaven, they enjoy so little light, or if they dwelt in the extreme north, where the night lasts for half the year, their madness would find some excuse. But how do those latter act in reality? The less they enjoy of the benefits of the sunshine, the more thankful they are for it; for when their long night is at an end, they go out singing and playing musical instruments to welcome the sun at his rising.

There are people in the world who hate the sun.

Do you wish to know who are they who hate the sun so bitterly? They are the people who enjoy most of his benefits, and whose mountains and plains are filled with gold, silver and precious stones through the sun's beneficent action; namely, the Atlantes. What a barbarous and savage people they must be! Yet since they are barbarians, there is some excuse for their mad hatred of an inanimate creature such as the sun.

And they are those who derive most benefit from him.

Is it possible, my dear brethren, that refined and civilized people can act in the same way towards their God of infinite goodness? Alas yes, says Lactantius; "then especially do men forget God when they enjoy His benefits in greater abundance, and are consequently under a greater obligation of honoring Him." The holy Pope, St. Gregory, confirms this when he says: "they are most violent in their rebellion against God, who are most enriched beyond their merits by His liberality." But, O great Saint, if I had not thy authority for that, should I not look on it as a mere invention? Yet, alas, when I read the Sacred Scripture, and see how men were wont to act in every age of the world, I must confess that what thou sayest is the truth, and that there are none who hate God so much as those to whom He has been most generous.

So do many people act towards God; they are the most ungrateful who have received the greatest benefits from Him.

In the Book of Deuteronomy we find examples of that kind of ingratitude amongst the Israelites, of whom their leader, Moses,

The Israelites are an example of that.

<sup>1</sup> Tum maxime Deus ex memoria hominum labitur cum beneficiis ejus fruentes honorem dare divinæ indulgentiæ debent.

<sup>2</sup> Magis contra Deum elevantur, qui magis ab ejus largitate contra meritum ditantur.

says, after enumerating all the benefits that God had conferred on them; "The beloved grew fat, and kicked; he grew fat, and thick and gross, he forsook God who made him, and departed from God, his Saviour."<sup>1</sup> Mark the word, "beloved" my dear brethren; for thereby the Scripture gives us to understand that the Israelites had received special favors from God; He chose them from among all the nations and peoples of the world, and called them in a special manner His own people, the people consecrated to Him; He protected them in quite an extraordinary manner from all their enemies; He sent His angels from Heaven to accompany them; He caused the stormy sea to divide so as to leave them a dry passage; He made the heavens to rain down bread and other food for them; He caused water to flow from the hard rock to quench their thirst; in a word, God was so generous to His people, that the Scripture says they grew fat, and thick, and gross. But see what odious ingratitude they were guilty of, "the beloved kicked, he forsook God who made him," "they provoked Him by strange gods, and stirred Him up to anger with their abominations;"<sup>2</sup> "they sacrificed to devils and not to God, to gods whom they knew not; they angered Me with their vanities."<sup>3</sup>

So are Saul,  
Solomon and  
Jeroboam.

Did men act any better later on? Saul, who otherwise had the name of being the best man in the whole country, as the Scripture says, was hardly raised above the original obscurity of his condition to the dignity of first king of Israel, when he began to grow disobedient and obstinate towards God, who was so good to him. Solomon, whom God had blessed with wisdom, honors, riches, and pleasures above all the kings and princes of earth, so that no one ever was or will be so highly gifted, abandoned the true God, built temples and altars to the false gods of his concubines, and bent the knee to them. Consider the example of Jeroboam; he was one of the subjects and servants of King Solomon and could never have dreamt of being his successor on the throne, yet God, through special goodness to him, promised him by the Prophet Ahias, to make him king of the ten tribes of Israel, and besides that, that the sceptre would never pass out of his family, that He would be his Adviser in all

<sup>1</sup> *Incrassatus est dilectus, et recalcitavit: incrassatus, impinguatus, dilatatus, dereliquit Deum factorem suum, et recessit a Deo salutario suo.—Deut. xxxii. 15.*

<sup>2</sup> *Provocaverunt eum in diis alienis, et in abominationibus ad iracundiam concitaverunt.—Ibid. 16.*

<sup>3</sup> *Immolaverunt dæmonibus, et non Deo. diis, quos ignorabant; irritaverunt in vanitatibus suis.—Ibid. 17, 21.*

doubts, his Helper in difficulties, his Protector in dangers ; “and thou shalt reign over all that thy soul desireth,”’ said God to him, provided only thou remain faithful to Me. Who would not think that Jeroboam, who was thus so wonderfully exalted and favored by God, would prove a model of piety, devotion and gratitude towards God ? And yet, who would believe it, if the infallible word of God did not assure us of it ? hardly was he placed on the throne, when he publicly declared himself a sworn enemy of God, forbade his people under pain of death to go to the temple of Jerusalem to offer sacrifice to the true God, and set up two golden calves, which he commanded the people to adore ; “And finding out a device, he made two golden calves, and said to them : Go ye up no more to Jerusalem ; Behold thy God O Israel, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt.”<sup>2</sup> Such a determined enemy of God did Jeroboam become, that, to his perpetual infamy, the Holy Scriptures say of the godless kings who came after him ; “and he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nabit, and in his sins wherewith he made Israel to sin.”<sup>3</sup> And he remained an enemy of God to the end of his life ; “After these words Jeroboam came not back from his most wicked way ;<sup>4</sup> but became worse and worse. Oh how true is the saying of St. Gregory, “they are most violent in their rebellion against God, who are most enriched beyond their merits by His liberality !”

But why should I talk so much of the ingratitude of others, when our own is enough to make us blush for shame ? Let us consider, my dear brethren, what goes on in the Catholic world nowadays. Those who are favored above others by health and strength, by mental endowments, prudence and discretion, by corporal beauty and other evidences of the generosity of their Creator ; those who are placed in high positions, so that others must look up to and serve them respectfully ; those who are provided with magnificent houses, and large estates, whose business is so blessed by God, that it brings in more and more every year ; those who can lead a comfortable, easy life, because they have no need to work for their support, and who can eat and drink of the best every day ; in a word, all those who are abundantly

Experience shows of Christians nowadays, that they who have received most from God, are most careless in His service.

<sup>1</sup> Et regnabis super omnia, quæ desiderat anima tua.—III. Kings xl. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Et excogitato consilio fecit duos vitulos aureos, et dixit eis : Nolite ultra ascendere in Jerusalem : ecce dil tui, Israel : qui te eduxerunt de terra Egypti.—Ibid. xii. 26.

<sup>3</sup> Ambulavitque in omni via Jeroboam filii Nabat, et in peccatis ejus, quibus peccare fecerat Israel.—Ibid. xvi. 26.

<sup>4</sup> Post verba hæc non est reversus Jeroboam de via sua pessima.—Ibid. xiii. 33.

endowed with the gifts of Providence, in preference to so many poor, oppressed and lowly people, how do they act towards God? Are they not obliged to be more grateful to Him than the others? Grateful indeed! If there are a few of them who are models of piety and devotion, are not the most of those favorites, so to speak, of God, they who are most forgetful of Him, who are ashamed to show Him proper honor in the church, or in the street, when the Blessed Sacrament is carried past, who are seldom to be seen approaching the sacraments, who rarely join in public devotions, or hear a sermon, who only mock at and make fun of the Gospel truths, and who regulate their conduct according to the vain customs and manners of the perverse world?

They even  
abuse His  
benefits to  
offend Him.

Nay, do not many of them act like the ungrateful Eribatus, who having received an immense sum of money from King Croesus as a present, used it to hire a number of soldiers to rebel against his generous sovereign? Do they not act in the same way? They use the special benefits which God has conferred on them as weapons wherewith to wage war against God all the more daringly, and to transgress His laws all the more boldly. The precious time, which is given to them that they may have more leisure for the service of God, in preference to others who have to work hard for their daily bread, they squander away in sleep, idleness, useless talk, gaming and amusements, without any profit to their souls; they are not satisfied with the beauty that nature has given them, but they must try to enhance it by artificial means, by painting their faces, and by all sorts of luxury, extravagance, and even scandalous indecency in dress, and thus they inflame the impure passions of others; they abuse their mental endowments to cheat and commit injustice, their high position to indulge their pride, and to contemn and oppress others; they spend in gluttony and drunkenness the superfluous wealth that the common Father of all has given them that they may help the poor, and feed and clothe them; they neglect the children which God has entrusted to them, that they may train them up in the Christian virtues, and bring them up with the greatest care for their last end in the fear and love of God; they teach those poor children all manner of worldly vanity, or allow them to go into the danger of sin, whereas they should carefully keep them, especially the daughters, at home; they permit them to go into company which endangers their innocence, and thus they lead them on to evil, turn them away from God, and deliver them over to the devil. Can we not say of them therefore,

that, "they are most violent in their rebellion against God, who are most enriched beyond their merits by His liberality?"

And how do we act, my dear brethren, when the good God averts from us some public calamity, so that we have reason to think that all danger is past, as far as we are concerned; or when He gives us a fruitful year, so that our vineyards are filled with grapes, our fields with corn, our trees with fruit? Do we thank God sincerely for His goodness, visit the church more frequently, attend devotions and hear sermons more zealously, spend more time in prayer, show more modesty and humility in our outward demeanor, have a more heartfelt sorrow for our past sins, guard more carefully against future sin and its occasions, amend unbecoming abuses and grow more and more in the love of God? Is that the way we act? Certainly, that is what the divine liberality deserves from us. But is not our conduct, generally speaking, the very contrary of that? Do we not imitate the rich man in the Gospel of St. Luke, who enlarged his barns, and said to himself in his arrogance, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thy rest, eat, drink, and make good cheer"?<sup>1</sup> In the same way, when the evil is averted, and we have received many benefits from the divine goodness, we cry out: God be praised that danger is over, we have enough to eat once more. And we begin with the gluttony and drunkenness, the cursing and swearing, the pride and vanity just as bad as ever. Is this not the case, my dear brethren? Is not a rich harvest the time at which most excesses are committed? Has not experience proved it often enough? And, alas, is it not true that in those troublous times, with wars and their attendant miseries at our doors, when poor people, who feel most keenly the pressure of the hard times, have to bewail with bitter tears their poverty and distress; is it not true that they who, through God's goodness, are least exposed to suffer from the general distress, indulge in greater luxury and foppery, and allow themselves greater liberty on that account; as if it were lawful and becoming for them to still further excite the divine anger against the whole city and country by their wanton excesses? I wish I could speak plainer, but I dare not. I can only wonder how such a thing is possible. See, that is the gratitude we show to God when we begin to enjoy the benefits that we owe to His liberality. Is it any wonder that He so often

In fruitful years we generally show the greatest ingratitude to God.

<sup>1</sup> Anima, habes multa bona posita in annos plurimos: requiesce, comede, bibe, epulare.— Luke xii. 19.

afflicts us in His just anger? Have we any reason to complain of those afflictions, when we make use of the benefits only as a means of attacking and offending the benefactor?

What a  
gross injus-  
tice that is.

What odious and fearful ingratitude that is! The wildest barbarian among the most savage people on earth would be ashamed to act in that way towards his fellow-man. We are justly indignant at the conduct of Joseph's brothers, who determined in their wicked councils to put their innocent brother to death: "Behold the dreamer cometh. Come let us kill him;"<sup>1</sup> and that too, at the very time when he was bringing them a basket full of provisions. We are justly indignant at the ingratitude of King Saul, who tried to pierce David with his lance, at the very moment when the latter, after having slain the giant Goliath and conquered Saul's enemies, was playing the harp to free him from the spirit of madness. We are horror-struck at the cruel ingratitude of the emperor Basil, who caused one of his most trusty courtiers to be beheaded on the market-place, because the latter had once saved his life while out hunting at the risk of his own, and the proud emperor was ashamed to owe his life to one of his own subjects. What an ungrateful wretch he must have been! we think. Ah, Christians, why are we not angry and displeased at our own unheard-of ingratitude to God, whose countless benefits we have so often abused to despise Him and to offend Him all the more wantonly, and whom we put to death again, as far as we can, by our repeated sins?

Of which  
God com-  
plains in  
the old Tes-  
tament.

"Hear O ye heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord hath spoken;"<sup>2</sup> such is the bitter complaint that God makes by the Prophet Isaias; although you cannot hear; for reasoning men refuse to understand it. What then? "I have brought up children, and exalted them; but they have despised Me."<sup>3</sup> I, the common Father of all, have shown them a special love in preference to all people; but they have despised Me. "My friends and My neighbors have drawn near and stood against Me. And they that were near Me, stood afar off."<sup>4</sup> Such is the complaint that God makes by the Psalmist. But how can that be, asks St Augustine. How can the same people be near Thee O Lord, and far off at the same time? Yet such is the

<sup>1</sup> Ecce somniator venit. Venite, occidamus eum.—Gen. xxxvii. 19-20.

<sup>2</sup> Audite, coeli, et auribus percipite, terra, quoniam Dominus locutus est.—Isa. i. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Filios enutrivit et exaltavi: ipsi autem spreverunt me.—Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Amici mei, et proximi mei adversum me appropinquaverunt, et steterunt.—Ps. xxxvii. 12.

case with the ungrateful. Those whom I approach with My benefits, retreat from Me; they look at Me only from a distance, as if they did not know Me; those on whom I daily bestow temporal benefits in abundance, keep away from Me, from My Church, from My altar, from the Table I have prepared for them, from the food of their souls, from My divine word. Hear how bitterly God complains of them by the Prophet Job: "Who said to God: Depart from us; and looked upon the Almighty as if He could do nothing."<sup>1</sup> Go away from us; we know Thee not; we have nothing to do with Thee. And when did they say that? Was it when God was chastising them; when He was taking away their dear friends by a premature death; when He was visiting them with a severe illness; when He was afflicting them with poverty, misfortunes and trials of all kinds? No, indeed; for at such times they sought to appease the anger of their God, and to regain His friendship. And when then? "Whereas He had filled their houses with good things;"<sup>2</sup> when He was filling their cellars with wine, their granaries with corn, their chests with money; when He was providing them with abundant yearly revenues and bestowing all sorts of benefits on them, then they said to Him, "Depart from us;" then they despised Him, and would not serve Him. One hand they stretched out to receive His gifts, and with the other they drove Him off. "They looked upon the Almighty as if He could do nothing."

"Whereas he had filled their house with good things;" in these words the Holy Ghost gives us to understand how odious to Him is the vice of ingratitude; and could He not justly complain in the same terms of many Christians nowadays? What odious ingratitude! If I had left that woman in her former condition in which she was just able to support herself decently, how humble, modest, pious and zealous in My service she would now be. But now that I have enabled her to marry above her condition so that she can live in opulence, she has forgotten Me; she has become proud, vain and haughty; because I have filled her house with good things, she no longer knows Me. While that man was living in a small house, and working hard to support himself and his family, he was very generous to the poor, he heard Mass every day, he was often at morning devotions, he went to Confession and Communion every fortnight, he was one

He can make the same complaint of many Christians.

<sup>1</sup> Qui dicebant Deo: Recede a nobis: et quasi nihil posset facere Omnipotens, aestimabant eum.—Job xxii. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Cum ille impleisset domos eorum bonis.—Ibid. 18.

of the first to come to sermons; his children were brought up in a Christian manner, and trained to virtue and the fear of God. But when I filled his house with good things, when I made his employment more profitable, his business more lucrative, when I raised him to a higher position and enriched him, then it was that he changed altogether; now he knows no more poor people, they are too low for him; he sleeps so long in the morning that he cannot go to Mass; he never goes to the sermon on Sundays and holy-days; he is never to be seen at morning devotions; there is an end to his frequent Confessions and Communions; his wife and children must conform to the usages of the perverse world. If I had allowed that man to lose that important lawsuit, if I had prevented that other from inheriting that property, if I had not freed a third from his sickness and delicacy, I should still be their dear friend; but now that I have given them what they so long sought for and desired, when I certainly should have reason to hope that they would be still more zealous in My service, they despise Me, and turn their backs on Me. "They said to God: Depart from us; whereas He had filled their houses with good things." Christians, what abominable ingratitude that is! To forget God, and be more slothful in His service, more careless of obeying Him, and more reckless in offending Him, just because He shows greater generosity!

Who are  
put to  
shame by  
dumb  
brutes.

"I fear, ah, I fear very much," says the learned Pacciuchelli, in his Doctrinal Exposition of the Book of Jonas, to an ungrateful man of this kind; "I fear that when you are lying on your death-bed, the devil will drive your dog into your room, and, when the dog begins to howl and to announce your approaching death, the demon will cry out still louder in your ear: Ungrateful wretch, does not this dumb brute put you to shame? How faithfully has he not served you for the crust of bread and the bone you threw to him? And how have you acted towards God, who has so generously bestowed on you all that you have? The more kindly you treated your dog, the more eager he was in caressing you and testifying his willingness to serve you. But the more generous God has been to you, the more slothful you became in His service; and the more you refused to obey Him through pride and obstinacy. Unhappy wretch, what will become of you now? Where will you go to? How can you dare appear before the face of your offended Judge, who will point to the benefits He has bestowed on you, and let them pronounce your sentence."

I hope, my dear brethren, that none of us will have to dread such a fearful reproof. Let us, then, never be guilty of such black ingratitude, as to misuse, as a means of offending Him, the good things that God gives us; but let us rather look on them as an additional incentive to gratitude and love for such a generous Benefactor. Represent often to yourselves the chaste Joseph when he was steward in Potiphar's house, and was tempted by the wicked wife of his master, to commit a grievous sin with her. How did the pious youth act? He showed her at once that what she required of him was utterly impossible, and that she should put the thought of it out of her head. Hear how modestly and impressively he spoke to her: "Behold my master hath delivered all things to me, and knoweth not what he hath in his own house; neither is there anything which is not in my power, or that he hath not delivered to me, but thee, who art his wife; how then can I do this wicked thing?" How can I commit this crime and sin against my master? How can I make such an evil return for his goodness to me? Must I insult and injure him who has raised me to such an honorable position, and placed me over all he has? How could that be possible? If I were guilty of such a crime, I should not deserve the name of man; I should be worse than a wild beast that has not reason. Not all the thunderbolts of Heaven would be enough to punish such black ingratitude as it deserves; not all the water of the sea could wash out such a crime. No; you are my mistress, and I know that a servant must be always ready to obey his superiors; but to sin against my master, and do such an abominable thing, how could it be possible? Mark, my dear brethren, the logical conclusion that Joseph draws; he first of all recounts the benefits he received from his master, and then concludes: therefore it is impossible for me to do him this wrong. He does not say, it is not lawful, or I ought not to do it; but, how can I do it? It is clearly impossible.

Conclusion and resolution often to remember God's goodness, like the Patriarch Joseph.

So should we also think in all dangerous occasions and temptations to sin, especially if God has blessed us with a large share of temporal goods or natural gifts; we should think, if we have any gratitude left, my Lord and my God has been very liberal to me in preference to so many hundreds and thousands of other people; He has given me abundant means, while others have

And never to offend God.

<sup>1</sup> Ecce dominus meus, omnibus mihi traditis, ignorat quid habeat in domo sua: nec quidquam est quod non in mea sit potestate, vel non tradiderit mihi, præter te, quæ uxor ejus es: quomodo ergo possum hoc malum facere.—Gen. xxxix. 8-9.

great difficulty in finding their daily bread ; He has raised me above the common people, and given me a high position, etc. How, then, could I be so ungrateful as to offend my good God by sin ? How could I forget Him or be so slothful in His service ? How could I be so proud and self-conceited as to be ashamed to show Him publicly the devotion and reverence I owe Him ? How could I be so heartless and niggardly as to refuse to help my poor brethren and sisters whom He has recommended to me ? How could I have so little respect for the law of His holy and humble Gospel, as to become a servant and an imitator of the perverse world ? How could I be so dishonorable as to prefer the love of a creature or the momentary gratification of a sinful passion to my good God ? How could I be so sensual and so carnal as to squander on idleness and luxury, on extravagance in dress, on gluttony and drunkenness, the means with which He has so liberally endowed me ? In a word, how could I ever offend the good God by a grievous sin ?

But to serve  
Him all the  
more zeal-  
ously.

No ; I cannot do it, and let this be my unalterable resolution. Because Thou, my God, hast bestowed so many blessings on me in preference to others, and hast given me wealth and a high position, I will never offend Thee any more by a deliberate sin, I will be more faithful and zealous in Thy service, I will be more humble and modest in my outward demeanor, I will be more charitable to the poor and needy, I will be more regular in attending public devotions and hearing Thy word, I will lead a more temperate life and give edification to others, so that all may see that I am not one of those ungrateful men who repay their Benefactor by injuries, but rather one of those who take the goods Thou so liberally bestowest on them and use them only that they may by their means love Thee alone above all things. Amen.

*FORTIETH SERMON.*

**ON INGRATITUDE TOWARDS THE HOLY GUARDIAN ANGELS.**

**Subject.**

He is an ungrateful man who forgets his guardian angel. 2. Still more ungrateful is he who grieves his guardian angel.—*For the feast of the guardian angels, or the feast of St. Michael.*

**Text.**

*Angeli eorum in cælis semper vident faciem Patris mei.*—*Matth. xviii. 10.*

“Their angels in Heaven always see the face of my Father.”

**Introduction.**

This text, my dear brethren, is already introduction enough to my sermon, and no doubt you understand from it what I am going to speak of, so that I need not spend any more time on the introduction. “Their angels,” that is, our holy guardian angels, the bare mention of whose name is in itself an exhortation to us to pay them all honor, gratitude and love. Certainly he is an ungrateful man who forgets his guardian angel; and still more ungrateful is he who grieves his guardian angel. Yet I am afraid that there are many such people. I intend speaking of them to-day, and I say,

**Plan of Discourse.**

*He is an ungrateful man who forgets his guardian angel; the first part. Still more ungrateful is he who grieves his guardian angel; the second part.*

O holy angels, you, as I must acknowledge, have suggested the words to my mind and to my pen; make them now so impressive, that they may move my heart and the hearts of all, to bewail our ingratitude to you, and henceforth to show you the greatest gratitude, honor and love. Help us thereto by thy intercession, O Mary, Queen of angels.

He is a thankless, ungrateful child who forgets his own mother to whom he owes more reverence, love and gratitude than to any one else on earth. Therefore the old Tobias, when he thought he was about to die, gave this impressive exhortation to his son: “Thou shalt honor thy mother all the days of her life; for thou

It is a wicked child who forgets his mother, from whom he has re-

celved so  
many  
benefits.

must be mindful what and how great perils she suffered for thee.”<sup>1</sup> And in fact, what is there that a mother does not do and suffer for her child, from the moment of his birth, until he grows up to manhood? For his sake she undergoes all the pains and anguish of child-bed; during the first years of his life she carries him about on her arm the whole day; she must often interrupt her sleep during the night; she must feed him, and often mortify herself for his sake that his health may not suffer; she is often uneasy and anxious lest some misfortune should happen to him; she sheds bitter tears if he is suffering; great is her trouble if he is sickly and delicate; for many years she must labor to feed and clothe him decently, and she must live with the greatest economy, so as to be able to leave him something after her death; in a word: that the child lives, is brought up, and attains a state in life, is due under God to no one but his father and mother. Wicked, ungrateful and godless children you are, if you forget all that your mother has done for you, and do not love and honor her as well as you can; but how much more wicked you are, if you afflict and grieve her, as the Scripture says, “The eye that despiseth the labor of his mother, let the ravens of the brooks pick it out.”<sup>2</sup>

No motherly  
love can be  
compared  
with the  
love and  
care the  
guardian  
angels take  
of their  
charges.

But why do I dwell so long on this? O parents, fathers and mothers, no matter how great is your love for your children and your care for their welfare, they are not near so great as the love and care that the holy guardian angels have for their charges. Your chief anxiety for your children is, generally speaking, during their childhood, while they are still unable to look after themselves; but when they are settled in life, your care is at an end, and, if they are good children, you have your joy and consolation in them. The angels never lay aside their motherly vigilance during the whole life of their charges; from the first moment of life to the last breath, their watchfulness, care and protection are unceasing. “In their hands they shall bear thee up; lest thou dash thy foot against a stone;”<sup>3</sup> says the Lord of the angels whom He gives to us as guardians; just as mothers carry about their children. Mothers, in spite of your watchfulness, you have not eyes enough to see every step of your children, nor feet enough to accompany them everywhere they go, nor hands enough

<sup>1</sup> *Honorem habebis matri suæ omnibus diebus vitæ ejus : memorem enim esse debes, quæ et quanta pericula passa sit propter te.*—Tob. iv. 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Oculum, qui despicit partum matris suæ, effodiant eum corvi de torrentibus.*—Prov. xxx. 17.

<sup>3</sup> *In manibus portabunt te, ne forte offendas ad lapidem pedem tuum.*—Ps. xl. 12.

to help them in all circumstances. But, God “nath given his angels charge over thee; to keep thee in all thy ways;”<sup>1</sup> in all places, at all times, at home and in the street, by day and by night, sleeping and waking, they must watch over you. If the mother were to forget her child, they could with truth say in the words of the Prophet: “Yet will not I forget thee.”<sup>2</sup> If your mother has to go out, and leave you alone in your cradle, yet I am there to look after you; if you are out and your mother at home, I am your faithful companion who will never leave you; when your mother is asleep, I am awake and watching you. Thus do the holy angels guard us in all our ways.

Your care, O mothers, is directed mostly to the welfare of the mortal body, and to the temporal prosperity of your children; your chief anxiety is to see that they are well fed and clothed, well brought up, and well provided for in worldly matters; and oftentimes your care in this regard is so inordinate, that you cause the eternal ruin of their immortal souls, by leaving them unjustly acquired wealth, by omitting to instruct them in and bring them up to virtue, by not exhorting and punishing them and keeping them away from evil; by teaching them vanity and encouraging them to follow the frivolous customs and maxims of the luxurious world, and by giving them bad example; so that instead of thanking you, they will one day curse you in a miserable eternity. The angels, besides taking care of your children’s bodily welfare, and protecting them from harm, are chiefly concerned about the salvation of their immortal souls. To this, as to the most important end, are directed all the holy inspirations of those guardian spirits, all the movements they give the heart, all the salutary fear they inspire the conscience with in the imminent danger of sin, all they do to avert the occasions of sin, all their prayers and intercession with God; in a word, to this end is directed all their care and trouble.

And that too, for the salvation of their souls.

No matter how watchful you are over your children, O mothers, you are not able to protect them against the attacks of the devil and the evil designs of sorcerers and dealers in witchcraft. Oh, if it were not for the holy angels, how many children would be bewitched! Witches have often confessed that, instigated by their master the devil, they have for years looked out for an opportunity of injuring a certain child by their hellish

They protect them against the devil and his followers.

<sup>1</sup> Angelis suis mandavit de te, ut custodiant te in omnibus viis tuis.—Ps. xi. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Ego tamen non obliviscar tui.—Isa. xlix. 15.

They help  
them  
in the hour  
of death.

arts; but each time they endeavored to put their design into execution, they were defeated by the guardian angel of the child.

Finally, O mothers, no matter how you help your children during their lives, by your careful training, salutary advice, holy exhortations, and by your money and temporal goods; still you cannot help them at that terrible moment when they are most in want of assistance, I mean, in the moment of death, when the soul is about to wing its flight into eternity. You can stand by your children's death-bed, give them the medicines prescribed, console them, smooth the pillows for them, and give way to bitter tears, thus distressing them more than ever in a moment which is so full of anxiety for them; all this you can do and nothing more. But can you drive off the temptations of the devil, who like a sleuth hound, watches every chance to fill the departing soul with despair by reminding it of its past sins; can you bring ease and peace to the troubled conscience, console the mind with heavenly comfort, and lead and accompany the departing soul into a happy eternity? Can you do that? No; not even your motherly affection can enable you to do that. This is a moment in which a far more powerful motherly care is needed; namely, that of the guardian angel, who, since a whole eternity depends on the last moment, uses his utmost endeavors to prevent his dear charge from being lost, unless the latter through malice frustrates his benevolent intentions. In a word, we must say of our guardian angels what the young Tobias said to his father of the benefits he received from the companion of his journey, the angel Raphael; "We are filled with all good things through him. What can we give him sufficient for these things."<sup>1</sup> Whatever good we have in us, we have received from God through our guardian angels. Wise and true was the answer made by Joanna of Orvieto, of the Order of St. Dominic, when in her childhood she was deprived of her parents, and was once in jest called by some one an orphan without father or mother; she pointed to a picture of the guardian angel, and said, "You must know that this angel is my mother, and a far better mother too, than she whom death has taken from me."<sup>2</sup>

Therefore  
they are  
very un-  
grateful!

Thankless, ungrateful and wicked you must be, I repeat, if you forget your angels, your greatest benefactors, and do not pay them all possible honor, gratitude and love! But alas, how

<sup>1</sup> Bonis omnibus per eum repleti sumus. Qui illi ad hæc poterimus dignum dare.—Tob. xxi. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Scito hunc angelum mihi in matrem esse.

many there are who do not think of their angel guardian once in a day, a week, or even a whole month! Daily he bestows countless benefits on them; yet they do not even know from whom those benefits come, much less do they return thanks for them. With reason may our holy angels complain in the words of our Lord to His Apostles: "So long a time have I been with you; and have you not known Me?"<sup>1</sup> You are now twenty, thirty, forty, or more years old, and I have not left you for a single moment of that time; I have been always at your side, I have protected you from many evils, instructed you, and even waited on you as a servant; and yet, you have not known me. So little do you think of me! I was with you on that journey when you lost your way, and I brought you on the right road; I was with you in that doubt when you knew not what to do, and I gave you good advice, so that your undertaking turned out well; I was with you that day when you were near being drowned, and I saved your life in a wonderful manner; I was with you when you fell under the wheels of that wagon and could easily have broken your ribs, and I saved you from all harm; I was with you that dark night when you fell down the stairs and were in danger of breaking your neck, and while you were actually falling I held you up, so that you suffered no injury; I was with you when that beam of timber fell on your head, and would certainly have broken it, had I not turned the falling beam aside, so that you came off with a mere scratch; (I know a person, my dear brethren, who has met with all these accidents, and who must ascribe his safety under God, to his guardian angel) these and still more numerous benefits, of which you are not even aware, I have been bestowing on you for such a long time, and that through sincere love and affection for you, and yet you act as if you did not know me, and had never heard of me before!

who forget their guardian angel, and they give him just reason to complain. The benefits he confers on the body.

I was with you in that violent temptation, on that dangerous occasion, when you would certainly have fallen into sin, had I not turned away your thoughts, your ears, and eyes to other things. I was with you when you had already determined to go into that house, into that dangerous company; I placed an obstacle in your way against your will, so that you could not carry out your design, and thus were freed from many sins. I was with you when you were in the state of sin, and were on the point of being struck by lightning, or being hurried off by a violent

Those which he confers on the soul.

<sup>1</sup> Tanto tempore vobiscum sum, et non cognovistis me?—John xiv. 9.

or a sudden death, and hurled into hell; I prayed to God for you that He might spare you for a while longer, and I made your conscience uneasy, until you were converted and by true sorrow obtained the friendship and grace of God again. And yet you know me not, and you have hardly once thanked me for all these benefits, although I have been so careful of you the whole day long for so many years. Ah, my dear brethren, how great our ingratitude must be if our holy angels can thus complain of us!

Therefore we must daily thank our guardian angel.

What else can we do then, but acknowledge our manifold obligations to our faithful guardian, and return him thanks for his goodness every morning and evening with grateful hearts? Plutarch relates that when Alexander the Great was still a child, he was assisting at a sacrifice that was being offered to the false gods, and seeing that the incense caused a great smoke when it was thrown on the burning coals, he took whole handfuls of it and threw them on the fire; "Wait," said his tutor to him, "when you have conquered Arabia you can then be prodigal with the incense." Afterwards, when Alexander had really conquered Arabia, and sent home many ships laden with spices, he remembered what his tutor had said to him when he was a boy, and he called his attention to the precious cargo of the ships, and told him that he must not now be niggardly to the gods, to whom such great success in war was to be attributed. A similar exhortation is given to me and to all of us, not by a heathen to honor false gods, but by St. Bernard to be especially grateful to our guardian angels, who do so much daily for our bodies and souls, that we should not be niggardly in showing devotion and love to them. "Be with them," he says, "by constant recollection, and fervent prayer; for they are always with you to guard and protect you." Now, if it is a gross ingratitude for a child to forget his mother, for a man to forget his guardian angel, and not to thank him for his goodness, and there are many such men, what black ingratitude it must be to grieve that holy spirit in any way, instead of thanking and honoring him, and to make him an evil return for all his benefits? Yet there are a still greater number of people who are guilty of this crime; as we shall see in the

- *Frequentate eos sedula cogitatione, et oratione devota; quia semper vobis adsunt ad custodiam.*

## Second Part.

The fable told at great length by Father Bidermann, but which I will relate to you in a few words, will help me to explain my subject. A peasant was once going through a gloomy forest, when he heard sounds of lamentation and wailing issuing out of a neighboring thicket; he went to the place where the voice came from, thinking that it might be a dying man who was calling for help; but he found no one. At last it seemed to him that the voice came out of a hole that was covered over with a large stone. Ah, whoever you are, said the voice, take pity on me; I am a prisoner here, and am buried alive; take away the stone and set me free, and I will be very grateful to you, as grateful as one man can be to another. The peasant, moved with compassion, put forth all his strength, and by great exertions managed to roll the stone away; when to his great astonishment, a monstrous serpent sprang forth, and coiling itself about the peasant's body, made as if it were about to devour him. Is that your gratitude, said the poor man, trembling with fear; is that the way you keep your promise of being grateful to me after I have set you free? Certainly, answered the serpent; that is the return that men make for the benefits they have received, and I did not promise you any other. It is not true, said the peasant; no man would act so ungratefully as that. It is true, answered the serpent. Finally, after a long dispute, they agreed to refer the matter to a third party, who should be empowered to decide it as judge. For this purpose they chose the fox, as the most cunning of beasts. The fox heard what both had to say; but he whispered in the peasant's ear, that, if he would leave his fowl house open for him, he would decide the case in his favor. The peasant agreed willingly. The fox then went to the serpent, and said that he would decide in his favor, but that he must first see whether the thing was possible as narrated, and whether such a long body could really be confined in such a small hole. The serpent, to convince him, crept back into the hole; whereupon the peasant at a sign made him by the fox, came up at once and closed in the serpent as before. That same evening the fox came to the peasant's house to get the promised meal; the window of the fowl house was opened for him at once according to the agreement and he sprang in; but as soon as he did so, he was caught by the neck in a noose that was hung under the window, and there he was strangled. Ah, cried he before the breath left him, it serves me perfectly right,

The ingratitude of men who return evil for good, shown by a fable.

because I have given an unjust judgment! The serpent was right; there is no animal so ungrateful as man, who repays benefits by injuries.

Many are guilty of this ingratitude towards their guardian angels.

And such is generally speaking the case amongst men, my dear brethren. Even the most savage beasts, lions, tigers, serpents, dragons, as history tells us, have often shown their gratitude to those who have been kind to them; but how do we often act? To stick to our subject, how do we thank our most faithful guardians and protectors, I mean our holy angels guardian? Ah, how often does it not happen that, like the serpent, we lie in a hole under a heavy stone without strength to roll the stone away. When we were for a long time in the habit of sin, or in the proximate occasion, did we not often confess our misery, and cry out for help, and beg that the stone might be taken away? Did we not often wish to be freed from that miserable state in which habit kept us enslaved? It was our holy angel, who by his prayers for us, came to our aid, and who obtained for us that powerful grace that restored us to the freedom of the children of God. How often have we not, like that peasant, fallen into the claws of the hellish dragon, who would certainly have devoured us, unless our angel had found the means of gaining time for us, so that we might do penance? Countless other benefits has he bestowed on us at every moment of our lives, and his goodness still continues unwearied. But where is the gratitude we owe him? Instead of thanking, we grieve and offend him.

Namely all who commit mortal sin.

This is the case whenever we determine to commit a grievous sin, in spite of his inspirations and in his very presence. For, just as, according to what our Lord says, the angels rejoice when a lost sheep returns to God by penance: "I say to you, there shall be joy before the angels of God upon one sinner doing penance"<sup>1</sup> so also it would be impossible to cause them greater sorrow, if they were capable of feeling sorrow, than what they would experience at seeing the beloved souls entrusted to their charge, whom they endeavor night and day with unceasing efforts to keep on the right path, rushing wilfully to destruction. St. Frances of Rome, who enjoyed the constant visible society of her angel guardian, saw him cover his face with his hands whenever she committed the least fault. With what horror and disgust would he not turn away his eyes, if he saw his God offended and insulted by mortal sin. I take as witness to the truth of

<sup>1</sup> Dico vobis: Gaudium erit coram Angelis Dei super uno peccatore poenitentiam agente.—Luke xiv. 10.

this any loving mother, who could tell you what trouble and grief it would be for her to see her darling son, whom she leads carefully by the hand that he may not fall, tearing himself away from her and breaking an arm or a leg.

All sinners in general make this evil return to their beneficent angels, but especially those who lead unchaste lives. Chastity is called after the angels, the Angelical Virtue, because the angels are most pure spirits who love the pure of heart. Therefore, St. Bernard reckons virgins amongst the angels;<sup>1</sup> and according to Tertullian, the body that is kept free from all stain of impurity, is changed into an angelic nature.<sup>2</sup> Never do the angels show greater zeal in protecting souls, than when this virtue is in danger. Agnes, Cæcilia, Lucy, and many other holy virgins, you, when you were in danger of being robbed of this treasure by violence, experienced how your angels protected you visibly, and drove off your shameless assailants! In the Annals of our Society, a detailed account is given of how an angel in the shape of a beautiful young man, once knocked loudly at the door of one of our houses in a certain town, while the fathers were at table, and asked to see a certain priest on most urgent business. Go, father, said he, when the priest came to him, go quickly to that house in which you will find one of your scholars who is still innocent, but is now in very dangerous company where he will see and hear things that will imperil his chastity. Before the father had time to look round, the young man vanished, nor could any tidings be heard of him ever after. However, the priest ran off at once to the house, and saved his scholar from the danger he was in. In my opinion (and I speak from experience) one of the best means of conquering temptation to impurity, is to have recourse with child-like confidence to one's guardian angel, in the words of the young Tobias, when the fish was about to devour him: "Sir, he cometh upon me."<sup>3</sup> My dear angel, there is the enemy of my soul who wishes to destroy me; help me and defend me! From this it follows, my dear brethren, that there is nothing more intolerable to the angels than the foul vice of impurity, and if they ever would be inclined to abandon those entrusted to their care, it would certainly be when they see them addicted to this vice. O ye unchaste discourses, desires, songs, looks

But especially the unchaste.

<sup>1</sup> Virgines de angelica familia deputantur.

<sup>2</sup> Fit caro angelica.

<sup>3</sup> Domine invadit me.—Tob. vi. 3.

and touches, (there are infamies that I dare not name) what great grief and sorrow you cause the holy angels! And this is the thanks that those beneficent spirits get for their goodness!

And worst  
of all those  
who give  
scandal.

Still there is no sinner who treats the angels more ungratefully and injuriously, than he who gives scandal to others. Why so? Because he openly declares himself their enemy. The good that the angels try to do the souls entrusted to them, he tries to undo, and thus he endeavors to frustrate all their plans. For, in the first place, the angels endeavor to lead on their charges to the love of God and to virtue by good inspirations; he who gives scandal works in the very opposite direction, for by his scandalous words, acts, manner, behavior and dress, he only causes bad thoughts or excites to impure passion; these evil influences, since they work on a nature that is already weak and inclined to evil of that kind, and are perceived by the senses, are far more powerful than the inspirations of the angels, which affect only the inward powers of the soul. Besides, the angels are always trying to inspire their charges with a horror, fear and aversion for all kinds of sin; scandal-givers do quite the opposite; for by their bad example, which invites imitation, they take away all disgrace and deformity from vice, and make it not only decent almost, but even fashionable. In the third place, when their charges have fallen into grievous sin through weakness, the angels try to raise them up again as soon as possible, and to preserve them from a relapse. Scandal-givers, on the contrary, try to keep the sinner in his guilt by placing sinful objects and occasions before him constantly. Fourthly, the object which the angels wish to attain is to promote the kingdom, the honor and the glory of God, and to spread them through the world; but scandal-givers promote and extend the vain kingdom of the world, and the vicious kingdom of the devil. In a word, the holy angels have no more venomous and bitter enemies amongst men, than those who in any way give scandal, or are to others an occasion of sin.

Proved  
from Scrip-  
ture.

With reason then has the Church appointed this Gospel, about avoiding scandal-giving, to be read to-day, the feast of the angels, and also on the feast of St. Michael, the prince of the angels. "Woe," says Christ, "to that man by whom the scandal cometh." <sup>1</sup> "See that you despise not one of these little ones;" <sup>2</sup> that is, according to the interpretation of St. John

<sup>1</sup> Væ homini illi, per quem scandalum venit.—Matth. xviii. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Videte, ne contemnatis unum ex his pusillis.—Ibid. 10.

Chrysostom, see that you do not scandalize one of those weak little ones; and why? "Because their angels in Heaven always see the face of my Father;" their angels see the scandal you give, and it does not escape their notice that you are trying to steal away their souls. St. Paul writes to the Corinthians: "Therefore ought the woman to have a power over her head because of the angels."<sup>1</sup> And why because of the angels? Are then, the angels, as pure spirits, in danger of having sinful thoughts, through seeing a woman's head uncovered? No, says William of Lyons; but the reason of the prohibition is, "that they may not offend the angels by slaying the souls of those whom the angels have to guard."<sup>2</sup> O holy St. Paul, who looked on it as so important that women should cover their heads on account of the angels, come into the world now, and see how many there are to whom you would have to throw a veil, to cover their necks and shoulders, lest they scandalize the souls that the angels have charge of! And there is many an immodesty in dress besides this, that you would have to forbid, lest the angels take offence at it. Perhaps if you came, you might do some good! As it is, there is little use in our preaching to people on this subject. The perverse world is ruled by a different law nowadays, from that which obtained in Christendom in your time. Nor is there much use in our preaching to little children about it; for the poor innocents cannot help doing as their parents tell them. Come, St. Paul, see for yourself, you will find unfortunate children dressed out in flounces and furbelows, until they look broader than they are long! O ye angels, who are always with those children, what think you of that? What do you think when you see the innocent souls entrusted to your care, brought up to vanity from their tenderest years, by those who should help you in your loving efforts to lead them to Heaven? That is the gratitude you get from us, thankless mortals, in return for so many benefits!

My dear brethren, we have been ungrateful enough hitherto. Do we now wish to love and honor our holy angels, whom we ought to love and honor far more than a child does its loving mother? If so we must be particularly careful not to offend them in any way, or to make them our enemies. How will it be with us amid so many dangers of body and soul, if we willfully deprive ourselves of their favor and care? How will it

Woe to all  
who are  
thus un-  
grateful to  
their guard-  
ian angels.

<sup>1</sup> Ideo debet mulier potestatem habere supra caput propter Angelus.—I. Cor. xi. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Ne scilicet offendat Angelos occidendo homines quos ipsi custodiunt.

be with us in the hour of death, if they are unwilling to make an effort to save our souls, when they see them in the claws of the devil, and if they drive us into despair by saying to us: "We would have cured Babylon, but she is not healed, let us forsake her;"<sup>1</sup> let us leave her to the hellish birds of prey. How will it be with us on the day of judgment if those angels appear as witnesses against us, and as accusers to demand that sentence of condemnation be pronounced against us? If they say to our Judge: We have done all we could to induce these men to serve Thee; we have given them good inspirations by means of preachers and confessors to whom we suggested what they should say to them; we have often tried to move their hearts, to deter them from vice and to exhort them to amend their lives; but they would neither hear nor obey us, and besides, they have robbed us of other souls too, by their scandal and bad example. O supreme Judge, pronounce a just sentence on them now!

Conclusion  
and resolution  
to  
honor them  
constantly.

Ah, dearest angel, before things go so far, I will try to act better to thee and to myself! I know that I have hitherto been very ungrateful to thee, that I have made thee an ill return for all the benefits I owe thee, that I have sinned and sinned grievously in thy presence, and been the occasion of sin to others also, to thy great grief; although, as I must again acknowledge, if I look back on every day of my life, from my youth to the present moment, I shall find that on account of special, countless and evident benefits thou hast conferred on me, I owe thee my life a thousand times, and I still daily experience thy concern for my welfare. I thank thee therefore, with all my heart, and repent of my past ingratitude to thee! By thy intercession and the help of God, I shall never be guilty of it again. One of the most powerful reasons for me to avoid all sin, and especially to avoid giving scandal, shall be thy presence and the horror thou hast of sin. Not only will I never grieve thee again; but I will love and honor thee during the remainder of my life, as a dutiful child does its mother. Every day I will thank thee for the benefits I receive from thee; every day I will commit myself to thy tender care; every day I will fly to thee, like a child to its mother, in all doubts, temptations, dangers and necessities of body and soul. Whenever I can I will promote thy honor, that thou mayest continue to protect me during life, and mayest save me in the hour of death, and bring me to that place in which I shall praise thee, my benefactor, and with thee my God for ever. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Curavimus Babylonem, et non est sanata: derelinquamus eam.—Jer. li. 9.

*FORTY-FIRST SERMON.*

**ON THE PUNISHMENT OF INGRATITUDE.**

**Subject.**

How and in what manner the Almighty is wont to punish the ungrateful even in this life.—*Preached on the second Sunday after Easter.*

**Text.**

*Cognosco meas.*—John x. 14.  
“I know mine.”

**Introduction.**

O happy souls whom the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, will recognize as His. They are the only ones who, on the last day, will be separated from the reprobate goats, and will be placed as the elect on the right hand of the Judge to hear the joyful invitation, “Come ye blessed of My Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you.”<sup>1</sup> Woe to the great number who will not be recognized by Christ on that day! But why? Does not the eternal Wisdom know each and every one? Yes, but He does not know all as His own. There are many to whom He has already said what He will repeat to them on the judgment day, “I know you not,” and they are those who during life, have not wished to know God, or to honor Him, but who preferred to drive Him away from them by their wickedness. Amongst the number of these are especially the ungrateful, as the Glossa says of the words in the Gospel of St. Luke, Chapter xvii, where it is said that, of the ten lepers who were cleansed, only one returned to give thanks to our Lord: “Were not ten made clean? and where are the nine?”<sup>2</sup> Such was the question our Lord asked, as if He did not know where they were; for, “He looks on the ungrateful, as if they were unknown to Him.”<sup>3</sup> We have recently seen, my dear brethren, how ungrateful most men are to their good God, especially those who have received most benefits from Him; these latter may conclude that they do not belong to the number of those of whom the Good Shepherd

<sup>1</sup> Venite, benedicti Patris mei, possidete paratum vobis regnum.—*Matth. xxv. 34.*

<sup>2</sup> Nonne decem mundati sunt? et novem ubi sunt?—*Luke xvii. 17.*

<sup>3</sup> Sic habet ingratos quasi ignotos.

says, "I know mine;" but that they will hear from His lips the terrible words, "I know you not." But will the God of justice never be tired of our ingratitude, so that He will leave it unpunished until the last day? Ah, what a question that is! Is it not punishment enough not to be recognized by Christ? Still, ungrateful mortals, take care. If the thought of that punishment does not affect you, you must know that ingratitude is a vice so hateful to God, that He, who is otherwise so merciful, is forced to punish it most severely even in this life, as I shall now show you, in order to make an end of this subject.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*How and in what manner the Almighty is wont to punish the ungrateful even in this life. Such is the whole subject of this sermon, to the end that the thought of this punishment may induce us to render due and unceasing thanks to our good God.*

Give us Thy light and grace to this end, O God of mercy, through the intercession of Mary and the holy angels guardian.

No upright man upbraids another with the benefits he confers on him.

He who really wishes to do good to another, must never talk in his presence of favors conferred, or boast of them, or say, I have done so and so for you; it was well for you that I was there to help or advise you, etc. He who acts thus is an intolerable boaster, and makes even his benefits disagreeable to others. "Odious is the conduct of those," says Cicero, "who are constantly praising their own good acts."<sup>1</sup> He who has received a kindness must certainly be grateful for it, remember it and praise it; but not so he who confers it. Nay, a really good-hearted man tries to make the benefits he confers greater by never speaking of them, and by concealing as far as possible, his own part in bestowing them. Such was the conduct of the holy Bishop, St. Nicholas, who, as is well known, stealthily threw into the window of a house belonging to a poor family, as much money as was necessary to form a marriage portion for the three daughters of that family. Such, too, was the conduct of Booz with regard to the poor Ruth, as we read in the Book of Ruth, Chapter ii. The latter was compelled by want to glean corn in the field; Booz said to his reapers that they must not interfere with her: "If she would even reap with you, hinder her not; and let fall some of your handfuls of purpose, and leave them that she may gather them without shame, and let no

<sup>1</sup> Odiosum genus hominum beneficia exprobrantium.—Cic. in dial. de Amic.

man rebuke her when she gathereth them.”<sup>1</sup> The best kind of alms are those which are received by the worthy poor, without their knowing where they come from; and therefore Christ says in the Gospel of St. Matthew, “Therefore when thou dost an alms-deed, sound not a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. But when thou dost alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth; that thy alms may be in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret, will repay thee.”<sup>2</sup>

St. James says of God, our sovereign Benefactor, that, “He giveth to all men abundantly and upbraideth not.”<sup>3</sup> Hundred and thousandfold are the benefits that we receive daily from Him, for He protects us from dangers and provides us with the necessaries of life, nor do we even know that we receive those benefits from His hand, for He upbraids no one with them.

Much less does God do so to us mortals.

But why do I say this, my dear brethren, when my intention was to speak of the punishment of ingratitude? To show that it is the ungrateful alone who compel the Almighty and most generous God to put them to shame by upbraiding them with benefits He so liberally bestows on them, making them see the deformity of their ingratitude, and showing them the justice of the punishment He inflicts on this vice. Thus He said in His anger by His angel to the Israelites: “I made you go out of Egypt, and have brought you into the land, for which I swore to your fathers; and I promised that I would not void my covenant with you for ever . . . and you would not hear my voice; why have you done this?”<sup>4</sup> He says by the Prophet Ezechiel to the ungrateful synagogue: “I clothed thee with embroidery, and shod thee with violet-colored shoes, and I girded thee about with fine linen, and clothed thee with fine garments. But trusting in thy beauty thou hast played the harlot because of thy renown; and thou hast prostituted thyself to every passenger to be his.”<sup>5</sup> When King David had committed adultery

It is the ungrateful alone that He must upbraid with His benefits.

<sup>1</sup> Etiam si vobiscum metere voluerit, ne prolibeat is eam; et de vestris quoque manipulis proficite de industria, et remanere permittite, ut absque rubore colligat, et colligentem nemo corripiat.—Ruth ii. 15, 16.

<sup>2</sup> Cum ergo facis eleemosynam, noli tuba canere ante te, sicut hypocritarum faciunt in synagogis et in vicis, ut honorificentur ab hominibus. Te autem faciente eleemosynam, nesciat sinistra tua, quid faciat dextera tua, ut sit eleemosyna tua in abscondito, et Pater tuus, qui videt in abscondito, reddet tibi.—Matth. vi. 2-4.

<sup>3</sup> Dat omnibus affluentur, et non improperat.—James i. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Eduxi vos de Aegypto, et introduxi in terram, pro qua juravi patribus vestris: et pollicitus sum, ut non facerem irritum pactum meum vobiscum in sempiternum . . . et nolulistis audire vocem meam; cur hoc fecistis?—Judges ii. 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> Vestivi te discoloribus, et calceavi te lanthino, et cinxi te byso, et indui te subtilibus. Et habens fiduciam in pulchritudine tua, fornicata es in nomine tuo, et exposuisti fornicationem tuam omni transeunti, ut ejus feres.—Ezech. xvi. 10, 15.

and murder, God sent the Prophet Nathan to reproach him: “Thus saith the Lord the God of Israel; I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee from the hand of Saul, and gave thee thy master’s house. Why, therefore, hast thou despised the word of the Lord to do evil in my sight?”<sup>1</sup> All these words were as so many sharp arrows in the heart of him whom God thus upbraided.

This will be a great torment for the ungrateful on the last day.

O Christians, what an intolerable torment it will be on the last day for the wicked, when in the presence of the whole world, of the angels and saints of Heaven, and of the demons and reprobates of hell, the Lord will remind them of all the benefits He bestowed on them, and to their public shame and confusion, will reproach them for their ingratitude! See, He will say, I have created you out of nothing; I have ransomed you from eternal death, by dying on the Cross for you; I have brought you, in preference to many thousand others, to the one true faith; I have enriched you with many gifts of soul and body, and with temporal blessings; I have given you many occasions of doing good; I have so often enlightened you by means of My inspirations, and by sermons also, if you had gone to hear them; I have so often overlooked your faults and borne patiently with them, although I could have condemned you to hell for one mortal sin, etc. And yet you have continued to despise Me and My law! Ah, this reproach and the confusion it will cause them before the whole world, will be worse than hell itself, so that they will cry out for shame to the mountains and hills to fall upon and hide them!

God punishes the ungrateful in this life, by depriving them of His benefits, as He did the Israelites.

Besides this severe reproach, which God often causes the ungrateful to feel in their consciences during life, He punishes them also by withdrawing His benefits from them; for, according to St. Thomas, just as he who is grateful, merits a continuance of the benefits hitherto bestowed on him, so the ungrateful man deserves to be deprived of those benefits.<sup>2</sup> Such was the punishment inflicted on the ungrateful Israelites. Hear what God says by the Prophet Osee: “And she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold;” so many benefits have I conferred on her (that is on the synagogue); but, “they have used them in the service of Baal;”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hæc dicit Dominus Deus Israel: Ego unxi te in regem super Israel, et ego erui te de manu Saul; et dedi tibi domum domini tui. Quare ergo contempsisti verbum Domini, ut faceres malum in conspectu meo.—II. Kings xii. 7-9.

<sup>2</sup> Propter ingrattitudinem meretur aliquis beneficium perdere.

<sup>3</sup> Et hæc nescivit, quia ego dedi ei frumentum et vinum, et oleum et argentum multiplicavi ei, et aurum, quæ fecerunt Baal.—Osee ii. 8.

they have misused My benefits to offend Me, and have sacrificed them to the devil. How ungrateful they were! But what was their punishment? "Therefore will I return and take away My corn in its season, and My wine in its season, and I will set at liberty My wool, and My flax. And I will cause all her mirth to cease; and I will make her as a forest, and the beasts of the field shall devour her."<sup>1</sup> I will send the Assyrians, Chaldeans and Egyptians to attack her, to burn her houses and lay waste her fields and vineyards, and make her cities deserted, etc. See what a just punishment is inflicted on ingratitude.

The philosophers of old experienced the same punishment. St. Paul writes of them to the Romans, that God bestowed on them greater wisdom and understanding than on other men, so that they knew their Creator and penetrated the secrets of nature: "Because that which is known of God is manifest in them; for God hath manifested it unto them. When they knew God, they have not glorified Him as God, or given thanks," for the wisdom they received from Him, and therefore, they "became vain in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened,"<sup>2</sup> as a chastisement for their ingratitude: "For professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."<sup>3</sup> Commenting on these words, St. Augustine remarks, that "what God gives gratuitously, He takes away from those who are ungrateful."<sup>4</sup> Rupertus thinks that the first sin of our first parents whereby they lost paradise and were plunged into misery, was really due to their ingratitude in not thanking God for having placed them in such a garden of delight.

To the philosophers of old.

Christians, we often complain of temporal misfortunes and calamities, of unfruitful seasons, and other miseries that afflict our lives. Do you wish to know why God, who is so good, sends us those afflictions? Think for a moment, of the use we have made of the benefits bestowed on us by Him, and of our conduct while we were still enjoying them, and you will find that it is only right and just that we should be deprived of them as a punishment of our base ingratitude. For instance, God has

There are ungrateful people of that kind amongst Christians nowadays.

<sup>1</sup> Idcirco convertar, et sumam frumentum meum in tempore suo, et liberabo lanam meam et linum meum: et cessare faciam omne gaudium ejus; et ponam eam in saltum, et comedet eam bestia agri.—Osee ii. 9, 11, 12.

<sup>2</sup> Quod notum est Dei, manifestum est in illis; Deus enim illis manifestavit. Cum cognovissent Deum, non sicut Deum glorificaverunt, aut gratias egerunt; evanuerunt in cogitationibus suis; et obscuratum est insipiens cor eorum.—Rom. 19, 21.

<sup>3</sup> Dicentes enim, se esse sapientes, stulti facti sunt.—Ibid. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Quod Deus dederat gratis, tulit ingratis.

given you wealth and enriched you in preference to so many others, by making you successful in business; He has caused you to fall heir to a rich legacy here and there; your fields and vineyards have been most fruitful; you enjoy a certain income from the capital you have invested, etc. What use have you hitherto made of these free gifts of God's goodness? Perhaps you have, like the Israelites, sacrificed them to false gods, and have misused them to gratify your pride and contempt of others, your love of idleness, your gluttony, your love of gambling, and your extravagance in dress; but you had little or nothing for the poor Christ in the person of His poor, or for the glory of God, or the salvation of your soul. See how ungrateful you have been. God has given you good mental gifts, a good memory, a quick understanding, learning and skill; what use have you made of those gifts? Have you not imitated the philosophers of old, and used your talents to deceive and cheat others, and to oppress the weak and ignorant; or else have you not occupied yourself with reading useless, dangerous and impure books and love stories? God has given you bodily health and strength; what use have you made of them? You have squandered them in intemperance, impurity, and sensual pleasures. God has enabled you to marry well; you are happy in the married state and can live in peace and quiet, in love and harmony; oh certainly that is a great blessing which falls to the lot of few married people, as you yourself must acknowledge; but what use have you made of it? You have misused it only to indulge your sensuality and love of bodily comfort by immoderate indulgence in sleep, and in eating, drinking and amusements; so that you have become slothful in the service of God, and careless about the sacraments, the devotions you were accustomed to practise, and the hearing of sermons, because you find pleasure enough at home. "I have married a wife," you say like the man in the Gospel, who was invited to the feast, I find all my pleasure at home, "and therefore I cannot come."<sup>1</sup> The Providence of God has given to those children a pious, prudent father, or a devout and careful mother, through whose diligence and care they are abundantly supplied with temporal goods, as far as their bodily welfare is concerned, while their spiritual welfare is also attended to, inasmuch as they are trained up to virtue and the fear of the Lord; what a great benefit that is! and also, let me add, what a rare one, too! Not that God is unwilling to bestow it on

<sup>1</sup> *Uxorem duxi, et ideo non possum venire.*—Luke xiv. 20.

parents, but because most parents are unwilling to receive it, or to use it properly. But what use do the children make of it? They forget their duty as children; they disregard the teaching and exhortations of their parents; they go secretly and stealthily into bad company; they grieve and trouble their parents by disobedience and obstinacy. On the other hand, God has given those parents good, obedient, docile and healthy children, according to their wish, so that their children are a pride and a pleasure to them; what a great benefit that is! But how do they use it? They bring up their children from their tenderest years in all the vanity of the world; they put no restraint on them; they approve of everything they do, except when they try to live piously and save their souls, and gain Heaven; if they try to do that, they are stupid, naughty, foolish and disobedient children. Alas, is it not too true that there are Catholic parents who keep away their children from God, bring them into the dangerous occasions of sin, and actually force them to walk in the broad way that leads to eternal ruin? See what ingratitude theirs is.

What punishment has God in store for all those people? "I will cause all their mirth to cease," He says; they are not worthy of My benefits, and therefore I will put an end to their prosperity; therefore "I will take away my corn;" I will deprive them of all the blessings I have hitherto conferred on them. I will take from them by death their son, their daughter, their dearest and only child; or else the child who is now the greatest joy of its parents, will afterwards be their greatest trouble and torment because they have trained him up in worldly vanity. I will punish those disobedient children by putting an end to their prosperity; I will deprive them of their father or mother by a premature death, so that, through their inexperience, they will have trouble enough to provide themselves with their daily bread. I will put an end to the joy of that vain woman, by depriving her of her husband, or I will punish that man by taking away his wife, so that the happiness they find in the married life will be destroyed. I will make the joy of that strong and healthy man to cease; I will send him a long and wasting illness, that will make him weary of life. That curious, inquisitive man shall become weak in his understanding, confused in his imagination, and shall pine away in uneasiness and melancholy. I will soon put a stop to the pride and conceit of that wealthy man; I do not require the Assyrians or Chaldeans for the purpose, as in olden times; there are others at hand who will reduce

Whom God  
also de-  
prives of  
His benefits.

him to poverty; I will cause his house and property to be destroyed by war; I will make his fields and vineyards unfruitful; I will cause him to lose his yearly revenues by the ruin of his debtors. Thus I will revenge Myself on all those ungrateful people by taking away from them the benefits I bestowed on them. And, says St. Augustine, "it is a most just punishment of sin for a man to be deprived of what he was unwilling to make a proper use of."<sup>1</sup>

Another punishment of ingratitude is in being deprived of the blessings God intended to bestow.

The third chastisement of ingratitude consists in the withdrawal of the blessings that God was prepared to bestow on him had he proved himself grateful for those he had already received. Again a most just punishment. For, according to St. Gregory, "he is not worthy of future benefits, who has not been grateful for those that have been conferred on him in the past."<sup>2</sup> Suppose that a man has made his will in favor of another, but he finds that this other is not at all grateful to him for the favor he intends conferring on him; will he not at once think that his kindness is ill-bestowed, and make another will? I meant well towards him, he will say, but since he shows such ingratitude to me, he shall have nothing from me. In the same way God told the Prophet Samuel to announce to Saul, after the latter had disobeyed His command by beginning the sacrifice; "Thou hast done foolishly, and hast not kept the commandments of the Lord thy God, which He commanded thee. And if thou hadst not done thus, the Lord would now have established thy kingdom over Israel for ever."<sup>3</sup> But since thou hast been so ungrateful, He has cast thee away from His sight, and will take thy kingdom from thee: "Thy kingdom shall not continue. The Lord hath sought Him a man according to His own heart; and him hath the Lord commanded to be prince over His people, because thou hast not observed that which the Lord commanded."<sup>4</sup>

A punishment that hangs over many, who least expect it.

There are no prophets nowadays, my dear brethren, to foretell us clearly what divine Providence has in store for us, or what favors and graces It has prepared for us if we are grateful for those bestowed in the past; still God acts with us in the

<sup>1</sup> Illa est poena peccati justissima, ut amittat unusquisque illud, quo bene uti noluit.—S. Aug. lib. 1. de lib. arbitr.

<sup>2</sup> Non est dignus dandis, qui non egit grates de datis.

<sup>3</sup> Stulte egisti, nec custodisti mandata Domini, Dei tui, quæ præcepit tibi. Quodsi non fecisses, jam nunc præparasset Dominus regnum tuum super Israel in sempiternum.—1. Kings xiii. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Nequaquam regnum tuum ultra consurget. Quæsit Dominus sibi virum juxta cor suum, et præcepit ei. Dominus, ut esset dux super populum suum, eo quod non servaveris quæ præcepit Dominus.—Ibid. 14.

same way, although we know nothing about it. He meant well with that man whom He intended to raise to a high position; with that poor man, for whom He had prepared a rich legacy; with that tradesman, for whom He had good fortune in store, but who now has to work hard for his daily bread; for that son, that daughter He had prepared a rich and happy marriage; for that country, that city, He had decreed prosperous times, and so on; already God had determined to bestow great blessings on them. But how do they act towards Him? There is no trace of piety, fear of the Lord, or of a Christian life in their actions. A trifling gain, a momentary pleasure, human respect, vanity, any creature at all is capable of taking away their heart and love from God; they commit sin without fear, and in the very midst of public calamities, their only thought is of amusements, etc. Oh, the Almighty must think, certainly My gifts are ill-bestowed here! Is that the way in which you act towards Me? If that is all you think of My honor and friendship, then I will take no more care of you, away with you; you shall have nothing more from Me! Thus in a moment He changes all His plans with regard to that gentleman for whom He had prepared a high position, that rich man who has no heir to inherit his wealth, that son, or daughter for whom He had prepared an advantageous marriage. In an instant His design is altered, and none of those people receive any of the blessings intended for them. They complain, and say, oh, witchcraft has been at work against me; calumnious tongues have not been silent, the envy of others is to blame; this or that person has stood in my way; etc. Not a bit of it. You alone are to blame, and it is against yourself that your complaints must be directed. Accuse yourself, and say, I am not worthy of receiving benefits; my ingratitude, my sloth in the service of God, my pride and vanity, my sins and vices stand in my way; they have prevented the Lord from giving me the blessings He had intended for me; if God still wished to bestow them on me, not a demon of hell nor any man on earth could prevent Him: but I have acted ungratefully to God, and therefore He has abandoned me. "He is not worthy of future benefits, who has not been grateful for those that have been conferred on him in the past."

The fourth and last punishment of ingratitude, as far as temporal things are concerned, is a premature death, by which God takes the ungrateful man out of the world. Many are of the same opinion as the rich man in the Gospel, who, considering

The fourth punishment is a premature death proved from Scripture.

the abundance of his riches, said to himself: "What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? This will I do; I will pull down my barns, and will build greater. . . And I will say to my soul: Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thy rest, eat, drink and make good cheer;"<sup>1</sup> enjoy yourself, sleep, play and spend your time in amusements and in sensual pleasures. See, O God, the fruits of the benefits Thou bestowest so liberally on men! But unhappy wretches, if you continue in your ingratitude, the day, the hour will come, and perhaps soon, when the unexpected and sorrowful news will be announced to you, as it was to that rich man: "Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee," although you think you have nothing to do but to enjoy yourself, "and whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?"<sup>2</sup> And Our Lord concludes with regard to all men: "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God."<sup>3</sup> Nearly the same thing happened to King Ezechias; God had given him a wonderful victory over his enemies, and had miraculously destroyed a hundred and eighty-five thousand of them; but a short time after He sent the Prophet Isaias to him with this message: "Thus saith the Lord God: Give charge concerning thy house, for thou shalt die and not live."<sup>4</sup> But what was the cause of this sudden change on the part of God? After having saved the life of His otherwise faithful and beloved servant Ezechias from so many thousand enemies, He now wishes to deprive him of life. Why? Because Ezechias did not act rightly towards Him. In what did his fault lie? For he says of himself before God: "I beseech thee O Lord, remember how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is pleasing before thee."<sup>5</sup> And it was perfectly true, but still he had to die. And do you know why, my dear brethren? After enabling him to gain such a great victory, God expected, as was just, that he would be extraordinarily grateful; but instead of that, Ezechias became vain of his power, and therefore, says St.

<sup>1</sup> Quid faciam, quia non habeo, quo congregem fructus meos? Hoc faciam: Destruam horrea mea, et majora faciam. . . Et dicam anima meae: Anima, habes multa bona posita in annos plurimos: requiesce, comede, bibe, epulare.—Luke xii. 17-19.

<sup>2</sup> Stulte, hac nocte animam tuam repetunt a te: quæ autem parasti ejus erunt?—Ibid. 20

<sup>3</sup> Sic est, qui sibi thesaurizat, et non est in Deum dives.—Ibid. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Hæc dicit Dominus Deus: Præcipe domui tuæ: morieris enim tu, et non lives.—IV. Kings xx. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Obsecro, Domine, memento quæso, quomodo ambulaverim coram te in veritate et in corde perfecto, et quod placitum est coram te, fecerim.—Ibid. 3.

Cyril, he was warned of the approach of death, because an ungrateful man is not worthy of a long life.

When describing the creation, Moses mentions in order all the creatures that God made by a single word; with the sole exception of fire, of which he says nothing. Did he perhaps forget it? By no means; for it was under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost that he wrote. Perhaps God did not create fire? It would be a most grievous error to believe that. Is fire then such a worthless thing that it does not deserve special mention? On the contrary it is the noblest, most subtle and most powerful of all the elements. Why then is there no mention made of it? St. Ambrose and the Abbot Rupert assign the following cause; fire, they say, is by its nature fruitless and ungrateful. God created the heavens with their twinkling stars, and they at once commenced to praise their Creator, as David says, "The heavens shew forth the glory of God."<sup>1</sup> He created the earth, and it brings forth countless fruits; the water, and it feeds and nourishes the fishes; the air, and it serves as a habitation for the birds. God created fire also; but what fruits does it bring forth? Not one. Everything that is thrown into it, is at once devoured; fuel is the nourishment and support of fire, and the fire destroys its own support. Thus it is a perfect symbol of an ungrateful man, who is supported by the blessings that God bestows on him, but devours them all without producing the least fruit or making the least return for them. "Such is the ungrateful man," says the Abbot Rupert, "he devours many benefits, but makes no return for them; and therefore he should be excluded from the number of living creatures."<sup>2</sup>

Confirmed  
by a simile.

We hear people say sometimes, when a young man dies suddenly or prematurely: What a pity he died so young! How clever and learned he was, what nice manners he had! He would have been a fine man had he lived, and he could have done a great deal of good. Is it not a pity that such rare gifts and talents should be buried so soon? That is true enough; all those talents and endowments were gifts of the divine liberality; but do you know what use that young man made of them? No; that we cannot find out. God could tell us, and if He were pleased to do so, we should perhaps discover that that young man was guilty of the greatest ingratitude towards God, that he

Thus many  
die prematurely, on  
account of  
ingratitude.

<sup>1</sup> Coeli euarrant gloriam Dei.—Ps. xviii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Talis plane est ingratus; multa beneficia devorat, nihil redonat; dignus plane ut ex numero creaturarum excludatur.—Rupert Abb. lib. 1 in Gen. c. 8.

misused the talents bestowed on him to indulge in pride, impurity and other vices, and thus to treat his good God with the greatest contempt; so that the divine justice was forced to cry out in anger: Away with the wretch, he is not worthy to be numbered any longer amongst living creatures, his name must be blotted out; go, O Death, and hurry him away from the world, he is not worthy to live any longer!

These punishments are just: shown by a fable.

A just punishment for ingratitude! You know, I presume, my dear brethren, the fable that I am going to make use of here as a simile. A young deer that was pursued by the hunters over mountain and valley, came to a vineyard; it was so tired that it could not run any farther, so it lay down under a vine, that spread its leaves and branches over it and concealed it so effectually that the hunters could find no trace of its whereabouts. After a time the deer put its head carefully out between the branches and looked all around, but could see no sign of the hunters far or near; Oh, that is all right, it said; all danger is over now; and thereupon it turned round, and commenced eating the leaves of the vine, nor did it stop until it had devoured them all. While eating however, it made such a noise that the hunters heard it, and made after it again, when they caught and killed it without difficulty, as it had eaten away the friendly leaves which had before served to hide it. But before the unlucky animal breathed its last, it cried out in a fit of useless repentance, "It serves me quite right, because I did not hesitate to devour my protectress,"<sup>1</sup> who saved me from such imminent danger. This is only a fable my dear brethren, but it is verified only too often in the case of reasoning beings, who, after having been protected by God from many misfortunes, preserved in many dangers to life, and richly endowed with temporal goods, still do not hesitate to offend their sovereign Benefactor by sin. And if God in His anger deprives them of the benefits, the protection, or the blessings and prosperity He has hitherto bestowed on them, or if He refuses any longer to regard them with favor, or takes away their health by a tedious illness, or their life by a sudden or premature death, what else can they think or say but that it serves them quite right, that they are justly deprived of their prosperity, their health, their life; for they are not worthy of anything better, since they have been ungrateful to their sovereign Benefactor?

<sup>1</sup> Merito hoc mihi evenit, quid violare non dubitavi servatricem meam.

Ah my good God, I must cry out, how long is it now since I have deserved all these punishments? None of them is too great or too severe for my gross ingratitude towards Thee. Yet, what shows still clearer Thy goodness and mercy, Thou hast had such patience with me, an unworthy sinner, and hast borne with me so long in my thankless life, without visiting me with the well deserved chastisement. Shall I then still further presume on Thy mercy, and continue to make Thee such a bad return for Thy goodness? Ah, woe to me if I do! for then I shall have a far greater punishment to expect, than those of which I have spoken and which affect only the mortal body. How would it be with me, if, remitting those punishments, Thou wert to reserve Thy vengeance for my immortal soul? If Thou wert to withdraw from me Thy special grace, and to allow me to go on the broad road that leads to hell? No, O God of infinite mercy, now at this very moment, in this very place, I detest my past ingratitude! From now henceforth I will show by my repentance and amendment, and by renewed zeal and constancy in Thy service, and I will show publicly before the world, that I acknowledge Thee as my greatest Benefactor, and love Thee with my whole heart above all things. Amen.

Conclusion  
and resolu-  
tion to be  
grateful to  
God.

*On the Gratitude we owe to God for the Forgiveness of Sin, see the following Third Part; on Gratitude for other Benefits, see the following Fourth Part.*

# ON THE NEGLECT AND ABUSE OF DIVINE GRACE.

—  
*FORTY-SECOND SERMON.*

ON REJECTING THE LIGHT OF THE HOLY GHOST.

Subject.

1. Many men are stupid and without understanding in things that concern God and their eternal salvation, because they are not enlightened by the Spirit of God. 2. They are not enlightened by the Spirit of God, because they do not wish to receive His light.—*Preached on the Monday of Pentecost.*

Text.

*Lux venit in mundum, et dilexerunt homines magis tenebras, quam lucem.* John iii. 19.

“The light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light.”

Introduction.

Is it then possible that there are men in the world who hide themselves from the light of the sun, and prefer to remain in the darkness of night, rather than bear the daylight? Yes, as Herodotus relates, there are human owls of that kind; but they are barbarians, as I have elsewhere explained. Yet this is not of very great importance. What is especially to be lamented is the fact that there are men, and countless numbers of them, who hide themselves away from the divine light, and seek to keep their souls in darkness; and it is of these that Jesus Christ complains in to-day's Gospel in the words of the text: “The light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light.” And who are those men? Not merely heathens

and infidels, nor Jews and heretics, who deliberately reject the sufficient enlightenment that they receive from the same Light, which according to St. John, "Enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world;"<sup>1</sup> and refuse to acknowledge the truth of the one true faith; but there are also Catholic Christians, who, although they are in the midst of the brilliant sun light of divine faith, yet prefer to wander about in the darkness like bats. Is not that the case? How many are there not who understand little or nothing of the Gospel truths that concern their souls and their salvation, the service of God and the observance of His law; although there are teachers enough to explain all these things to them? Whence comes this my dear brethren? The Spirit of God, who according to the words of Christ, must teach us all truth, is wanting to them; or to speak more truly, they do not want to be instructed by this Spirit. "And men loved darkness rather than the light." That I shall now proceed to explain.

**Plan of Discourse.**

*Why are many men so stupid and void of understanding in things that concern God and the salvation of their souls? Answer; Because they are not enlightened by the Spirit of God; this will be the first and longest part. Why then are so many men not enlightened by the Spirit of God? Answer; Because they do not wish to receive His light; this will be the second part.*

O most blessed Light, fill the hearts of Thy faithful;<sup>2</sup> that we may see our blindness and stupidity in spiritual things, and receive Thee henceforth with greater eagerness. O most enlightened Virgin, and you holy angels, obtain this light for us by your intercession.

If one is stone blind, or spends his life in a gloomy cavern, what wonder is it that he knows little of things in general, and cannot discern beauty from deformity, and that, even when a thing is explained to him, he is still unable to understand it? You remember my dear brethren, the case of the man born blind, whom Jesus restored to sight, as we read in the ninth chapter of the Gospel of St. John; before he was healed by our Lord, he lived like other men amongst all sorts of visible creatures, and yet he could not say nor imagine how a single one of them was formed. No doubt he often asked his parents and relations where they were leading him to, and what sort of a place they were

One who is born blind, since his eyesight is wanting, cannot form any idea of the appearance of visible things, no matter how they are explained to him.

<sup>1</sup> Illuminat omnem hominem vententem in hunc mundum.—John 1. 9.

<sup>2</sup> O Lux beatissima reple cordis intima tuorum fidelium.

in; and they told him as well as they could, of the greatness of the earth; but what could the blind man understand of it all? He felt something hard and immovable under his feet, and he asked what it was. It is the earth, was the answer; it is dark-colored, and it produces all kinds of fruits for our nourishment; it is beautifully divided into mountains and valleys, in which all sorts of wild animals live; into brooks and rivers, in which fishes of various kinds swim about; into gardens and meadows, which are covered with verdure, and ornamented with white, yellow, red and blue flowers, for the delight and pleasure of those who behold them; into towns and villages, in which people live in houses great and small. But what is the use of talking to a blind man about red and yellow, blue and green, towns and villages? You may repeat it a hundred times over to him, and he may listen to you; but what wiser will he be at the end? Not a bit, because he does not know what a color looks like. He knows well enough that he breathes, and he gropes about with his hands. What is that, he asks; I cannot feel anything. Oh, that is the air, and is illumined by the brilliant light of the sun; when that light disappears in the evening, the earth is in darkness, and we cannot see unless we light a lamp or a candle. In the air too, are numbers of birds that fly about above our heads; they differ in size, appearance, beauty and the color of their feathers; most of them fly about during the day, others such as the owl and the bat, prefer the night. Poor blind man, what do you say to all this? What can I say? I hear your words, but it is impossible for me to understand what the things of which you speak, are like. I wish I could see them! And yet they are nothing compared to the heavens and the firmament which extend over the atmosphere like a roof made by the hands of God, in which are numbers of fixed stars that twinkle by night, but are invisible by day, because their light is overpowered by the exceeding brilliancy of the sun. The most of these stars are motionless and remain where the Creator placed them in the beginning; others are planets and have their appointed revolutions through the heavens. Under this firmament, when the weather is gloomy, the clouds are black and sombre, but when it is fine, they are white and fleecy, and form a pleasant sight for the eye to rest on. If these things were explained to the blind man, what do you think, would his idea of them be? Doubtless he would be lost in amazement, and would form a mental picture of some

wonderful machine; but he would know just as little as before, even if a hundred years were spent in explaining things to him. It is in fact impossible for him to understand anything about such things, because the human understanding, as long as it is surrounded by this mortal body, cannot form an idea of a visible thing unless it sees it with the eyes of the body. True indeed is the saying, "A blind man is a poor man;" all visible beauty is to him as if it were not. Imagine what the blind man must have felt when Jesus opened his eyes. How astonished and delighted he must have been! How eagerly he must have employed the newly restored sense on the first day! For everything he saw was new to him, and had been hitherto unintelligible.

See, my dear brethren, there you have a picture of the man who is inexperienced in spiritual things and who is not enlightened supernaturally. What the eyesight is to the body, in order to enable us to form a true idea of the outward appearances of creatures, that the light of the Holy Ghost is to the soul, to enable it to understand invisible and supernatural truths that concern God and our eternal salvation. "Come O Light of our hearts," the Church sings to the Holy Ghost, "without the influence of Thy light, there is nothing in man."<sup>1</sup> No one can have a good thought, nor speak a good word, unless by the grace of the Holy Ghost: "No man can say, the Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Ghost," says St. Paul to the Corinthians; "To one indeed by the Spirit is given the word of wisdom; and to another, the word of knowledge," to a third the grace of faith, to a fourth the gift of prophecy, to a fifth that of discernment of spirits, to a sixth, that of tongues; "But all these things one and the same Spirit worketh, dividing to every one according as He will."<sup>2</sup>

What were the Apostles and disciples of Christ before they received this light in the coming of the Holy Ghost? They were very ignorant and inexperienced. Christ, the Eternal Truth and Wisdom, who says of Himself, "I am the light of the world,"<sup>3</sup> spent three years teaching them; He spared no pains to instruct them daily in the divine mysteries and the great truths of faith, partly by the clearest explanations, and partly, that they might understand them better, by the most

Men are blind in that way in divine things, when the light of the Holy Ghost is wanting to them.

How ignorant the Apostles were before the coming of the Holy Ghost.

<sup>1</sup> Veni lumen cordium; sine tuo lumine nihil est in homine.

<sup>2</sup> Nemo potest dicere: Dominus Jesus, nisi in Spiritu Sancto. Alii quidem per Spiritum datur sermo sapientiæ; alii autem sermo scientiæ. Hæc autem omnia operatur unus atque idem Spiritus, dividens singulis, prout vult.—1. Cor. xii. 3, 8, 11.

<sup>3</sup> Ego sum lux mundi.—John viii. 12.

beautiful parables and similes; "And they understood none of these things," says St. Luke, "and this word was hid from them, and they understood not the things that were said."<sup>1</sup> If they learned anything, they forgot it immediately. He often spoke to them of His eternal kingdom that was to come; they thought He meant a temporal kingdom, and that He would reign like an earthly king or potentate; therefore James and John asked their mother to obtain for them the first places in His kingdom. He often preached to them of humility, and told them that they must become like little children if they wished to enter Heaven, and that he who wished to be the greatest among them, must become the servant of the others; He Himself gave them an example of the greatest humility, and yet, at the last Supper, when He was speaking to them of the sufferings that were in store for Him, "there was a strife amongst them," as St. Luke says, "which of them should seem to be greater."<sup>2</sup> He had often and clearly foretold to them that He would rise from the dead on the third day, and yet in spite of all the miracles they saw Him working, they did not believe Him. Nay, even after He had actually appeared to some of them and spoken with them, they were still doubtful whether it was really He. What was the cause of this blindness? The light of the Holy Ghost was wanting to them, as Christ Himself said to them: "I have yet many things to say to you; but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will teach you all truth."<sup>3</sup> And what wonderful wisdom the same Apostles, who were once so stupid, exhibited after they had received the Holy Ghost!

He who is not enlightened by the Spirit of God, does not understand supernatural things, no matter how well they are explained to him.

Without this divine light, my dear brethren, no natural knowledge is of any use to us; without it "the wisdom of this world is," as St. Paul says, "foolishness with God."<sup>4</sup> No matter how cleverly and clearly you explain divine, heavenly and supernatural truths to one who has not this light; he will be like the man born blind, who could form no idea of visible things. You may explain those supernatural beauties to him; but he will know as little of them, as the blind man does of color. Clever men give themselves no end of trouble in writing books, preach-

<sup>1</sup> Et ipsi nihil horum intellexerunt, et erat verbum istud absconditum ab eis, et non intellegebant, quae dicebantur.—Luke xvlii. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Facta est contentio inter eos, quis eorum videretur esse major.—Luke xxii. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Adhuc multa habeo vobis discere, sed non potestis portare modo. Cum autem venerit ille Spiritus veritatis, docebit vos omnem veritatem.—John xvi. 12, 13.

<sup>4</sup> Sapientia hujus mundi, stultitia est apud Deum.—I. Cor. iii. 19.

ers cry out from the pulpit on Sundays and holy-days, that according to the infallible word of God, all earthly things, all the pleasures, honors and riches of this world are but vanity, and deserve to be trampled under foot and to be despised as dross; that it is future, heavenly and eternal goods that are alone worthy of our love; that the human soul is almost infinitely more precious than the body; that sanctifying grace is so great a treasure, that he who has the least portion of it, should esteem himself happier than if he had all the kingdoms and principalities of the world in his possessions, etc. There are many people who read all this in books, and hear it in sermons; but there is hardly one in twenty who understands what it all means. The words are plain enough, and they reach the ear; but since the understanding is without light, those truths fail to touch the heart. There is many a one who, enlightened by his natural reason, thinks that those truths must be very great and sublime; but he knows nothing about them; he understands as little of them, as a blind man does of color.

It is useless to describe to him the fearful malice of offending God by mortal sin; useless to tell him that it is the greatest, nay, the only evil we have to dread in this life, because it is the only one that can make man really miserable; useless to tell him that a great king or emperor in the state of sin, who is seated on a throne, ruling over nations and enjoying every imaginable pleasure, is to be looked on as far more miserable and unhappy, than the poor beggar in the state of grace, who has to beg his bread from door to door; more unhappy than the prisoner in the state of grace, who is loaded with chains, and beaten and scourged, and forced to tug at the oar the whole day in the galleys, in hunger and thirst. For the king who has a mortal sin on his soul, is an object of hatred and execration to God, and an abject slave and thrall of the devil, and he has to expect the eternal pains of hell as his just punishment; so that he has no reason ever to sleep quietly, to rejoice or to laugh; but rather to weep and lament, and look on himself as the most miserable of men. A man who has not received the light of the Holy Spirit, will hear all this, and he will think to himself: Now if that is true, it is strange enough. Perhaps he may go so far as to admit the possibility of its being true. Nay, it may cause him to be somewhat afraid; but to understand this truth thoroughly, so as to be deterred from sin, and be induced to amend his life, that is an impossibility for him. He is like the blind man who cannot judge of color.

It is useless to describe to him the malice of sin.

Useless to preach the Gospel truths to him.

It is useless to cry out against certain abuses that are dangerous to the soul, and contrary to the Christian law. There is many a one addicted to them, who does not believe they are so bad as is said; the supernatural light is wanting to him; he is a blind man to whom you are speaking of color. Tell him that he is on the wrong road, and that he will be fatally deceived by the false rules and maxims of the vain world, which are opposed to the holy and humble Gospel of Jesus Christ as St. James says distinctly in his Epistle: "Know you not that the friendship of this world is the enemy of God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of this world, becometh an enemy of God."<sup>1</sup> Tell him that the manner of life which Jesus Christ, the Infinite Wisdom, embraced during His mortal career, is the best and safest in order to gain Heaven; and because He chose extreme humiliation, contempt, poverty and privation of all worldly goods and pleasures, and spent His life in trials and suffering, that therefore a sensible man, who is at liberty to do so, ought certainly to make choice of a life like His in preference to any other. For Our Lord has said, "Blessed are the poor," and he should esteem himself happier in poverty than in riches, happier in sufferings and trials than in pleasures and delights, happier in contempt and persecution than in honor and authority; because he can thus approach nearer to that perfect life which the great God chose for Himself, and can become more like his Head, Jesus Christ, resemblance to whom is a necessary condition of gaining Heaven. When he duly considers all this, he will say that it is likely true, that it is right enough that the servant should not be better than his master, and that a man may justly consider it an honor to resemble the King of Heaven; still he will not see the beauty and excellence of such a life; he finds it impossible to believe that happiness can be found therein, and he has not the least desire or inclination for a life of that kind. And why should he? The light of God's Spirit is wanting to him; he is a blind man to whom one talks of color.

Useless to speak of the happiness of the servants of God.

But if you were to say to him that an enlightened soul finds far more pleasure, peace and contentment, more joy and sweetness in mortifying itself severely, and in constantly chastising the flesh, than a sensual man finds in all the pleasures of the world; that there is more glory in extreme humiliation and contempt of self, than in the most heroic achievements and vic-

<sup>1</sup> Nescitis, quia amicitia hujus mundi inimica est Dei? Quicumque ergo voluerit amicus esse sæculi hujus, inimicus Dei constituitur.—James iv. 4.

tories of kings and emperors; that to be separated from the world, to be unknown to it, to be despised and laughed at by it, to be without any earthly joy or consolation, and to occupy one's self with God alone, nay, to be visited with many trials and torments for the sake of God and Heaven; that in this consists the true happiness of souls that are enlightened by God, a happiness that many saints have incessantly desired and longed for, and have rejoiced over when they attained it as if they had found a paradise on earth and a foretaste of the joys of Heaven: not a word of all this will he be able to understand. He will say that they are great and sublime spiritual thoughts, fit for the saints, but not for men like him. Talk to him for a hundred years of truths of that kind, and at the end he will be just as wise as before. Why so? The light is wanting to him; he is a blind man who cannot form the least idea of color, no matter how it is explained to him.

Come Holy Ghost, come light of hearts, take pity on this poor blind man! Give him a ray of Thy divine light, that he may begin to see! Oh how clearly he will then perceive all those truths, that he could not understand before! How astonished will he not be, more so than that blind man whose eyes were opened! Christian humility, he will say, before, thou appearedst to me as contemptible and despicable; now I see that thou mountest in thy beauty above the angelic thrones. Christian poverty of spirit, before thy very name terrified me; now I see that thou possessest all things; for thy real treasure is God Himself. Crosses, trials and difficulties, I formerly thought that you were not to be endured; now I see to my greatest consolation, what heavenly sweetness is concealed in you, when you are borne for God's sake with contentment and perfect resignation to the divine will. World, and everything that is in vogue or esteem in the world, formerly you attracted my blind heart altogether to you, and I thought that I must live as others and conform to your fashions; alas, what vanity, what treachery, what palpable falsehood! Away with the vain toys which kept me from my God, my greatest good, and prevented me from loving Him with all my heart.

The soul enlightened by God, understands all this very clearly.

And while I say this, the blind children of the world stand there and listen, but they do not understand; they wonder, but they cannot conceive how any one could find his happiness in such things. A soul enlightened by God could tell them that it is true however, but that they cannot see it, because the light is

But the blind children of the world do not.

wanting to them and they are stone blind in heavenly things. In olden times in Athens, a beautiful painting was once hung up in the market-place. Every one who passed by, looked at it, admired it, and went his way. At last one who was skilled in works of art came up, and seeing the painting, was so rapt in admiration, that he could hardly leave it. What a fool you are, said a passer-by; what do you see in the picture more than any one else who has looked at it? and yet you are not tired of gazing at it. "You would not ask me," said the other, without turning his eyes away for a moment, "if you had the same eyes that I have." <sup>1</sup> Any soul enlightened by God might say the same thing to the blind children of the world; you would not be astonished at my finding my greatest and only happiness in the service of God, in Christian humility, in poverty and mortification, if your eyes were like mine, and if you saw as I do, those divine truths. Come O Holy Ghost, I beg of Thee again, come and enlighten our miserable blindness, that we may see the things of God in their proper light! But why do I cry out to Thee? Why should I attribute our blindness to Thee? Thou art the light of all hearts, Thou dost nothing but enlighten, Thou offerest Thyself to all men who come into the world, that they may see; but they do not wish for Thy light. And such is the case, Christians; the only reason why so many are not enlightened by the Holy Ghost, is because they do not desire His light. And this I shall show briefly in the

### Second Part.

They do not wish to be enlightened by the Spirit of God.

I go into a house and find a man sitting there in a dark room, with the shutters closed, so that not the least ray of sunshine can reach him. I ask the people of the house what is the matter with him. Oh, they say, he has been like that for the last month. But has he done anything wrong? No; he has not done anything wrong. Well then, I say, let the poor fellow have a little comfort; open the windows, that he may have some light at least. We are willing to do so, they say, but he does not want the light; he went into that room of his own accord, and shut up the door and windows, and if we even bring him in a candle, he blows it out. Oh, I think, if that is the case, he is not right in his mind; nor have I any pity for him because he has his own way. My dear brethren, that is the manner in which many Christians act. The light of the Holy Ghost shines in all

<sup>1</sup> Non me interrogares si meos oculos haberes.

places; "He enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world," and is ready to instruct every one in good and to impel him to it; but many creep away and hide themselves in the darkness so as to avoid this light; they shut up all the windows and doors of their hearts, so that it cannot penetrate into them; they love their blindness and ignorance in things that concern God and the duties of a Christian life; they do not desire instruction or enlightenment; they reject all good inspiration; they say like those people in the Book of Job: "Who have said to God; Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways;"<sup>1</sup> we do not want to know anything of the way of penance and of the Cross, which Thou hast pointed out to every one, as the only way that leads to Heaven; we do not wish to hear of it; it is enough for us if we live respectably before the world.

Therefore they do not come to sermons, lest the preacher, according to his duty, should make known eternal truths to them, disturb their consciences and make them uneasy, and admonish them to perform the duties of their state of which they know nothing and wish to hear nothing. Thus they close their hearts to the light of the Holy Ghost; and even when they do come to sermons, it is without any preparation of the heart, and without a proper intention. They wish to see the people, but not to hear the salutary words spoken to them; or to hear what the preacher has to say, and how he says it, but without the least idea of trying to understand and to practise the truths he explains for the good of souls. If a ray of grace manages sometimes to penetrate their hearts, so that they have a clear knowledge of a certain truth, they blow it out at once; they seek all kinds of pretexts and excuses to persuade themselves that they are not bound to practise that truth; they go about from one to another explaining in a garbled and incomplete manner what it is that troubles them, until at last they find a confessor after their own heart, who makes little of their uneasiness, and lets them see that in his opinion they are not bound to do the good to which they were exhorted; and so they imagine that they are bound to nothing. But if they cannot find any argument against the truth brought forward, if they must acknowledge that this or that is unlawful and vicious, and that it should be therefore abolished, they refer to others what is said, and try to persuade themselves that they only are alluded to who are much worse than themselves in regard to that vice. In fine,

They therefore neglect or misuse the word of God in sermons.

<sup>1</sup> Qui dixerunt Deo : Recede a nobis, et scientiam viarum tuarum nolumus.—Job *xxi.* 14.

if they cannot escape the clear light that is shining on them they take it in at the window and let it out at the door; they have heard the truth and acknowledged it, but that is all, they remain as they were; they do not practise what they have learned, or else they defer it to a time which never comes. Thus the light of the Holy Ghost has shone on them in vain; they remain in their former blindness and darkness.

Or they  
drive away  
the Spirit of  
God by the  
spirit of the  
world, or  
by the flesh.

There are others who receive the divine light and instruction and take it to heart; but they act like one who lights a candle and goes about with it in broad daylight; it is not of the least use to him, for the greater light completely overpowers the smaller one. Such is the conduct of those who wish to be good and pious and to live according to the divine inspirations; but at the same time to unite the spirit of the world or the flesh with the Holy Ghost. They want to divide their hearts between God and the world; in certain things which they think respectable, they are ready to obey God and to observe His law; in certain other things of which they have a different opinion, they prefer to conform to the customs and maxims of the vain world; they do not wish to put off the old man, but to put on the new man over the old, as they put on one coat over another. Like the Apostle, they might say, "We do groan being burthened; because we would not be unclothed, but clothed upon."<sup>1</sup> Their idea is to keep their old habits and still get new grace from Heaven. In a word, they try to be earthly and heavenly, vain and humble at the same time. But they can never succeed. Just as they cannot have two souls in their bodies, so also they cannot have two different spirits ruling together in their souls. The idol Dagon, as we read in the Old Testament, could not stand in the presence of the ark of God; neither can the Holy Spirit of God bear the presence of the vain spirit of the flesh or of the world. "Let the Ark of the Testament enter into you," says St. Augustine, "and throw down the idol Dagon;"<sup>2</sup> if you wish the Holy Ghost to enter into your soul, you must expel the spirit of the world. As long as the false laws of the perverse world are the rule and guide of your conduct, the light of the Holy Ghost cannot shine on your soul, as our Lord expressly says to His Apostles: "I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete. . . the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive."<sup>3</sup> He who lives according to the world

<sup>1</sup> *In gemisimus gravati, eo quod nolumus exspoliari, sed supervestiri.*—II. Cor. v. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Intret in te arca Testamenti, et ruat Dagon.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ego rogabo Patrem, et alium Paracletum dabit vobis. . . Spiritus veritatis quem mundus non potest accipere.*—John xiv. 16-17.

and its perverse usages cannot receive this Spirit; so that if you remain attached to the world, you are like one who carries about a lighted candle in broad daylight, and who is of course not at all helped by so doing.

“The Spirit breatheth where he will,” said Christ to Nicodemus. Now there are very many who wish the Holy Ghost to come and enlighten them, but in a way to please themselves; not as the Holy Spirit Himself wishes. If His light comes with regard to a truth that pleases them, they readily open their hearts to receive it; but if the truth is opposed to their evil inclinations, they shut all the doors and windows of their hearts against it, and like owls, fly the light. Is it not true that many a one comes to church to hear a sermon, with these, or similar thoughts: I will do all that God tells me by the voice of the preacher, as long as he does not touch on a certain point; for in that I am determined not to listen to him. He need not say anything to me of Christian humility, or try to persuade me that I must give way to another and be the first to ask pardon and to propose a reconciliation. No; I cannot do that; it is against my nature. The preacher, thinks another, is talking about poverty of spirit, and he says that I must withdraw my affections from money, give alms liberally and not accept bribes; but he will never persuade me to that; I am in want of money; priests do not know anything about it, nor what it costs to bring up a family decently. It is useless, says a third, to tell me that I must give up going to that house, and avoid that occasion or break off that intimacy; it cannot be done; I am in need of those people. It is all right, thinks a fourth, to mortify my eyes now and then, as well as my ears and other senses; but no one need try to induce me to mortify myself in such a way as to give people cause to talk of me. The preacher should not speak of this or that fashion, says a fifth; and I will not change my mode of dress, no matter what he says; it is the fashion, and I must be as good as others in that respect. I know that by changing in this matter, I could give a good example to others and publicly advocate the glory of God; but I do not wish to be the first to combat an abuse. If any one is scandalized at seeing me dressed as I am, he need not look at me. Thus there is hardly any one, no matter how pious he may be, who does not refuse to give up some pet point which has captivated his natural inclinations; so that he does

Most people receive the light of the Holy Ghost but not in everything.

not give his whole heart to the Holy Ghost, but blows out His light when he sees it coming, and therefore must remain in the dark; because the Spirit of God will not be content with a part; He must have the whole heart, or none of it; "It filled the whole house where they were sitting,"<sup>1</sup> says St. Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, describing the coming of the Holy Ghost.

**Conclusion  
and resolution  
to open  
the heart  
fully to the  
Holy Ghost.**

Thus, O Holy Ghost, God of truth, Thou shinest on and enlightenest every man that cometh into the world; and yet the souls of most men are in darkness, because they neither desire nor are willing to accept Thy light: "Men loved darkness rather than the light"! As for me, I cannot deny that Thou hast hitherto most generously enlightened me. Oh how much good I have learned, and how many occasions I have had to practise it! But I must also confess with sincere sorrow that I have lived so little in accordance with Thy light, that I have not followed Thy inspirations, nay that I have deliberately extinguished Thy light, through the influence of bad habits, or fear of difficulties that were only imaginary, through inordinate and blind love of creatures, through human respect and fear of what people might say. O woe to me if, after I had rejected Thee so often, Thou hadst kept Thy light from me and left me in darkness! I must acknowledge that hadst Thou done so, I should not have reason to complain of being treated unjustly. I should have richly deserved it. But O Spirit of meekness and love, deal not with me according to my deserts! Behold my heart is open to Thy divine light, ready to receive without exception all the truths Thou wilt teach me, and to practise them diligently! If my weak nature now and then contradicts Thy inspirations, on account of difficulties; do Thou, O Spirit of strength, drive on my obstinate and lazy will; leave me no rest until I have fulfilled Thy will in all things as far as it shall be made known to me; and grant that I may constantly walk in that way which by Thy light, will alone lead me where I can praise the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost forever. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Replevit totam domum, ubi erant sedentes.—Acts ii. 2.

**FORTY-THIRD SERMON.**

**ON REJECTING THE DIVINE INSPIRATIONS.**

**Subject.**

It is a very dangerous thing not to obey and follow the divine inspirations; for to reject and disregard even one divine inspiration may be the occasion of eternal ruin.—*Preached on the feast of St. Andrew, Apostle.*

**Text.**

*At illi continuo relictis retibus, secuti sunt eum.*—Matth. iv. 20.  
“And they immediately leaving their nets, followed him.”

**Introduction.**

Happy fishermen, who, being called by Christ, at once obeyed and followed Him! It was a twofold happiness for them; for, in the first place, they had to thank the special favor and affection with which Christ regarded them, for being called by Him without any merit of their own, and in preference to so many others, to be His Apostles. Again, that they obeyed the call so readily, and left their nets and followed Him, was due to a special efficacious grace, and also to their own co-operation; if this latter had been wanting, the former would not have helped them to attain that great happiness. For, had they not immediately obeyed the call of Christ, in all probability the grace would never have been offered them a second time, and they would have fared like the young man in the Gospel of St. Mark, of whom we read that Jesus cast an eye of favor on him too: “And Jesus looking on him, loved him, and said to him: One thing is wanting unto thee; go, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven; and come, follow me.”<sup>1</sup> But the young man was fond of his riches and could not make up his mind to part with them, so he went away sorrowful: “Who, being struck sad at that saying, went away sorrowful.”<sup>2</sup> Nor did he get another call, and so probably he was excluded from Heaven as Christ appears to indicate by what He said immediately after to His Apostles. “How hardly shall they that have riches enter

<sup>1</sup> *Jesus autem, intuitus eum, dilexit eum, et dixit ei. Unum tibi deest: vade, quaecumque habes vende, et da pauperibus, et habebis thesaurum in caelo, et veni, sequere me.*—Mark x. 21.

<sup>2</sup> *Qui contristatus in verbo, abiit mœrens.*—*Ibid.* 22.

into the kingdom of God.”<sup>1</sup> My dear brethren, God still cries out with an interior voice to the hearts of men and invites them to follow Him. Happy they who, like Peter and Andrew, at once obey the call! But on the other hand, how unfortunate they who reject the invitation and are deaf to the call! Nor do I speak now merely of the call to the true faith, or to the religious state; but of each and every divine inspiration by which we are inwardly impelled to do good or to avoid evil according to the divine will. Ah Christians, be careful of graces of that kind. See that you never deliberately reject them. And why? Because by rejecting them, you may cause your eternal ruin, as I now mean to prove.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*It is a very dangerous thing not to obey and follow the divine inspirations; for to reject and disregard even one divine inspiration may be the occasion of eternal ruin. Such is the whole subject.*

Christ Jesus, who with the words, “Follow me,” caused Peter and Andrew to come after Thee, give us all Thy powerful grace, that we may always follow Thy inspirations. This grace we ask of Thee through the merits of Mary and our holy angels guardian.

How and  
whence the  
divine in-  
spirations  
come.

An inspiration of God is nothing more than a sudden, unexpected enlightenment of the understanding, by which one knows that he can do something pleasing and grateful to his God, if he now performs or leaves undone a certain thing. And it is at the same time an impulse given to the will, by which one inwardly feels himself urged to do or to omit that thing. For instance; a man is in the state of sin, or is given to a certain vicious habit; a thought suddenly strikes him which disquiets and disturbs him. Oh, he thinks, it is time for me to change. I must go and confess my sins; I must give up that bad habit; I must leave the house in which I have committed so many sins, break off all connection with that person who has been a stumbling-block to me, restore what I have unjustly acquired, give up the habit of excessive drinking which has caused me so much harm, etc. Another has been hitherto very careless and cold in the service of God, and has been living according to the usages of the vain world; he too gets a sudden thought; life, he thinks, cannot go on forever like this, nor can this mode of living end well, for it certainly is not the narrow way of the Cross that leads to Heaven.

<sup>1</sup> Quam difficile, qui pecunias habent, in regnum Dei introibunt.—Mark x. 23.

I must make a general confession of my whole life, and live better in future. For the sake of God I will give up those luxurious habits which are so inconsistent with Christian modesty and humility. I will get up earlier in the morning and hear Mass every day; I will go to Confession and Communion every fortnight; I will be regular in hearing sermons in order that I may be impelled to do good; I will look more carefully after my children, etc. One who is still unmarried gets the idea of leaving this wretched world and serving God in the religious life; a thought that remains in his mind for a long time after he has duly pondered on it. I see a poor man, and am suddenly reminded of the duties of mercy and charity, and feel an impulse to give him an alms. I am sitting at table eating something I am very fond of, when I feel a sudden inclination to mortify myself and eat something else. I am very thirsty and am about to drink, when the thought occurs to me that I should wait a few minutes longer and mortify myself for God's sake. That was what David did once when he was very thirsty; he was fighting against the Philistines one very warm day, and overcome by the heat he cried out, "O that some man would give me a drink of the water out of the cistern that is in Bethlehem by the gate."<sup>1</sup> Three of his bravest soldiers hearing him express this wish, burst through the enemy's ranks and brought their king a draught of cool water. When David was about to drink, he hesitated for a moment, and, with the greatest self-denial, poured out the water on the ground without tasting it, and offered it to the Lord in spite of the thirst that oppressed him; "but he would not drink but offered it to the Lord."<sup>2</sup> I am lying in bed in the morning and intend to enjoy another hour of sweet sleep, when the thought strikes me that I ought to get up and give that hour to God. I am invited to meet pleasant company, when I recollect that it might be better for me to remain away so as to avoid the danger of sin. If I am actually in company and uncharitable conversation is being carried on, I am just on the point of joining in it, when something warns me to hold my tongue. I am in a passion and am about to revile the person who has vexed me, when I suddenly remember that such conduct is contrary to Christian meekness and charity. The same thought occurs to me when I am about to contradict others, etc. Curiosity drives

<sup>1</sup> O si quis mihi daret potum aquæ de cisterna, quæ est in Bethlehem juxta portam.—II. Kings xxiii. 15.

<sup>2</sup> At ille noluit bibere, sed libavit eam Domino.—Ibid. 16.

me to the window to find out the meaning of the noise I hear in the street, when I am on the point of going, something tells me that it would be better to remain where I am and mortify my curiosity for God's sake. In these and similar circumstances, when I feel an impulse to do something good and pleasing to God, or to avoid something evil and dangerous, I may, generally speaking, conclude that these impulses are so many inspirations from God. They come in two ways; either inwardly from God who is speaking immediately to the heart, or from our guardian angels who in the same way enlighten the understanding and excite the will; or else they come outwardly from hearing sermons, reading spiritual books and the Lives of the Saints, getting wholesome advice from one's confessor or friends, seeing the good example of others, being frightened at the unexpected death of a friend, or suffering misfortune or calamity, crosses or trials, by which many are induced to enter into themselves, to avoid evil and to do good.

To neglect such inspirations, may be the cause of eternal damnation; because thereby the good God is contemned.

Now, my dear brethren, it is a most dangerous thing to reject those inspirations and to refuse to follow them, no matter how they come; and deliberately to reject and despise a single inspiration, especially when it is clearly recognized as coming from God, may be the just cause and first and chief reason of an unhappy death and eternal damnation. Why so? First, because it implies a shameless contempt of the good God. Nothing causes more chagrin to a noble, generous and well-meaning man, than to see that people despise his benefits, and make little of his proffered favors; for it is quite evident that they who do so, have little respect for their benefactor himself. One who has any nobility of sentiment would rather be hated than despised; for hatred comes from the fear that the other has of being injured, or else from the desire of being revenged for some wrong; while he who is the object of contempt is simply looked down upon and scorned. It is often looked on as an honor to be feared; but to be despised is always considered an insult. Now, if men are so sensitive on this point, that they cannot bear themselves or their gifts to be scorned by others, how grievously must not the Almighty feel Himself insulted when a miserable worm of the earth treats Him with contempt, although He is jealous of His honor and glory? Now, good inspirations are graces that God offers to men, knocking at the door of their hearts, calling them and inviting them in a friendly manner either to abstain from evil, to avoid the present danger of sin, to begin to lead

better lives and thus to save their souls from hell; or else to do good, to advance in virtue and perfection, and thus to increase their merits and have a greater reward in Heaven. They are graces, and special graces too, which God is not bound to give to any one; graces that He does not offer to many thousands, but which He gives through special favor and mercy, in certain circumstances, to whom, when, how and where He wills. Therefore, to turn a deaf ear to those inspirations, to refuse to receive them, to reject them, or not to obey them, is equivalent to saying, Away with Thy graces, O God; I do not want them; I do not desire them; I know that Thou offerest them to me because Thou desirest to give me a special mark of Thy love; yet I will not have them; keep them for Thyself; I will not do as Thou wishest me. O my Lord and my God, says the royal Prophet, "Thou art terrible, and who shall resist Thee?"<sup>1</sup> No potentate of earth, no power of Heaven, no fury of hell can do it. But there is one thing that can resist the Almighty; and what is that? "The human heart," says Lorinus, writing of the seventy-fifth Psalm, "resists God, who touches it," with His divine inspirations when it rejects them and refuses to obey them.

And has not the sovereign Lord, who means so well to us, just reason to be angry at being treated in such a manner? Who ever heard of servants or subjects rejecting with contempt the favors offered them by their master or their king? If the master calls his servants, or merely gives them a sign, they are at once all eagerness to know what his wishes are and to fulfil them; but the great Monarch of Heaven, whose will is immutable, whose designs are inscrutable, whose decrees are infinitely wise and provident, who is all-powerful in accomplishing His will, and who is absolutely independent of the service of any creature, calls, invites, begs and entreats a mere mortal to do something for that mortal's own greater good and eternal salvation, and He cannot find a hearing! A wretched creature dares to turn his back on Him, and say, I do not wish to do what Thou now askest of me: Thou canst call and invite me as long as Thou wilt, I refuse to do in those circumstances what I know to be Thy will. Certainly no earthly master is treated with such contempt. It is God alone who is despised and insulted in that way by men. You can see now, my dear brethren, whether despising or rejecting the divine inspirations, is not a just reason why God, who is not in want of His creatures, should abandon the daring mortal

And He is  
justly in-  
censed  
thereat.

<sup>1</sup> Tu terribilis es, et quis resistet tibi?—Ps. lxxv. 8.

who thus insults Him, and allow him to die an unhappy death.

Therefore  
God with-  
holds other  
graces also.

Again, although it is not always sinful in itself to reject the divine inspirations, since they are not commandments of God, and therefore disobedience to them cannot be the immediate cause of an unhappy death; yet it can prepare the way for future sins and for final impenitence, just as deliberate venial sins do; because as a punishment for despising His grace, God may withdraw the graces He had in store as a reward for co-operating with those already given, so that thus a man becomes unable to fight against temptation and falls into mortal sin. Let no one say then, that it is no great harm to reject an inspiration now and then, since those inspirations do not bind under sin. True, they do not bind under sin; but what can you expect if you despise the grace which you know very well came from God, and if you refuse to do the service He expects from you?

Shown by  
anilles.

A traveller does no wrong by lying down to rest under the shade of a tree; but, he thinks, if I remain here I will not get on towards the end of my journey before night. Still a second thought occurs to him, it is no harm for me to rest awhile; it will be time enough for me to continue my journey when I am quite rested. Meanwhile the day is declining and the evening coming on, so that when he eventually prosecutes his journey, what are the consequences? It is quite dark, he has no light to guide him, and he is in imminent danger of losing his way, or of being attacked by robbers or devoured by wild beasts. Such may be the consequences of his laziness, although he was under no obligation to go on. The sailor who is about to cross the ocean, does no wrong by not taking immediate advantage of a favorable wind that happens to be blowing. But what may follow from the delay? That the wind may cease to be favorable, so that he will not be able to set sail, or that he will be blown about by contrary winds and dashed on the rocks and wrecked. The pearl-oyster is not bound to open its shell in the morning to receive the dew-drop. But if it remains closed, what follows? It will be unfruitful, because it cannot form the precious pearl that it could have formed by receiving the dew-drop. What is a divine inspiration, my dear brethren? It is a heavenly dew, by which God intends forming in your soul, O man, a costly pearl of virtue. It is a favorable wind that blows you along gently over the dangerous sea of this world, and brings you safe to the harbor of eternal glory. It is the light of the Sun of justice which shines on your soul, so that you may walk

more securely on the way of salvation and avoid mortal sin. If you do not accept this light and it goes out, if you do not profit by the favorable wind, if you close your heart against the heavenly dew, it is true you do not always commit a sin thereby, but what may be the consequences? Oh what fearful loss and injury to your soul! What lamentable falls in temptations! And what a deplorable shipwreck at the end!

Consider the case of the Apostle St. Thomas; to deny that Jesus Christ was really risen from the dead, after He who is the infallible Truth and Wisdom had so often and emphatically foretold it, is a manifest sin of unbelief; to deny it in presence of the other Apostles who assert that they have seen the Lord and spoken with Him, is a sin of pride and obstinacy; to protest deliberately that he will not believe it unless he sees Christ and puts his finger in His wounds, is a sin of presumption; to remain in that unbelief for a whole week in spite of what the other Apostles and the holy women said to him to convince him of the truth of the resurrection, is a fearful sin of stubbornness and obduracy. Such was the abyss into which an Apostle of Christ so lamentably fell. What was the cause of his fall? His having rejected one single divine inspiration by absenting himself from the society of the other Apostles when Christ appeared to them; "Now, Thomas, one of the twelve, who is called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came."<sup>1</sup> If he had not separated himself from the holy company, if he had obeyed the good inspiration, he would have had the same happiness as the other Apostles, that of seeing Christ in person, and would have been saved from all those sins, which afterwards cost him such bitter tears of sorrow and repentance.

O Christian, you are often aware of a divine inspiration urging you to hear Mass on a week-day when you have time, or to hear a sermon or attend public devotions on a Sunday or a holy-day; but through fear of the slight mortification and difficulty there is in obeying it, or because the weather is too cold, or too warm, or too damp, or because you persuade yourself you have something to do at home, although you could easily put it off to some other time, or because you are engaged in some unnecessary conversation for the sake of pleasing men, or simply because you are too lazy, you put the thought out of your head and stay at home. You are often aware of a good inspiration urging you to

By the fall of the Apostle, St. Thomas.

They who reject the divine inspirations, must bear a similar fall.

<sup>1</sup> Thomas autem unus ex duodecim, qui dicitur Didymus, non erat cum eis quando venit Jesus.—John xx. 24.

go to Confession and Communion on a Sunday or feast-day, so as to gain an indulgence; but the tempter puts all kinds of difficulties in your way, and you reject the thought. What is the result of your doing so? True, you do not commit a sin by not hearing Mass, or going to the devotion, or the sermon, or by not confessing or communicating; nor did St. Thomas sin when he absented himself from the common prayer of the other Apostles; but what will be the result of your rejecting the inspiration? You deliberately deprive yourself of the light and knowledge that God had prepared for you if you had heard the sermon, in which He would have shown you the deformity of this or that vice, so that you might repent of it, or avoid it, or else would have encouraged you to practise some virtue or good work; you deliberately deprive yourself of the special grace and help which He had determined to give you in the Holy Mass, or in Confession and Communion, or in the public devotion, in order to strengthen you against temptations and dangers of sin. And what then? Alas, the first occasion you meet with, the first temptation that assails you, you will fall miserably into sin! One sin will bring on another, until the habit of sin becomes inveterate, after that the conscience grows callous, final impenitence follows, and what can be the end of it all but an unhappy death? See, that is what comes of rejecting deliberately the divine inspirations.

Because they thus destroy the order of the graces that God had prepared for them.

To make this still clearer, mark, my dear brethren, what theologians, following St. Augustine and St. Thomas, the Angel of the Schools, teach of predestinaton or the selection of those who are destined for eternal happiness; they say that, if we consider it as a special favor and benefit conferred on men by God, it consists in the preparation and determination of a chain, as it were, of graces with which God has foreseen that a certain individual will do good and persevere in the state of grace to the end of his life. Now, the All-wise and most just God has not decreed to give these graces in order to each one unconditionally; for to many of them He has attached a certain condition, namely, that the individual to whom a grace is given in certain circumstances, corresponds with it; if that condition is fulfilled, He will give other graces with which that individual will be enabled to work out his salvation; if it is not fulfilled, if the first grace is despised and rejected, then God will withhold the other special graces that He had determined to give one after the other, until the death of that individual. If you take a link out of the centre of a chain, you break the chain so that it no longer hangs to-

gether; in the same way it may happen that if one grace offered by God is rejected, the whole chain of graces falls to pieces. Since, therefore, no man can know what are the inscrutable decrees of God in his regard, and what order of graces is determined for him, it follows necessarily that it is a most dangerous thing to reject even one divine inspiration, especially when one clearly recognizes it as such; because the consequence of rejecting it may be eternal damnation. In that sense what the holy Fathers say is true, namely, that our salvation, or our damnation depends on a very little. A single good inspiration that we receive and obey with a great amount of self-denial, may be the occasion of our salvation and future happiness in Heaven; a single good inspiration that we clearly acknowledge as such, but despise and reject, may be the beginning of a vicious life and the occasion of our eternal damnation.

That was the reason why our Lord wept so bitterly when, looking on the city of Jerusalem, He predicted its temporal and eternal destruction: "And when he drew near," says St. Luke, "seeing the city, he wept over it, saying: if thou also hadst known, and that in this thy day, the things that are to thy peace; but now, . . . 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; and beat thee flat to the ground, and thy children who are in thee, and they shall not leave in thee a stone upon a stone." Why? "Because thou hast not known the time of thy visitation."<sup>1</sup> That, too, was the reason why our Lord gave such little hope of salvation for that young man, whom, as we have seen in the beginning of the sermon, He invited to sell all he had and to follow Him, but who rejected the invitation and went away sorrowful. Although he had observed all the commandments of God from his youth upwards, yet it appears that he was lost, because our Lord said immediately after, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God."<sup>2</sup>

As appears  
from Sacred  
Scripture.

Menochius writes of another young man, named John, who was called by divine inspiration to enter the Cistercian order, and had actually made up his mind to do so; but after a time his zeal grew cold, and he abandoned the idea of becoming a

Shown by  
an example.

<sup>1</sup> Ut appropinquabit, videns civitatem flevit super illam, dicens: 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, et ad terram prosternerent te, et filios tuos, qui in te sunt, et non relinquent in te lapidem super lapidem, eo quod non cognoveris tempus visitationis tuæ.—Luke xix. 41-44.

<sup>2</sup> Quam difficile, qui pecunias habent, in regnum Dei introibunt.—Mark x. 23.

religious. I can save my soul in the world, he thought, and like so many others, lead a good and holy life and thus gain Heaven. Acting on this idea, he redoubled instead of lessening his works of devotion, and set out on a pilgrimage to the shrine of the Apostle, St. James, at Campostella, in order to obtain the grace of perseverance in piety. After he had finished his devotions at the shrine, he saw in a vision Christ our Lord, accompanied by St. Peter and St. James, holding in His hand an exceedingly beautiful book in which John's name was written with golden letters. As we may readily imagine, John was delighted at seeing his name written in the Book of Life; but to his great alarm he heard our Lord say to St. Peter, "Blot his name out of my Book, because he has not been faithful to his resolution." "I beg of Thee, O Lord," said St. James, "spare him because he is a pilgrim of mine;" "he will be obedient to Thy inspiration and I will answer for him. The vision then vanished, and John full of fear and anxiety, at once entered the holy order to which God had called him, and lived therein a holy life. Mark this example, my dear brethren; to have obeyed the inspiration calling him to religion, meant for that young man the keeping his name in the Book of Life; while not to have obeyed it meant having his name blotted out of that Book, and losing his soul consequently. It is a well-known fact in the life of the wonderful Saint Teresa, that Christ once showed her the place that was appointed for her amongst the demons in hell, if she had not obeyed a certain inspiration she received in her youth, urging her to give up a certain vanity, an act of renouncement that she was encouraged to perform by a salutary thought that at the time made a vivid impression on her.

Prayer for  
pardon for  
faults of  
this kind,  
and resolu-  
tion of  
amend-  
ment.

The conclusion of all this is evident; to reject and despise a divine inspiration, once we recognize it as such, may justly be the cause of an unhappy death and the eternal damnation that must follow. Alas, my Lord and my God, since that is so, woe to me! What will become of me, who have so often put away out of my mind Thy salutary inspirations, as soon as I noticed them, and have so often neglected to hearken to Thy invitations, although I recognized them well enough? How often has not a clear light been given to me that I might see the danger of certain attachments and renounce them, that I might avoid that dangerous company, abandon that worldly vanity, reform that

<sup>1</sup> Dele nomen ejus de libro meo, quoniam resiliit a proposito suo. — Menoch. miscell., part 3, § 317.

<sup>2</sup> Obsecro Domine, parce illi quia peregrinus meus est, ego fide jussor illius sum

abuse, renounce gambling, calm my uneasy conscience by a general confession, live more in conformity with Thy humble, and holy Gospel, receive the sacraments more frequently, be more regular in hearing Thy word in sermons? but my rebellious will has always resisted Thy fatherly invitations. How often have I not received inspirations urging me to moderate my love of sleep, and to rise earlier in the morning, to make a better use of the precious time given me for the sole purpose of working out my salvation, to turn away my eyes from dangerous objects, to mortify my sensuality and the desires of the flesh, to moderate my anger, to restrain my talkative and uncharitable tongue in company, to be more generous to the poor and needy, to practise the works of Christian charity when the opportunity was given, and to bear patiently for Thy sake the difficulties of my state of life, and the trials and crosses Thou hast sent me? And yet I have not done so. I have despised and neglected all those graces; which, if I had followed, since they came from Thy special favor to me, oh, what great merits I might have gained for my soul, how many beautiful virtues I might have acquired, how many eternal joys I might have heaped up in Heaven, which are now irretrievably lost to me. Woe to me, if Thou wilt hereafter reproach me with this neglect! What will then become of me? How can I hope to obtain the grace of perseverance, which I cannot merit by any good work, if during my life I have rejected and despised so many graces that thou hast offered me with such goodness? What am I to do? Must I despair of my salvation? No; O Lord, I beg of Thee spare me, do not blot my name out of the Book of Life, although I deserve that punishment; have mercy on my poor soul! I did not know that it was such a dangerous thing to reject Thy inspirations; now that I know better, I will amend my conduct in this respect; I will be more attentive in listening to and obeying Thy calls, and I will not allow one of them to escape me without profiting by it. Thou art my sovereign Lord and God, and I am Thy lowliest servant depending on Thee for everything. It is for Thee to command, and for me to obey Thee in all things. "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth."<sup>1</sup> Speak to my heart, and by Thy holy inspirations make me to know Thy will; but give me at the same time Thy powerful grace, that I may fulfil Thy will and pleasure, and thus make sure of living a Christian life, dying a happy death, and enjoying eternal happiness with Thee in Heaven. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Loquere, Domine, quia audit servus tuus.—I. Kings iii. 10.

**FORTY-FOURTH SERMON.**

**ON THOSE WHO REFUSE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE DIVINE  
INSPIRATIONS.**

**Subject.**

Many, especially tepid Christians, generally reject good thoughts with contempt, because they are unwilling to recognize them as divine inspirations; others, who are indiscreetly pious, look on all their apparently good thoughts as divine inspirations; both are wrong.—*Preached on the feast of the Epiphany.*

**Text.**

*Vidimus enim stellam ejus in oriente, et venimus adorare eum.*  
—Matth. ii. 2.

“For we have seen his star in the East, and are come to adore him.”

**Introduction.**

But were these three wise kings the only persons who saw that extraordinary star in the East? No; that is hardly likely; for since the star shone brightly in the heavens, there can be no doubt that others saw and admired it. Nor is it less certain that the three wise men were not the only ones in their country who looked on the star as a sure sign that the Saviour of the world was born. Why then were those three the only ones who came to Bethlehem? Why did not a great many people accompany them in order to see their Saviour and pay Him due homage? They certainly would have received great graces from Jesus if they had done so. Doubtless if they had clearly known who the great Lord was who was inviting them by the star, many of them would have undertaken the journey; but it was with them, as it often is nowadays with us in similar circumstances. Most of them did not believe that the star was a sign of the birth of the Redeemer; others, although they had been told the meaning of the sign by the wise men, were unwilling to expose themselves to the danger of being deceived by what they considered a doubtful sign, and so they would not leave their homes to undertake such a long and uncertain journey in the winter season. The three kings alone, with their attendants, acknowledged the truth fully, and despising all the difficulties that might lie in their way, de-

terminated on setting out in search of the Saviour, whose birth was clearly indicated to them by the star, no matter in what part of the world He might be. Thus they alone had the rare happiness of seeing Him: "We have seen His star," they said, "and are come to adore Him." My dear brethren, a divine star shines on us from Heaven, as often as God urges us to do good by the inward inspirations He gives us; would that we were always like the three kings, ready to follow that star! What great treasures of grace would then be ours! But, generally speaking, we are like the people in the East, we pay little attention to those inspirations, and through fear of the slight difficulty we might find in doing the good to which they urge us, we reject them or refuse to believe in them. I have already explained to you that this is a most dangerous proceeding, because the neglect of a single divine inspiration may be the cause of an unhappy death and eternal damnation. The next important thing to know, is how to find out when we must look on good thoughts as divine inspirations. The apparent doubt that might arise on this point is occasioned by a great mistake on the part of two different classes of men.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*The first, who are the most numerous, especially amongst tepid Christians, generally reject good thoughts with contempt, because they are unwilling to recognize them as divine inspirations. The others, who endeavor to be pious, but who are indiscreet, are too ready to obey, because they look on all their apparently good thoughts as divine inspirations. Both are wrong; but the fault of the former is much more grievous and inexcusable than that of the latter. Both these faults will form the subject of the present instruction. The conclusion for the former will be, that by thus rejecting the divine inspirations, they place themselves in danger of an unhappy death and eternal damnation.*

But, O dear Saviour, do Thou preserve us all from such a misfortune, and let the star of Thy grace shine on us; this we beg of Thee through the merits of Mary and our holy angels guardian, that we may always hearken to Thy voice and follow Thy star.

First, then, there are many who reject and despise good inspirations because they neither recognize nor wish to recognize them as stars of grace shining from Heaven and sent by the good God; when, as we have seen in the last sermon, they are aware of an inward impulse to do this or that good work, to go to

Many do not wish to recognize good thoughts as divine inspirations.

## 82 *Refusing to acknowledge Divine Inspirations.*

public devotions or to hear a sermon, to keep away from that house or that company, to restrain their anger, to abstain from uncharitable conversation, to give alms to the poor, to renounce that worldly vanity, to mortify themselves in this or that particular, etc. Oh, they think, how do we know where those thoughts come from? How can we tell whether they are from God or some other source? He who is too ready to believe may easily be deceived. The matter must be well looked into first. I must see whether it suits me, my disposition, and my position in life, to do such a thing; otherwise, I should have enough to do to follow every fancy I get. I cannot be certain that it is an inspiration from God, etc. Thus all inspirations, without distinction are immediately rejected, no matter how the conscience objects to the proceeding.

That comes from self-love and fear of difficulties.

This is a deceit practised by self-love, which comes either from fear of the difficulty and mortification in following the good inspiration, or from human respect, which must be overcome, in order to do the good or to avoid the evil proposed, or else it arises from sensuality and love of ease, which would be interfered with by hearkening to the good inspiration. This self-love and fear of difficulties goes so far with some, that they are afraid to mention their doubts to their confessor or others, who know more about the matter than themselves, and they dread asking advice lest they should be told that the inspiration comes from God, and so be obliged to do something opposed to their natural inclinations. If they are exhorted in the confessional or in a sermon to do something which is against their will, instead of looking on that exhortation as a divine inspiration, they act like the friends and sons-in-law of Lot in Sodom, when the latter warned them to leave the doomed city: "So Lot went out," says the Holy Scripture, "and spoke to his sons-in-law, that were to have his daughters, and said: Arise, get you out of this place, because the Lord will destroy this city."<sup>1</sup> And what did they do? They began to laugh at him and treated the whole matter as a joke: "And he seemed to them to speak, as it were, in jest."<sup>2</sup> In the same way, I say those Christians act who have a certain wish and desire to serve God and save their souls; but they wish to serve Him in a manner suitable to their own tastes and inclinations, and not as He tells them that He wishes to

<sup>1</sup> Egressus itaque Lot, locutus est ad generos suos, qui accepturi erant filias ejus, et dixit: Surgite, egredimini de loco isto: quia delebit Dominus civitatem hanc.—Gen. xix. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Et visus est eis quasi ludens loqui.—Ibid.

be served so that they may save their souls; they are unwilling to do violence to their evil inclinations, in order to gain Heaven, although Jesus Christ says that it is to be gained only by great labor and mortification: "The kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away."<sup>1</sup> If they hear a voice from Heaven speaking by the mouth of a preacher or their confessor, advising and warning them to change their mode of life, to renounce that custom which is unbecoming to a good Christian, etc., they look upon it in the light of a jest; they say it is the mere fancy and frightened imagination of the priests, who know a good deal about their Breviary, but very little about the way in which men of the world have to live; and it would be a fine to-do if people had to conform in every little thing to the advice of the priests. Afterwards when they go into the company of kindred spirits, they laugh at the whole affair, and try to quiet their consciences by the approval of others.

But I hope that at the end of their lives they will not fare like the sons-in-law of Lot, who, after they had laughed at his friendly warning, were suddenly consumed by fire from Heaven, and hurled from temporal into eternal fire. At all events, it is very dangerous thus to despise the good inspirations and graces that God sends in that manner, and to pay no attention to them; the good inspirations and graces, I say, that God sends; because thoughts of that kind urging to good can, generally speaking, come from no other source but God. How so? Mark well what I am now about to say, my dear brethren. The thoughts and movements of our minds come from three sources; either from our own nature, or from the devil and his followers, or from God by means of the holy angels guardian.

And is very dangerous to the soul.

Now I ask you in the first place; is it likely that movements and thoughts which tend to keep you away from evil, to exhort you to good, and urge you to restrain an evil inclination, to mortify sensuality and the desires of the flesh, to avoid worldly vanity, to fly the dangerous occasions of sin, to renounce bad company, to change and amend your life; is it likely, is it even credible that thoughts of that kind can come from our own nature, which is so woefully corrupted and inclined to all sorts of evil on account of the sin of our forefather Adam that we bring into the world with us? A nature that always seeks its own ease and comfort? A nature that avoids all discomfort, mortification, crosses and trials so carefully? Can a nature of that

Those thoughts cannot come from our own nature.

<sup>1</sup> Regnum cœlorum vim patitur, et violenti rapiunt illud.—Matth. xi. 12.

## 84 *Refusing to acknowledge Divine Inspirations.*

kind exhort a man, and by actually making him uneasy, urge him to do things that are contrary and difficult to itself? No, that is neither likely nor credible, but is, so to speak, a natural impossibility.

Nor from  
the devil.

I ask again, is it likely that those thoughts and inspirations come from the evil spirit, the devil? No indeed; that would be a strange quarter from which to expect help in the salvation of our souls! That rebel and enemy of God, who has sworn eternal hatred against the Almighty, how could he try to extend and increase the honor and glory of God, by inspiring men to do good works? That arch-enemy of souls, who, wherever he finds fruitful ground, is bent on sowing tares in it, that, as the Gospel says, will afterwards be tied up in bundles and burned; how could he endeavor to sow the good seed, which may bring forth a hundredfold that shall be hereafter gathered into the heavenly granary? That fierce lion who goes about seeking whom he may devour, how could he change so completely as to act the part of a good shepherd of souls, to lead them on to the right path, and exhort them to continue in it? That tyrant Pharaoh, who uses all possible means to enslave the people of God and keep them under his yoke; how could he exhort souls to fly the servitude of Egypt, to shun the dangerous customs of the world, and to enter on the narrow path of penance in order to escape hell? That accursed prince of darkness, as St. Paul calls him, who blinds the human reason that it may not see what is an evident occasion of eternal ruin; he who hardens the will and makes it obstinate in evil so that it may continue therein without repentance and amendment, how could he send forth rays of salutary light to enlighten men that they may not miss the road that leads to Heaven? In a word you feel yourself urged to repress anger, vindictiveness and the desires of the flesh, to renounce idleness, luxury and dangerous society, to avoid evil, to do good, to amend your life, to overcome yourself, to please God; can thoughts of that kind possibly come from the devil, the cruel enemy of your soul? No; neither from him, nor from our own nature can such movements of the mind be expected.

But from  
God; and  
therefore  
they must  
not be  
despised.

Therefore they can have no other origin but the all-wise and truthful Spirit of God, who is interested in the salvation of your soul, and who in that way invites you to enter on the path that leads to His kingdom. Why, do you hesitate, O man, asks St. Bernard, as to whether you shall follow inspirations or not? "The angel of the great council is calling you; why do you wait

to take counsel from another?"<sup>1</sup> Why do you wait so long, and spend so much time in considering where the voice comes from? The great God offers you His help and grace; so that, if you despise His inspirations as mere fancies and empty imaginations, you despise God Himself, while He is in the very act of helping you, in preference to so many others, to your eternal salvation.

But, you say, that good thought and inspiration, that movement and impulse given to my heart, I felt when listening to a sermon, or meditating, or reading a pious book, or considering the example given by a good Christian, or after having heard of the sudden death of a neighbor, or experienced some temporal misfortune or calamity, etc. These are not divine, but purely natural voices and inspirations, and they come from men or from other creatures. Do you then mean to say that you will not acknowledge a divine inspiration, until you hear the voice of God speaking to your ears in a sensible manner? or until an angel comes down from Heaven to make known the divine will to you? If so, you will have to wait a long time! Men who speak to you, the good example you see, the good books you read, the terrible accidents you hear of, the calamities you experience, and other natural circumstances, are, you must know, but instruments which the all-wise God makes use of to knock at the doors of our hearts by His inspirations, and to declare to us His holy will and pleasure. What was the origin of the sanctity of the holy hermit St. Antony, or of the Seraphic Father St. Francis, but the reading of the Gospel during Mass? Where did the holiness of that great Doctor of the Church, St. Augustine, come from? Was it not from reading accidentally the Epistles of St. Paul? Did not the holiness of St. Nicholas of Tolentino come from hearing the word of God in a sermon? That of St. Francis Borgia, from seeing the putrefying body of the empress Isabella? That of St. Ignatius, from reading the Lives of the Saints, which in default of a profane book that he had asked for, was brought to him as he lay on a sick-bed? The sanctity of so many others, who were suddenly changed from being vain children of the world, into poor, humble religious of the most austere orders, where did it come from? Was it not from some sudden calamity, or from being put to shame in some trivial matter before the world? To say nothing of other examples, such was the case with St. Gonsalvus of the

God speaks  
to our  
hearts by  
natural  
means.

<sup>1</sup> Vocat magni concilii Angelus; quid aliena consilia præstolaris?—S. Bern. Serm. super Ecce nos reliquimus

order of St. Dominic; when he was a young man, he was once riding at full gallop through the streets of the town, when his horse stumbled and to the great amusement of those who were looking on, threw him head foremost into a heap of mud. This accident, and the shame it caused him was the beginning of eternal happiness for Gonsalvus; for, as he lay in the mud, he thought to himself: Is this the way you treat me, O false world? You have served me a scurvy trick, but you shall pay for it; whereupon he left the world and entered the order of St. Dominic. If all these saints had looked on all those movements of their hearts as mere natural thoughts and despised and rejected them as empty fancies, would they have led such holy lives? Perhaps they would have caused the loss of their own souls and the souls of many others also. For instance, if St. Ignatius had not followed the inspiration he got when reading the Lives of the Saints, he would not have founded the Society of Jesus; and then, O great St. Francis Xavier, you would not have been converted and chosen for such a great mission, nor would so many hundred thousands of souls in India and Japan have been baptized and brought to the Catholic faith; nor would so many heretics have been converted, nor so many books have been written, nor so many schools opened for the eternal welfare of souls. In a word, so many souls would not have gone to Heaven, and would have been lost forever. See, my dear brethren, how much depends on obeying or rejecting a single inspiration sent by God.

Still, in weighty matters we must not take every thought that occurs to us, as a divine inspiration.

Still I acknowledge the truth of what St. John says in his First Epistle: "Dearly beloved believe not every spirit," that is, according to the commentators, believe not every inspiration; "but try the spirits if they be of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world."<sup>1</sup> I acknowledge that not every thought that occurs to us, and which has the appearance of being good, should be looked on at once as a divine inspiration; I acknowledge too, that the spirit of darkness, the sworn enemy of souls, sometimes transforms himself into an angel of light, and thus deceives men. Such is the case especially with regard to sudden resolutions following on inspirations that concern matters of great importance and long duration, as for example, the choice of a state of life, on which, generally speaking, the whole life of a man, and his happiness or misery for eternity depend.

<sup>1</sup> *Carissimi, nolite omni spiritui credere, sed probate spiritus, si ex Deo sint, quoniam multi pseudoprophete exierunt in mundum.*—I. John iv. 1.

If one is too hasty in a matter of this kind, and follows the first thought that occurs to him, even if it leads him to the holiest state, or if he is too hasty in binding himself by vow to some duty or obligation that it will take a long time to fulfil, or if he undertakes devotions and good works that interfere with the fulfilment of the ordinary duties of his state, he may make a great mistake. As for example, if servant-maids, or others who, by divine decree, have to work hard for daily bread, were to spend the whole forenoon or the half of it in the church hearing Masses, or at home praying, reading spiritual books, and meditating, in consequence of some thought that occurred to them which they took as a divine inspiration, although in reality by following it they neglect the duties of their state and so do not fulfil the will of God; or if pious works are undertaken which hinder greater good from being done, such as for instance, indiscreet austerities, long vigils, fasting, chastising the body in such a way as to injure the health and make one incapable of serving God in greater and more laborious things; or if works of piety are undertaken that involve dangerous occasions of sin and temptation, such as a pilgrimage to some distant shrine; oh, how many return from such pilgrimages with their consciences laden with sin, who were innocent when they set out! One must not be over ready to believe in these and similar inspirations, nor to act on them blindly; but should first ask counsel from God and from an experienced confessor before coming to any determination with regard to them.

They err in this respect who look on all their fancies and imaginations as heavenly stars and divine inspirations; and who are obstinate in following their own ideas with regard to devotions. If such persons are advised by their confessor, or by some friend who understands the matter, not to practise those devotions, they get angry and accuse their confessor or friend of trying to hinder them from doing good, or practising piety, etc. There is no use in arguing with them; they are firmly persuaded that God must approve of whatever they themselves invent in the way of piety; and if they do not hear the three or four Masses they have prescribed for themselves, or visit the different churches, or say the vocal prayers to the last syllable, or go on the pilgrimages, or join in the processions they have determined on, or if they do not fast till evening on the days they have fixed, they think that all is lost, and they are quite inconsolable. Otherwise they are not at all concerned by the fact that their

Many err  
in this particular.

obstinacy in those devotions hinders them from performing their duty; nor do they think of mortifying their passions and evil inclinations in accordance with the inspirations that God really sends them. In fact, since they are so bent on doing things according to their own ideas, they are all the less likely to do the will of God, and, in the long run, they will find that they have been deceived by the devil and by their own self-love.

And are often deceived by the devil: shown by an example.

Balladinus relates out of the Annals of the Friars Minor, an instance of a certain novice who used to follow his own ideas with regard to the practice of virtue and the study of perfection, without ever consulting his superiors or his confessor. Every whim that entered his head he looked on as a divine inspiration, if it had only the least appearance of good, and he followed it without delay. That was a fine opportunity for the devil, who was not slow to profit by it; for he began to appear to the novice in visible shape, but always with a heavenly beauty as if he were the Blessed Mother of God herself. The foolish young man allowed himself to be deceived to such an extent that he really believed that it was the Blessed Virgin who deigned to appear to him; for he did not think that the repeated exhortations he received in each apparition to chastise his body, could come from the evil spirit. Therefore the disguised spirit spoke to him only of great austerities, terrible scourgings and fearful torturings of the body. The poor young man obeyed punctually all the directions he received, and scourged himself daily until the blood flowed in torrents. The tempter also suggested fasting to him, and the consequence was that he abstained from all food and drink for several days. The whole design of the pretended heavenly messenger was simply to so injure the novice's health, that he would be turned out of the order as unfit, or else would have to receive extraordinary care on account of his delicate health. Nor would the tempter have failed to secure his object, had he not gone too far on one occasion. For the young man at last got so foolish that he determined to nail himself to a cross, so as to resemble his crucified Redeemer. He made a cross, therefore, stretched himself out on it, and seizing a heavy hammer, nailed one foot to it; but the wound he thus inflicted on himself was so severe, that he fainted. His moans and the noise he made attracted the attention of the other religious, who ran up at once and found him bathed in blood. They released him from the cross, and with a great deal of trouble succeeded in healing his wound. On his recovery the

*Refusing to acknowledge Divine Inspirations.* 89

novice found out how he had been betrayed by the crafty tempter, and he resolved never to follow any such inspirations in future without asking advice.

How many out of an indiscreet zeal bind themselves to all sorts of pious works, such as almsgiving, fasting and processions, by promises and vows, which they break afterwards when their zeal grows cold, and thus commit mortal sin in the state of which they remain for years! How many there are who rashly determine to enter some strict religious order, and who afterwards return to the world perhaps after having made their vows, and having thus become renegades from religion, lead godless lives and die unhappy deaths! Therefore in inspirations of that kind the safest plan is not to follow one's own idea, but to ask counsel from God in long and humble prayer and to seek the advice of a learned, pious and experienced confessor. By practising obedience in that way we are far surer of doing the will of God; since Christ Himself has said of all superiors, both lay and ecclesiastical, as well as of parents, pastors of souls and confessors: "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me."<sup>1</sup> "Consult prudent men," said God once to a religious who was engaged in prayer, "and do as they tell you."<sup>2</sup> In that way, besides the merit of the good work, although it may not have been as successful as we intended, there is the great merit of renouncing and acting contrary to one's own will and inclination.

Hence in such cases, one should ask advice from his confessor.

With regard to other movements of the soul and impulses to good, which do not involve long, uncertain and dangerous obligations, and which concern daily events in our lives, such as going to confession and recovering the state of grace as soon as possible when one is in mortal sin; changing one's mode of life, when one knows well that a change would be for the better; beginning to lead a more perfect life and one more in accordance with the precepts of the Gospel; frequently hearing the Word of God in sermons, avoiding dangerous company, mortifying the eyes and the other senses, restraining talkativeness, yielding to those who now and then contradict us, temperance in eating and drinking, and abstaining from some favorite morsel; overcoming sensuality by not indulging in too much sleep; renouncing a certain worldly vanity, etc., in these and similar cases I say, we can and should at once follow any inspirations we get,

Not to follow other good inspirations is very dangerous.

<sup>1</sup> Qui vos audit, me audit, qui vos spernit, me spernit.—Luke x. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Consule discretos viros. et acquiesce illis.

certain that we shall act well and please God by so doing, and that we do not incur the least danger of sin ; because such inspirations can come only from God through the good angels; and to refuse to recognize them as divine, and to reject them out of sensuality, fear of difficulty, or human respect, means simply to despise God, to drive Him away from our hearts, and to treat Him with a contemptuous indifference at the very moment when He offers us His grace and invites us in the most friendly manner to accept it ; and therefore it means placing one's self in danger of being abandoned in the hour of death by the God who has been so insulted, as we have seen in the last sermon.

Because  
by rejecting  
them, one  
makes him-  
self un-  
worthy of  
the last  
grace of  
final per-  
severance.

In confirmation of this I must now remind you of a most important fact, namely, that the grace of perseverance or of a happy death, is nothing but a special inspiration and illumination which God gives the soul as a mark of special favor and good will, so as to enlighten the mind and give the will additional strength in the last fight against temptation, and to confirm the soul in the love of God that it may give itself up into the hands of its Creator in the state of grace when it leaves the body. This grace, as theologians teach, no man can merit, no matter how innocent and holy he may be, by all the good works he does during his whole life; not that the good works we do in the state of sanctifying grace and with a supernatural intention, are not of such value in themselves as to merit that final grace; but because the whole merit of all our good works goes to increase sanctifying grace here, and eternal glory hereafter, so that the great grace of perseverance must be obtained by humble prayer and a zealous fulfilment of the divine will. Now, if a man has habitually despised and neglected the divine inspirations and graces during his life, how can he, without presumption, expect that God will give him that great and final grace which He is bound to give to no one? Even the holiest and most zealous servants of God, who always tried to find out the divine will and to fulfil it with the utmost exactness, have nevertheless acknowledged with fear and trembling, that they required great mercy and favor on the part of God to obtain the grace of perseverance at the end of their lives. How then can they, who nearly always give way to their evil inclinations, and who constantly stop their ears so as not to hear the voice of God calling to them, and reject the graces He offers them during life, how can they expect that at the end of their lives He will force upon them an extraordinary light and grace, that they may die well

and happily? Ah, who does not see that at least they run great danger of being deceived in their presumptuous expectations?

Hear what Eliu, a friend of Job, says of the just God: "He also shall open their ear, to correct them and shall speak, that they may return from iniquity; if they shall hear and observe they shall accomplish their days in good, and their years in glory."<sup>1</sup> "But if they hear not," if they do not pay attention to My voice, nor obey it, what then? how will it be with them? "They shall be consumed in folly; their soul shall die in a storm."<sup>2</sup> That is, as commentators say, they will die an unhappy and premature death. Mark the words, "they shall be consumed in folly," my dear brethren. How so? Just as fools and madmen despise others, even the cleverest men, and are laughed at and ridiculed by the latter in return; so God will reject and treat with contempt at the end of their lives, those who rejected and despised His inspirations and graces during life. "Turn ye at My reproof," says God by the Wise Man, and if you refuse to do so, "behold I will utter My spirit to you, and will shew you My words. Because I called and you refused; I stretched out My hand and there was none that regarded; you have despised all My counsel, and have neglected My reprehensions."<sup>3</sup> I have spoken to you so often, but you did not wish to recognize My voice; I have freely offered you, in preference to many others, and with the best intentions towards you, manifold graces, and you have despised and neglected them; but I will have satisfaction for that. "I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock. . . when sudden calamity shall fall on you and destruction as a tempest shall be at hand; when tribulation and distress shall come upon you. Then shall they call upon Me and I will not hear; because they have hated instruction, and received not the fear of the Lord, nor consented to My counsel,"<sup>4</sup> when I made known My will to them by My salutary inspirations.

God threatens such people with destruction

<sup>1</sup> Revelabit quoque aurem eorum, ut corripiat: et loquetur, ut revertantur ab iniquitate. Si audierint et observaverint, complebunt dies suos in bono, et annos suos in gloria.—Job xxxvi. 10-11.

<sup>2</sup> Si autem non audierint, consumentur in stultitia; morietur in tempestate anima eorum.—Ibid. 12, 14.

<sup>3</sup> Convertimini ad correptionem meam: en, proferam vobis spiritum meum, et ostendam vobis verba mea. Quia vocavi, et renuistis: extendi manum meam, et non fuit, qui aspiceret. Despexistis omne consilium meum, et increpationes meas neglexistis.—Prov. i. 23-25.

<sup>4</sup> Ego quoque in Interitu vestro ridebo, et subsannabo. . . cum irruerit repentina calamitas, et interitus quasi tempestas ingruerit: quando venerit super vos tribulatio, et angustia: tunc invocabunt me, et non exaudiam; . . . eo quod exosam habuerint disciplinam, et timorem Domini non susceperint, nec acceperint consilio meo.—Ibid. 26-30.

Confirmed  
by an ex-  
ample.

The Venerable Bede, in the 5th. Book of his history of England, relates that he knew a certain lay brother, who was very clever and skillful at his work, but very cold and tepid in the service of God and in the observance of rule. God often spoke to his heart by inward inspirations, and urged him to begin to live a holy life and one more in conformity with the constitutions of his order; but the lay brother always rejected those inspirations as idle fancies. His brethren often tried to urge him to amend both by word and example; but he simply laughed at them. At last God sent him a dangerous illness, and when he saw that his last hour was come, he sent for all the brethren, and turning to them his face which was fearfully distorted, he said to them, as clearly as his agony allowed him to speak : See, there is the place that I shall soon occupy in hell; I can see the abyss already opened, and Lucifer in the lowest depths; I can see Caiphas too, and the other murderers of Christ, and near them is the place where I shall suffer eternal torments. The terrified brethren told him to remember the infinite mercy and goodness of God, who never rejects the repentant sinner, and who at the last moment is ready to pardon the greatest sinner who is really contrite, etc. No; said the unhappy man; it is all at an end for me, my time for mercy is over; the divine mercy called me often enough during life, but I despised and laughed at all its graces and inspirations. Now my sentence is already pronounced; I am lost; I am going to hell! With these despairing words on his lips he breathed his last, without Confession or Viaticum, thus giving a terrible example of what may happen, and likely will happen to those obstinate people who do not recognize nor accept the divine inspirations. "I have called, and you refused; I also will laugh in your destruction."

Conclusion  
and resolu-  
tion.

O merciful God, save me and all men from such a terrible end. I am heartily sorry that I have ever despised the graces Thou hast offered me; and I must confess before the whole court of Heaven that I have often despised them. Forgive me my disobedience! With the help of Thy grace I shall never be guilty of it again. I renew the resolution I have made already; I will follow Thy star; I will hear Thy voice, and will be most obedient to Thy inspirations. I shall never let any light and grace Thou offerest to me go by without profiting by it; but will use it to amend my life, to make progress in the Christian virtues, and to receive, as I hope, the grace of perseverance in the hour of death, relying for this on Thy infallible promise: "But he that

shall hear Me, shall rest without terror, and shall enjoy abundance without fear of evils." Let that be the case, O Lord, with me and with all men! Amen.

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*FORTY-FIFTH SERMON.*

**ON THOSE WHO DO NOT AT ONCE FOLLOW WHAT THEY  
KNOW TO BE DIVINE INSPIRATIONS.**

Subject

Not to obey at once, according to the will of God, what we know to be divine inspirations, is to place ourselves in the greatest danger of an unhappy death.—*Preached on the Feast of the Annunciation of the B. V. Mary.*

Text.

*Ecce, ancilla Domini ; fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum.*  
—Luc. i. 38.

“Behold the handmaid of the Lord ; be it done to me according to thy word.”

Introduction.

Thus was the consent given, which the eternal Father sought from His chosen daughter, the Son of God from His future Mother, and the Holy Ghost from His chosen Spouse, by the angelic ambassador, in order to begin and to accomplish the great work of the redemption of the world ; this was the consent which gave such joy to the angels, which the holy souls in Limbo had sighed for, for so many hundred years, and which the faithful on earth were so eagerly longing for : “ Be it done to me according to thy word.” As soon as this consent was given the Divine Word descended from Heaven and became man in the virginal womb of Mary, in order to fill up the vacant places in the angelic choirs, to release the holy souls from their prison, and to save all men from eternal death. O Mary, most lowly handmaid in thy own eyes, but glorious Mother of the Lord in the eyes of God, “ Blessed art thou,” for so I must now cry out to thee with heartfelt congratulation in the words of St. Elizabeth at the Visitation ; “ Blessed art thou that hast believed, be-

<sup>1</sup> Qui autem me audierit, absque terrore requiescet, abundantia perfruetur, timore malorum sublato.—Prov. i. 33.

cause those things shall be accomplished, that were spoken to thee by the Lord.”<sup>1</sup> Blessed art thou because as soon as thou hast believed, thou hast at once conformed thy will to the will of God! Blessed art thou because thou hast conceived and given birth to the Saviour for the redemption of the world! Would to God, my dear brethren, that we were all thus ready and willing to obey our sovereign God and Lord, whenever He asks anything from us by His inspirations! For we are well aware that whatever He asks of us in that way is for His own honor and for the greater good of our souls. But alas, how seldom God finds this ready consent amongst men. Most people reject good inspirations at once; because they are unwilling to recognize them as coming from God, that they may not be forced to do violence to their evil inclinations, as we have seen on a former occasion. There are others who appear to act a little more courteously to their God when He sends them inspirations, and yet they do not obey Him as they ought. They know that those inspirations are from God, and they do not refuse them; “behold the handmaid,” the servant, “of the Lord,” they say, “be it done to me according to thy word;” but they do not wish to do immediately what God desires from them: they put off the fulfilment of His will to some future time. Again, a very dangerous thing to do, as I shall now prove, to make an end of this subject.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*Not to obey at once, according to the will of God, what we know to be divine inspirations, is to place ourselves in the greatest danger of an unhappy death. Such is the whole subject.*

O God of infinite goodness, give us Thy powerful grace, which we ask of Thee through the intercession of Thy most obedient Mother, Mary, and the holy angels guardian, that we may at once obey and follow Thy known inspirations, and that we may be always ready to say, “Behold the handmaid, the servant of the Lord, be it done to me according to thy word!”

There are two classes of people for whom this sermon is especially intended.

Although what I am about to say is to be understood of every divine inspiration, due proportion being observed, in the sense that those inspirations should be at once carried into effect, yet it concerns especially two classes of people; namely, sinners who are in the state of mortal sin, and the vain children of the world who do not appear to be addicted to any of the greater

<sup>1</sup> *Beata quæ credidisti, quoniam perficientur quæ dicta sunt tibi a Domino.*—Luke i. 45.

vices, and yet lead sensual, tepid and disorderly lives, and do little for their eternal salvation. The former are called by the divine inspirations to be converted and to do penance; the latter to change and amend their lives, and to serve God with greater zeal. The former, when they hear a sermon, or read a spiritual book, or see a dead body, or experience some temporal calamity, or otherwise receive a divine inspiration by whatever means it comes to them, feel an inward impulse to make a general confession, to repent sincerely of their past wickedness, to restore ill-gotten goods, to avoid the proximate occasion of sin, to remove what is a cause of scandal, to be reconciled to their enemies, etc. The latter, that is to say, tepid Christians, also frequently feel themselves urged to amend certain habits which they look on as venially sinful, such as, idleness, unnecessary sleep, vanity, dangerous company, and to attend more to prayer and works of devotion, to be more regular in receiving the sacraments, to hear the word of God in sermons frequently, and so on; as I have frequently told you already in the hope that it will make an impression on you.

Now, in what way do those people act when they experience similar movements of the spirit? They cannot deny that such movements come from God, nor are they ignorant that it is their bounden duty to hearken to the voice of God, and to obey it at once. To refuse those graces which God offers is the same as saying: go away from me, O Lord, I will not do what Thou requirest of me; and they dare not do that, because their conscience would torment them if they did. How do they act then? That they may not seem to reject God altogether, and at the same time may have some means of quieting their uneasy consciences, they say: yes, I will obey, I will follow, I will do as Thou wishest, but not at once, on some future occasion; I will repent of, and confess my sins on some great feast; I will avoid the proximate occasion of sin when my year's service is expired, when I go to some other place, when the person to whom I am attached is gone away; I will restore what I possess unjustly to its rightful owner, when I have made better provision for myself; I will be reconciled with my neighbor when he has first given me some marks of friendship; I will remove the cause of scandal when I see that others do it; I will begin a better and more zealous life, be more regular in devotions and more earnest in the practice of the Christian virtues, go more frequently to Confession and Holy Communion, make a better use of the precious time for the salva-

Who recognize divine inspirations very well: but defer obedience to them.

tion of my soul, renounce all vanity and sensuality, hear the Word of God in sermons more frequently, etc., but not just now; all these changes cannot be effected in a moment: there will be time enough for them later on. See, that is the way in which most people try to calm their uneasy consciences, and at the same time to have the appearance at least of obeying the divine inspirations.

They resemble lifeless statues.

The will is always ready with them; but they hardly ever carry out its resolution. Father Athanasius Kircher writes of a crypt that was discovered in France, in which the water dropping down formed stalactites in the shape of monks singing in choir.<sup>1</sup> If one were to look at those statues from a distance, he would almost expect the supposed monks to begin the Office, but he would have to wait a long time for them to begin, because stones have no voice; the statues open their mouths as if to sing, but no sound proceeds from them. The people of whom I speak are like those statues; "They are like the stones that are hewn out of the mountains,"<sup>2</sup> as the Prophet Baruch says of false gods. God expects them to do this, or to omit that; they open their mouths and say, I will obey; but they go no farther than that; they are like the stone figures.

And act in a way that is most dangerous to themselves: because they treat God unjustly.

This is that most dangerous road by which the devil drags down to the eternal flames of hell nearly all the souls that are cast off by God and lost forever; namely, delay in corresponding with the graces that God offers. For, in the first place, is it not treating the good God most unjustly in the very moment in which He offers us His grace and favor with the best possible intentions towards us? Is it not making sport of the infinite Majesty of God and trying to put Him off with empty words to an uncertain future; nay, is it not turning Him away from us, as we would turn away a beggar from our door, saying to him, I have nothing for you now; if I could help you I would do so willingly: come later on and I shall likely give you what you want? "What a grievous insult it is," says St. Bernard, "and what a severe punishment it deserves, for a vile worm of the earth to disdain to listen to his Creator who deigns to speak to him."<sup>3</sup> Miserable mortal, what are you thinking of? Does not the Almighty God deserve to be obeyed at once? Do you not owe him all you have and are? Does He not deserve all your

<sup>1</sup> Cadureci in Gallia Narbonensi crypta reperitur, ubi distillans lapidificus humor duodecim veluti statuas monachorum in choro cantantium effecit.—Kircher in mund. subter. 1. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Lapidibus de monte similes.—Baruch vi. 38.

<sup>3</sup> Quanta hæc est injuria et quam graviter vindicanda, cum vilissimus vermis clamantem ad se audire dedignatur Creatorem universitatis.—S. Bern. serm. de 3 Spin.

love and service, as well in the present as in the uncertain future? There is no doubt of it, as you yourself must acknowledge. But when, after having received an inspiration which you know well comes from God, you resolve to serve Him at some future time, or in a manner different from that in which He wishes you to serve Him; you make up your mind, as a matter of fact, not to serve God now, or else to serve Him in a careless manner. Is that the right way to act towards a God who deserves all honor and love? Is not that the way to rob Him of the service and love which He actually desires from you? Tell me; would you be satisfied with a servant who says to you, when you give him an order: No sir, I will not do it; and to-morrow when you repeat the same command, you get as an answer: No, I will not do it now; wait a while longer; in a month's time I will begin to be really obedient? What would you think of such a servant? Away with him, you would say, with just anger and displeasure, he shall not remain a moment longer in my house; he ought to know that I have hired him not only for the next month, but for the whole year, and during all that time he is bound to serve me; for that I pay him his wages; if he refuses to obey now and when I will, he may go away. See, O man, you act towards your God like that servant, when you delay the fulfilment of what He suggests to you by His inspirations; you refuse Him the obedience and service you owe Him as your sovereign Lord, as your Creator who has given you all you have, as your Redeemer who has ransomed you by His death, and saved you from eternal death, as your only good and last end, whom therefore you should serve without intermission during your whole life. Oh, "woe to that time in which I have not loved Thee," says St. Augustine, full of repentance for the sins of his early years, "woe to that time in which I have grievously offended Thee." Such will one day be your thought too, but it will be too late.

Again, you say, hereafter I will be converted and lead a better life: hereafter I will serve my God and will love him with my whole heart, etc. Tell me, when is that "hereafter" to come? Must you not acknowledge in your heart that you have often experienced similar salutary impulses and movements of the spirit? And on each occasion you put off obedience to them to some future time, so that your resolution has come to nothing. So will it be with you in the future; you will always find the same or still greater difficulties in your way; so that you will never be able

Inasmuch as they will hardly obey His inspirations later on.

<sup>1</sup> *Vae tempori illo quo non amavi te, vae tempori illo quo te graviter offendi.*

to carry your faint-hearted resolution into effect, and consequently will never properly obey the divine inspirations. Is not the God who now calls on you to be converted, or to amend your life, the same God whom you expect to give you the same call on some future occasion? Does He not deserve to be heard now, as well as in the future? But if His boundless authority and endless Majesty cannot move you now to hearken to his voice how will they be able to do so afterwards? Consequently, what conversion or amendment is to be expected from you then? Believe me, just as little as now.

Which is the very thing that the devil seeks.

And that is the great object of the crafty enemy of souls, the devil. When, while hearing a sermon, or reading a spiritual book, or at some other time, you are aware of a grace moving you to repent or to amend your life; he will not tempt you directly to oppose the good inspiration, or to reject it, for he has good reason to think that such a temptation would not succeed. And what does he do then? All he wants in the beginning is that you put off for a while the fulfilment of the good work to which the inspiration urges you; he acts with you as the men of Jabes did with King Naas, as we read in the First Book of Kings. King Naas had besieged the town of Jabes with a great army, and reduced the inhabitants to such extremities that they were on the point of surrendering to him. There was only one resource left. And what was that? The ancients of Jabes went to King Naas, and demanded a respite: "And the ancients of Jabes said to him: Allow us seven days."<sup>1</sup> The imprudent King having granted this request, they sent for help throughout all Israel, and Saul collected a large army and marched at once to the defence of the besieged; and defeated King Naas so completely that not two of his army were left together: "He came into the midst of the camp in the morning watch, and he slew the Ammonites until the day grew hot, and the rest were scattered so, that two of them were not left together."<sup>2</sup> O sinner, in this King you have an image of your precious soul, which is sometimes so strengthened and encouraged by powerful graces, that it resolves to expel the devil and the many sins which have taken possession of it, and to lead a better life. When the wicked tempter finds himself thus reduced to extremities, all he can do is to ask for a respite; allow me seven days, he says; wait

<sup>1</sup> Dixerunt ad eum seniores Jabes: Concede nobis septem dies.—I. Kings xi. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ingressus est media castra in vigilia matutina, et percussit Ammon usque dum incalesceret dies; reliqui autem dispersi sunt ita, ut non relinquerentur in eis duo pariter.—Ibid. 11.

a little longer and I will go away. Yes, you answer, I will give you so much time, and then I will be reconciled to that man, and forgive him from my heart, after he has felt my anger and resentment a while longer; I will leave that company, that house which has been the proximate occasion of sin to me, but in order to save my good name and prevent people from suspecting anything, I will hold on for a month or two longer, until the time for which I engaged has expired; after a while I will sin no more with that person, as we may marry, but until that time we can continue our unlawful intimacy as hitherto; I will confess all my sins, but I will wait until the next feast of the Blessed Virgin; meanwhile I can continue indulging my impure desires, as the one confession then will make everything right; after that I will not offend God any more. Allow us seven days. Such is the contract you make with the devil. Ah blind soul, do you not see how your arch-enemy is deceiving and betraying you? He will use that delay for your eternal destruction; he will call on all your wicked passions and inclinations, that are growing stronger every day; to help him, he will entangle you still more in the meshes of your bad habits, and will gain such a mastery over you, that your resolution to be converted will never be kept, and he will succeed in ruining you utterly.

Thirdly, supposing even that you will be more susceptible to grace at some future time, how do you know that the grace and inspiration will then be offered to you? Will not God, who has hitherto so often called you in vain, get tired at last of calling you? If the master of a house sees a candle or a lamp burning late at night, and no one making any use of it, either to come in or to go out, while the servants are all asleep; what does he do? He blows the light out. What is the use of it? he thinks when the lazy servants awaken they can get a light for themselves. In the same way God acts with the light of His grace, which He causes to shine on you by His inspirations; if you make no use of it, either to leave the state of sin, or to enter on the way of virtue; if you continue to sleep in your vices, or in your tepidity, the light will be taken away from you; for why should it burn any longer, when you are making no use of it? Bye and-bye you will have to look out for a light for yourself. As St. Augustine remarks, it is with the Almighty God nowadays in the world, as far as the distribution of His graces and inspirations is concerned, as it was formerly with our dear Saviour, Jesus Christ, when He went through Judea dispensing His ben-

Because those graces will likely never be offered again.

efits. "He went about doing good,"<sup>1</sup> as St. Peter says of Him in the Acts of the Apostles. Ah, says St. Augustine, how terrible the word "pertransiit," he went by, seems to me. "I tell you, my dear brethren, and I tell you openly, that I fear Jesus when He passes by."<sup>2</sup> For, he who passes by seldom comes back to the same place, or else he does not come back until after a long interval. You have reason to fear, then, O slothful Christian! When you feel a good inspiration and impulse, then Jesus is in your house, and is desirous to do you good; ah, I beg of you, take at once the benefit He offers you; for it may be a long time before He comes back again with the same light and grace; perhaps even, He may never return during your whole life!

Therefore when God calls, He must be obeyed immediately.

Therefore He warns you and me: "Yet a little while the light is among you. Walk whilst you have the light, that the darkness overtake you not."<sup>3</sup> Now while the light is shining, you should be converted, abstain from your accustomed sins, leave the dangerous occasions of sin, renounce that unlawful affection, etc. Do not say that you will do so later on, for the light is passing by, and will never perhaps return. Now, while the light is shining you must correct your slothful habits; do not say, I will do so some other time; Jesus is passing on with the light; afterwards when you want Him He may not come back, and may leave you in the dark. Now the light is shining on you; you should at once betake yourself to the church and hear a sermon; do not put it off to the next Sunday; the light, the grace, the movement of the heart, the knowledge that God has prepared for you in this sermon, may not come next Sunday, it may never come again during your life; use it now while God offers it to you. "Yet a little while the light is among you," use it when and as long as you can; "walk whilst you have the light, that the darkness overtake you not," and that you may not be hurled from temporal into eternal darkness.

Because He has a certain number of graces and inspirations prepared and appointed for each one.

To make still clearer the danger of not obeying at once the calls of God, mark, my dear brethren, in the fourth place, this terrible, but certain truth, which the Holy Scripture frequently and emphatically inculcates in us; that namely, God has fixed all His designs and exterior operations to a certain number and meas-

<sup>1</sup> Pertransiit benefaciendo.—Acts x. 38.

<sup>2</sup> Fratres hoc dico et aperte dico; timeo Jesum transeuntem.—S. Aug. serm. 18. de verb. Dom.

<sup>3</sup> Adhuc modicum lumen in vobis est. Ambulate, dum lucem habetis, ut non vos tenebræ comprehendant.—John xii. 35.

ure, which He will not exceed. "Thou hast ordered all things," says the Wise Man, "in measure, and number, and weight."<sup>1</sup> "Weight and balance are the judgments of the Lord,"<sup>2</sup> as we read in the Book of Proverbs. "And I will set judgment in weight, and justice in measure;"<sup>3</sup> says the Lord Himself by the Prophet Isaias. A certain number of creatures has been fixed by God, to be drawn by Him out of their original nothingness, in preference to an infinite number of others, nor will He go beyond that number. He has determined the years and days that His Providence has decreed for each man to live, nor will any one live longer than God has appointed. He has fixed the number of sins that He will bear with patiently from each one, nor will His patience go beyond that number. He has determined the graces and inspirations He will give each one, nor will He give any more. Now, since the number fixed for me is known to God alone, whose judgments are inscrutable, it is certainly a dangerous thing for me to reject even one grace, to defer to some future time obedience even to one good inspiration, be the number of graces and inspirations great or small; because I know not, and cannot know how many there are still in reserve for me, and the very grace or inspiration that I now reject and despise, may be the last one which completes the number and measure appointed for me.

In order to give us timely warning of this, God has shown us in the Old Testament, as well as in the New, by different figures and parables, that He has prepared and appointed more graces and inspirations for some, than for others. When the town of Jericho refused to open its gates to the Israelites, God commanded Moses, His Prophet, and the leader of His people, to summon the stubborn inhabitants seven times to surrender, and meanwhile the army of the Israelites was to march seven times around the walls to the sound of the trumpet, without exercising any act of hostility against the town; but if the town was not surrendered on the sixth invitation, God assured Moses that the walls would fall in of themselves on the seventh, and the inhabitants would be left to the mercy of the conquerors. And so it happened in reality; when the trumpets sounded for the seventh time, the walls of the town fell in, and gave an easy entry to the besieging forces, who put all the inhabitants to the sword without distinc-

Shown by  
figures in  
the Old  
Testament.

<sup>1</sup> Omnia in mensura, et numero et pondere disposuisti.—Wis. xi. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Pondus et statera judicia Domini sunt.—Prov. xvi. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Et ponam in pondere iudicium et justitiam in mensura.—Isa. xxxviii. 17.

tion of sex or condition, and without the least mercy or pity, and reduced the town itself to ashes. This is a clear figure of a sinful soul that rebels against God, whom the merciful Lord invites by His good inspirations to do penance and to surrender itself to Him that He may occupy it; but, mark this well, the invitation is given only six times and not oftener; that is, those inspirations are limited in the inscrutable designs of God to a certain number, so that if the soul waits for the seventh, the number may be already complete, and the eternal ruin of that soul decreed.

From the words of Christ in the New Law.

In the New Testament we read how Jesus Christ wept bitterly over Jerusalem, and addressed that city in the following words: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, 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."<sup>1</sup> See there again prefigured in the city of Jerusalem, the order and measure that the just God observes with souls. "How often would I have gathered;" there you have the fixed number of graces which God had appointed to give a certain soul that it might be converted or lead a better life, and of which He keeps an exact account. "And thou wouldst not;" there you see how graces are rejected and despised, and obedience to them deferred. "Your house shall be left to you desolate;" "you shall not see me henceforth;" the number of graces is complete and the reprobation of that impenitent soul is decreed, because it refused to correspond to so many invitations on the part of God: now the Lord will close His beneficent hand, and will give no more lights or inspirations to that soul, so that it will fall miserably into sin after sin, in punishment of its obstinacy, and will be lost forever. In the same Gospel of St. Matthew we read that Jesus, being hungry, passed by a fig-tree, and sought for fruit on it, but found none; "And seeing a certain fig-tree by the wayside, he came to it; and found nothing on it but leaves only;" whereupon he cursed it: "and He saith to it: May no fruit grow on thee henceforward forever; and immediately the fig-tree withered away,"<sup>2</sup> to the great astonishment of the dis-

<sup>1</sup> Jerusalem, Jerusalem, quæ occidit Prophetas, et lapidas eos, qui ad te missi sunt: quoties volui congregare filios tuos, quemadmodum gallina congregat pullos suos sub alas: et noluit? Ecce, relinquetur vobis domus vestra deserta. Dico enim vobis: Non me videbitis amodo.—Matth. xxiii. 37-39.

<sup>2</sup> Videns fici arborem unam secus viam, venit ad eam, et nihil invenit in ea nisi folia tantum, et ait illi: Nunquam ex te fructus nascatur in sempiternum. Et arefacta est continuo ficulnea.—Ibid. xxi. 19-20.

ciples who were looking on. But, we might think, the poor tree did not deserve such a severe punishment; for, as the Evangelist St. Mark says: "And when he was come to it, he found nothing but leaves; for it was not the time for figs."<sup>1</sup> But if it was not the time for figs, the tree could not be expected to bear fruit; why then should it be cursed? The holy bishop, St. Paulinus, answers this question: "In that tree we have a figure of Our Lord hungering for the salvation of souls, and desiring from men the fruits they owe Him."<sup>2</sup> Whenever the Lord by His inspirations, invites man to serve Him, it will not do to say that it is not yet time for fruit; for, at all times God expects us to do His will, and to fulfil without delay what He requires of us. This fig-tree is then a figure of certain souls who, having rejected the first inspiration and grace of God, although they well know that it came from God, are, in the most just designs of the Almighty, abandoned to unfruitfulness, and will never be visited by another inspiration.

Further, you will find in the Gospel of Jesus Christ the well-known parables, of the great supper, the royal marriage-feast, and the laborers in the vineyard; all symbols of the divine vocation of souls to the kingdom of Heaven; but see what a difference there is; the same guests are invited twice to the supper. "A certain man made a great supper, and invited many;"<sup>3</sup> as they did not come at the appointed time, he sent his servants to call them; "and he sent his servant at the hour of supper to say to them that were invited, that they should come, for now all things are ready. And they began all at once to make excuse . . . then the master of the house being angry, said . . . I say unto you that none of those men that were invited shall taste of my supper."<sup>4</sup> It is probable, my dear brethren, that the guests did not wish to be excluded altogether from the supper, and that they excused themselves on this occasion, because they had other things to attend to; "I have bought a farm," said the first, "and I must needs go out and see it."<sup>5</sup> "I have bought five yoke of oxen," said another, "and I go to try them."<sup>6</sup> "I have married

From different parables in the same Law.

<sup>1</sup> *Et cum venisset ad eam, nihil invenit præter folia; non enim erat tempus flicorum.*—Mark xi. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *In illa arbore salutem hominis asuriebat, et ab homine debitum sibi fructum petabat.*—S. Paulin. exp. 33.

<sup>3</sup> *Homo quidam fecit cœnam magnam, et vocavit multos.*—Luke xiv. 16.

<sup>4</sup> *Et misit servum tuum hora cœnæ dicere invitatis, ut venirent, quia jam parata sunt omnia: Et cœperunt simul omnes excusare . . . Tunc iratus pater-familias, dixit . . . dico autem vobis: Quod nemo vitorum illorum, qui vocati sunt gustabit cœnam meam.*—Ibid. 17, 18, 21, 24.

<sup>5</sup> *Villam emi, et necesse habeo exire, et videre illam.*—Ibid. 18.

<sup>6</sup> *Juga boum emi quinque, et eo probare illa.*—Ibid. 19.

a wife," said a third, "and therefore I cannot come."<sup>1</sup> Thus they did not absolutely refuse to accept the invitation, and expected to receive it again on another occasion. Why then did not the master of the house invite them again? O fearful secret of the inscrutable decrees of God! the number of invitations was already complete for them: "None of those men that were invited, shall taste of my supper." On the other hand, all sorts of people are invited to the marriage-feast; but each one receives the invitation only once. Many different laborers are called to the vineyard at different hours of the day, some early in the morning, others at noon, others in the evening; but we do not read that any of them was asked more than once to come. Many disciples and Apostles were called to follow Christ, at different times and in different ways; but each one of them was called but once. We read of St. Peter and his brother, St. Andrew, that Our Lord invited them more than once to follow Him; but according to what the holy Fathers and the commentators say, they were not called for the same end and object. Our Lord called them the first time, according to St. Augustine, that they might learn to know Him, and the second time, that they might follow Him always. St. Thomas Aquinas thinks they were called three times; first, that they might know Our Lord, secondly, to be instructed by Him, and thirdly, to leave all earthly things and follow Him. Yes, you think, and they all obeyed the first call. That is true, but if they had not done so, who knows whether they would have been called again? The first invitation to perfection, would probably have been the last for the Apostles, and if they had rejected it, they would not have received another; as we see clearly exemplified in the case of the young man who was invited by Christ to sell all he had and give it to the poor, and to follow Him; but the young man went away sad, and Christ never spoke to him after that. A certain number and measure of divine inspirations appointed for each one: what a terrible truth that is! "Let no one," says the holy Pope St. Gregory, "despise the divine invitation, lest if he wishes to enter afterwards, he may not be admitted."<sup>2</sup>

**Warning to sinners not to defer any longer hearkening to the voice**

Now, O sinners! Christians who are slothful in the divine service! Vain children and lovers of the world! You who are always ready with an excuse when God invites you to repent, and to change and amend your lives; you who think and say, by-

<sup>1</sup> *Uxorem duxi, et ideo non possum venire.*—Luke xiv. 20.

<sup>2</sup> *Nemo contemnat, ne dum vocatus excusat, cum voluerit intrare non valeat.*

and-bye, some other time, on some future occasion I will obey the call of God (this sermon is for you alone); have you looked into the Book of God's inscrutable decrees? Do you know the exact measure and number of the graces and inspirations that God has prepared for, and determined to give you? No, you do not; for no one, to whom God has not expressly revealed it can know it. How then can you be so rash and presumptuous as to put off to some future time the fulfilment of even one good inspiration? Perhaps that which is now given you, is the last invitation, the last call, the last light of grace; think well on it; your eternal happiness or misery depends on it! Suppose, what may really be the case, especially since you have so often despised and rejected the well-meant calls of God, suppose that this is the last grace for you, and that you reject it also; what will become of you? Whom will you have to blame for your eternal damnation? Will you blame the Almighty, because He has refused to give you any longer special graces, which He is bound to give to no man, and which He dispenses with infinite wisdom, when, how, where, to whom and in what measure He pleases? Oh, no; you alone are to blame; and you must attribute your eternal damnation to yourself and to no other, because you refuse to see the light and to follow it, when God so generously offered you His graces.

Julius Cæsar, who was afterwards so foully assassinated, was often warned and exhorted by a faithful friend, to be on his guard against some of the members of the Senate, who had conspired to take away his life; but Cæsar, depending on his army, and deceived by the flattery of false friends, took no precaution whatever. One day as he was entering the Senate house, the conspirators thronged around him, and his friend managed to get through them and to hand him privately a note disclosing the danger that threatened him, and begged of Cæsar to read it at once. The latter, who was busy at the moment with a number of people, thought that it would do to read the note later on, and went boldly into the Senate house, where he was at once set upon and stabbed to death, still holding in his hand the note which would have saved his life, had he read it. Sinful and tepid Christians, there you have a picture of the unhappy end of your soul! God sees you hurrying to eternal ruin through that unlawful passion, that dangerous company, that vicious habit, that ill-gotten property, that tepidity which is daily increasing; He sees hell opened and all the infernal spirits conspiring against

of God calling on them to repent.

That they may not be lost forever.

your soul, and now he comes forward as your best friend, who would willingly have you with Himself in Heaven, and, by His good inspirations He gives you warning of the danger that threatens you. He sends you, so to speak, a confidential note, whenever He exhorts you by sermons, spiritual books, or temporal misfortunes, to free yourself from the state of sin by true repentance and amendment of life; but you always think you can read the note later on, and amend your life on some future occasion. Alas, before that time comes your enemies will have surrounded you, and with the note still in your hands unread, with the divine warnings and inspirations that you refused to follow, still ringing in your ears, will drag you down to the abyss of hell; for, either death will surprise you in the state of sin, or, since you have received the full measure of the graces allotted to you, there is no more hope of repentance for you!

Conclusion,  
to obey  
good in-  
spirations  
at once.

Therefore, "To-day if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts."<sup>1</sup> Think, whenever you are aware of a good inspiration: this is perhaps the last time that I shall hear a voice from Heaven calling me to repentance and amendment; I am not certain that it is so; yet it may be so. Therefore I will not delay, nor defer doing what that voice urges me to do; I will obey it at once. I will at once repent of, and confess my sins; I will at once abandon that dangerous occasion and company; I will at once get rid of those ill-gotten goods, and restore them to their lawful owner; I will at once be reconciled to my neighbor, with whom I have hitherto been at variance, and will be a true friend to him; I will at once begin to lead a better, more virtuous, humble and perfect life, and will persevere therein to the end. So it shall be, O God, with Thy grace! Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Hodie, si vocem ejus audieritis, nolite obdurare corda vestra.—Ps. xciv. 8.

# ON NEGLECTING TO HEAR, AND MAKING A BAD USE OF, THE WORD OF GOD IN SERMONS.

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## FORTY-SIXTH SERMON.

### ON THE DANGEROUS STATE OF THOSE WHO SELDOM HEAR THE WORD OF GOD.

#### Subject.

To hear the word of God in sermons but rarely, when one has an opportunity of hearing it frequently, is a very bad and dangerous sign for a Christian. For, generally speaking, they whose souls are in a bad or dangerous state, seldom hear the Word of God.—*Preached on the Feast of the Dedication of a Church.*

#### Text.

*Et festinans descendit, et excepit illum gaudens.*—Luke xix. 6.

“And he made haste and came down, and received him with joy.”

#### Introduction.

How wonderful that a man can be so completely changed by a single word! Zachaeus had hitherto been an unjust usurer, who defrauded and deceived people in every possible way; and now he makes superfluous restitution, for he gives back fourfold: “If I have wronged any man of anything, I restore him fourfold.” He had been a heartless miser, and now he becomes a generous father of the poor and needy. “Behold Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor.” He had been a public sinner, and a chief of sinners; now he is a public confessor and follower

of Christ: "He received Him with joy." That sudden change was effected by those few words of our Saviour: "Zachaeus, make haste, and come down, for this day I must abide in thy house. And he made haste and came down, and received Him with joy;" he was completely converted, so that he deserved to hear from the lips of Jesus, the joyful assurance: "This day is salvation come to this house." What wonderful power, then, I cannot help thinking, the divine word has over the human heart! And on the other hand, what a great good *fortune* it was for Zachaeus that he was, in preference to so many others, in the way of being spoken to by Our Lord, and that he came down from the tree at the first call, and received Our Lord into his house. My dear brethren, how much good would not the Word of God still effect nowadays among us Christians, if we were all as eager and as ready as Zachaeus, to listen to it! We have plenty of opportunities of doing so in Christian churches, in which the Word of God is frequently announced, but, alas for the deplorable carelessness of so many Christians! Those opportunities are seldom or never made use of by many. What shall I think or say of them? The least I can say is this:

#### Plan of Discourse.

*To hear the Word of God in sermons but rarely, when one has an opportunity of hearing it frequently, is a very bad and dangerous sign for a Christian. Why? Because, generally speaking, they whose souls are in a bad or dangerous state, seldom hear the Word of God. Such is the subject of this instruction.*

Christ Jesus, Thou who didst induce Zachaeus to follow Thee by a few words, give us, and increase in us, a love of Thy divine Word that we may henceforward hear it often, receive it with joy, and derive from it great fruit for our souls; this grace we beg of Thee through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary and of our holy angels guardian.

They whose souls are in a bad or dangerous state, seldom hear the Word of God.

One thing I must remind you of, and it is of great importance; namely, that it is one thing to say, they whose souls are in a bad state, seldom, as a general rule, hear sermons; and another thing to say, all those who, as a general rule, seldom hear the Word of God, are in a bad state as to their souls. This latter statement I cannot defend as it stands; God forbid that I should usurp the functions which belong to His inscrutable divine decrees, and dare to look on any one as bad, unless I am quite certain he is bad. But I do say that it is a bad sign for a

Christian, especially for one who has all sorts of worldly business and anxieties to distract him, and who neither reads nor hears anything of spiritual things during the week, to neglect, as a general rule, the frequent opportunities he has of hearing the Word of God in sermons on Sundays and holy-days; I look upon it as a bad sign, on account of what Jesus Christ, the Eternal Truth, has said: "Every one that doth evil, hateth the light;"<sup>1</sup> and I maintain that they whose souls are in a bad or dangerous state, have no love for the Word of God.

And they consist, first, of those who, having been accustomed to indulge in certain vices for a long time past, do not yet think of being converted and of amending their lives. Such are, for instance, those who knowingly possess ill-gotten goods, which they do not intend to restore to the lawful owner; those who, being immeshed in the toils of an unchaste passion, do not give up nor avoid the proximate occasion of sin, or who allow a secret mortal sin to remain on their consciences for many years, because they are ashamed to declare it candidly in confession. All these people will not readily go to sermons, or at all events, they will not be eager to hear them, but will do all they can to avoid them, especially those sermons in which the truth is told in an impressive manner. And why? Because they cannot bear the bitter reproaches of their own consciences, which are touched and disquieted by the explanation of the Gospel truths, and because they dread losing the false peace they have hitherto enjoyed in the midst of their sins.

A monkey cannot bear a looking-glass, nor a camel clear water; because they see their ugly figures reflected therein; therefore, the one will break the looking-glass, or throw it away in anger, and the other will trample about in the water until it becomes muddy, and is no longer transparent. The Word of God is a looking-glass which places clearly before the eyes of sinners the fearful state of their consciences, the filth and deformity of their sins and vices; they hate this looking-glass, says St. John Chrysostom, because they cannot look at their own vileness without shame and fear. Pliny and Salines write of a certain nation in Morocoo, who, as I have mentioned elsewhere, because they are coal-black in color, love the darkness better than the light, as it suits their color better; while they have such a hatred of the beautiful and pleasant sunshine, that they pursue the sun when he rises, with all sorts of execrations.

They are, first; those who will not give up the habit of sin.

They hate sermons, because they are disturbed by them.

<sup>1</sup> Omnis enim, qui male agit, odit lucem.—John iii. 20.

Foolish and mad people they must be indeed! But are we much better nowadays? The Word of God is a shining light, "the light of truth," *lumen veritatis*, as the Scripture calls it. Now, just as the children of the light, that is, pious souls who are desirous of their eternal salvation, seek and receive this light with the greatest eagerness; so also, there are Moors among European Christians, souls as black as a coal, who begrimed as they are with the filth of sin, love and seek the darkness of their ignorance and error, while they hate and fly the light of truth, as Our Lord says in the Gospel of St. John: "The light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light;"<sup>1</sup> although that light is so abundantly distributed every day. And He gives the reason of that: "For their works were evil: For every one that doth evil hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, that his works may not be reprovèd."<sup>2</sup> You cannot cause greater annoyance to a man who is lying in a deep sleep and wants to rest, than to shake and pull him about, and hold a lighted candle before his eyes. Oh, he will cry out, turning away his face, go away with that light, and let me alone! It would not be half so bad, if you were merely to talk, laugh, or make a noise in the room in which he is sleeping. Why so? Because the light shining in the eyes is surest to interrupt the sleep that he is so anxious to continue. That is the reason, my dear brethren, why the habitual sinner has such a hatred of sermons; he is buried in the deep sleep of his sins; he finds a false peace and pleasure in sensuality; he does not wish to be disturbed or awakened; the light of truth, the Word of God in sermons is likely to disturb this sleep most effectually; it shines in his eyes; it cries out: "Rise thou that sleepest;" and therefore, he cannot bear it; away, he says in thought, away with the light; away with sermons! I will have nothing to do with them.

For that  
very reason  
they should  
be diligent  
in hearing  
sermons.

But, says St. John Chrysostom to those people, that is the very reason why you should be all the more diligent in coming to sermons, and all the more eager and attentive to hear them, that the light may arouse you out of the sleep of sin, which otherwise will certainly be followed by the sleep of eternal death. Come, he says, listen to me! I will make you uneasy, but with an uneasiness that will gain eternal repose for you. The church

<sup>1</sup> Lux venit in mundum, et dilexerunt homines magis tenebras, quam lucem.—John iii, 19.

<sup>2</sup> Erat enim eorum mala opera; omnis enim, qui male agit, odit lucem, ut non arguantur opera ejus.—Ibid. 19-20.

in which the Word of God is preached, is an ark, and a far better one than that of the Patriarch Noe; the latter held animals of all sorts, and saved them from temporal destruction in the Deluge; but they left the Ark the same as they entered it; the wolf went in, and came out a wolf still; the raven went in, and came out a raven; the swine went in, and came out a swine, etc. It is far different with the ark of the church, in which I preach the Word of God, "if I find a wolf, I will turn him into a lamb;"<sup>1</sup> if a black crow comes in, he will go home a white dove; he who comes to the sermon a slave of the devil, will go away from it a beloved child of God; by a change, not of his nature, but of his will, which shall be converted and turned to God! This change shall be effected, not by my weak tongue, which speaks to the bodily ears, but by the supernatural light and powerful grace of God, which uses my tongue as an instrument to call to the hearts of the hearers, and to move them to amend their lives. So far that holy and zealous preacher, St. John Chrysostom. But most people do not want a change of that kind; the unjust wolf, greedy of gold, wishes to remain a wolf; the unchaste swine wishes still to wallow in the filth of his passions; the raven blackened by sin, wishes still to cry "caw, caw," and to put off repentance to some future time; and therefore, they will have nothing to do with sermons, or the Word of God. But woe to those, who through fear of being changed and converted, fly the light of truth! Jesus Christ Our Saviour, has already pronounced sentence on them in that passage of the Gospel of St. John that I have already quoted: "And this is the judgment; because the light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light."<sup>2</sup> That is, according to Alcuin's interpretation; since they fly and avoid the light of truth, they need not be judged any further; for they are already judged, and the sentence of eternal damnation is pronounced against them.

The other class of men who seldom hear the Word of God, are those who lead lives that are apparently not very bad or vicious, but neither are they good or pious. They are neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm and tepid; they are quite satisfied if they do nothing that is, in their opinion, evidently a grievous sin against the commandments of God and of the Church. Otherwise, they

In the second place, they who lead an idle, worldly life, seldom hear the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> *El lupum invenero, ovem faciam.* S. Chrysos. hom. 3. de penit.

<sup>2</sup> *Hoc est autem iudicium, quia lux venit in mundum, et dilexerunt homines magis tenebras, quam lucem.*—John iii. 19.

hardly trouble themselves as to how they fulfil many obligations of their state that bind under pain of sin. They would be very glad to go to Heaven; but at the same time their hearts cling to earth and earthly things; so that they spend the day from morning till night according to the rules laid down by the vain world for people of their condition, indulging in sensuality and love of ease; they sleep late in the morning, are extravagant in dress, given to good eating and drinking, and the greater part of the precious time, that God has given them to work out their salvation, they spend in idle conversation and unnecessary visiting. It does not at all harmonize with the life that such people lead to hear the Word of God in sermons frequently; for if they did so, their minds would be raised up to God, their last end; they would be inflamed with a desire and love of heavenly goods, and would be encouraged to practise the Christian virtues. Therefore, they remain away from sermons, either through fear of becoming scrupulous and anxious, and thus being induced to change their mode of life; or else through carelessness or negligence, inasmuch as the thought of going to hear a sermon never occurs to them, and they imagine that they are not in want of the Word of God, and are under no obligation to hear it; or else they are so sensual and unmortified, that they will not put themselves to the slight trouble that is necessary to hear the Word of God. In the winter, they cannot bear the cold, and the harsh wind; in summer, the heat oppresses them, or they are afraid of draughts, or of rain; nearly always, when there is question of going to the sermon preached in the morning, which is the time when both head and heart are best disposed to be influenced by the grace of God, it is too early for them; they require such an amount of sleep, and take such a long time to dress, that they can hardly manage to get to church; and very often they cannot rise earlier, because their heads are heavy from sitting up late at a party the night before. In a word, the light of truth, the heart-penetrating Word of God, the food that the good God has prepared for our souls is not for them.

Their souls  
are in a very  
dangerous  
state.

What a lamentable mistake! What a deplorable error theirs is! With reason does the Prophet Job say of such people: "If the morning suddenly appear, it is to them the shadow of death; and they walk in darkness as if it were in light."<sup>1</sup> They live in great uncertainty and carelessness of their eternal salvation; and

<sup>1</sup> *Si subito apparuerit aurora, arbitrantur umbram mortis: et sic in tenebris, quasi in luce ambulat.—Job xxiv. 17.*

yet they imagine they are on the straight road to Heaven. If these men, I say, and such as these are not in a bad state, a question which I will not now discuss, there is no doubt that they are in a very dangerous state, and, I might add, in a more dangerous state than the former class, who are openly addicted to gross vices, but who know the unhappy condition in which they are, and may yet be touched by divine grace and repent sincerely and amend their lives. But since the others see nothing in their lives that is wicked, and that ought to be repented of, and amended, what means have they of being really changed for the better, and of turning their tepid hearts to God? The life they lead is at best a luxurious, effeminate and idle life, it is not a mortified, or penitential one, it is not fixed to the Cross with Jesus Christ, and therefore it is not a Christian life, since it does not lead to Heaven by the rude way and through the narrow gate of penance; and, according to the words of Christ, the kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and only they can gain it who do violence to themselves.<sup>1</sup> If they came constantly, or at least frequently to sermons and instructions, they would often hear those truths explained; and if they heard them with duly prepared and eager hearts, they would soon be penetrated like the other hearers, by the supernatural light of the Holy Ghost; they would believe practically in those truths, and would lead far different lives. But since they neglect to hear the Word of God, they continue in what they imagine to be light, but which is in reality darkness: "they walk in darkness as if it were in light." What a light and knowledge will break upon them, but too late, when the eyes of the body shall be closed in death, and the eyes of the soul shall be opened in the house of their eternity! "Therefore," they will say with the fools in the Book of Wisdom, "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."<sup>2</sup> Because through laziness and sloth we refused to see, and to receive that light, that shining sun: "We have walked through hard ways, but the way of the Lord we have not known;"<sup>3</sup> we refused to allow it to be shown to us! Now we acknowledge that we have missed the right road to Heaven. Fools that we are! What an irreparable mistake we have made!

The third class consists of those who flatter themselves, and

Thirdly,  
they seldom

<sup>1</sup> Regnum cœlorum vim patitur, et violenti rapiunt illud.—Matth. xi. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Ergo erravimus a via veritatis, et justitiæ lumen non luxit nobis, et sol intelligentiæ non est ortus nobis.—Wis. v. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Ambulavimus vias difficiles, viam autem Domini ignoravimus.—Ibid. 7.

hear the Word of God, who are in ignorance through mistaken piety.

persuade others too, as far as their outward actions are concerned, that they are devout and pious; while in reality they are in utter ignorance of many things that are useful and necessary to their eternal salvation, and they are addicted to many serious faults and imperfections. These people seldom hear the Word of God, or at least they do not hear it regularly; not because they hate and avoid it, but because they have no taste or desire for it. They think they can employ their time better in some other way for the glory of God and the salvation of their souls. The whole substance of their piety consists in certain special devotions to churches, meditations, vocal prayers, hearing several Masses one after another, making their usual Confessions and Communions, etc.; the whole day is occupied with these and similar devotions, and each devotion has its own particular hour fixed for it; there must be no interruption, change, shortening, and least of all, omission in the list of devotions; if anything occurs to be done during the day, no matter what it is, it is put aside, if it interferes with them. The bell may ring a hundred times for the sermon; no, they say; I have not time to go now; I have something else to do; this is the time for visiting that church, for prayer, for Mass, meditation, and so on.

No works of devotion should, as a general rule, interfere with hearing sermons.

I acknowledge that it is an excellent thing, very profitable for the soul, and very pleasing to God, who performs all His works in a certain number and measure, to have a fixed order for one's daily devotions, as far as the duties of one's state allow; and I acknowledge too, that all those devotions I have mentioned, when they are performed in the state of grace, and with proper fervor, are very good, meritorious and pleasing to God. But when a fixed order for daily devotions prevents one, as a general rule, from hearing the Word of God, or makes one careless about it; then I have not the least hesitation in saying that all those prayers and pious works are of no good, and that it would be far better to omit them, nay, sometimes to omit even Confession and Holy Communion, or put them off to some other day, rather than not hear the Word of God; for that divine word is far more necessary for the due instruction of those people, and consequently more advantageous for their eternal salvation, and more helpful to them in the practice of solid virtue, than all their other pious works.

Such people are pious only in appearance.

If we consider the conduct of those people while they are in church at their devotions, and compare it with the way in which they behave at home, or during the performance of the duties

of their state, which the law of God obliges them to fulfil under pain of sin; what a striking contrast we should find! During their prayers and meditations they are like angels in modesty and humility; they shed tears of sweet consolation when they read in their prayer-books about the love of God; a thousand times they offer to God, with the lips, their bodies and souls, and all they have, and they profess to belong entirely to God, and to be ready to accept from Him, crosses and trials, sickness or health, life or death, etc. That is the kind of piety that suits their taste; that is what makes them look on themselves as really devout; and it is a piety and devotion that they have no chance of finding by hearing sermons. But how do they act sometimes, when they have finished their devotions and get to the end of their pious affections, and go home to do the will of God, not by empty words and with the lips only, but in deed and work? Oh, that is quite a different matter! It does not belong to their usual devotions; and so if they are commanded to do anything that does not exactly chime in with their own ideas, they are full of murmurs, complaints and opposition; they do only what pleases themselves, and what best suits their own convenience. If a person whom they dislike, ventures to say a word to displease them, they show just as much proficiency in abusing and reviling that person, as they did when in church in repeating their prayers. If some trifling thing annoys them, if, so to speak, a cross of straw is laid on their shoulders, there is no more talk of offering themselves altogether to God, to be disposed of according to His will, etc. In a word, all their piety and devotion is on their lips, and in their outward demeanor; while in reality they have neither true devotion, nor true virtue, nor true holiness and sanctity. And yet they are so obstinate, or to speak more truly, so infatuated and superstitious in observing the devotional practices they have prescribed for themselves, that they would look on any one who tries to detach them from those devotions, as an enemy of God's honor, and their salvation; while if they are obliged to interrupt their usual practices on account of some unforeseen occurrence, they are full of scruples and uneasiness during the whole day, as if they were guilty of some grievous sin; although they make light of neglecting the duties of their state, a neglect which they have reason enough to be uneasy and anxious about.

I cannot help comparing them to King Saul. We read in the First Book of Kings, chapters xiv. and xv., that in order

and in their own imagination.

They are like Saul when he

disobeyed  
the com-  
mand of  
God.

to gain a victory over his enemies he had bound himself and his army by an oath not to taste food till sunset, under pain of death: "And Saul adjured the people, saying: Cursed be the man, that shall eat food till evening, till I be revenged of my enemies."<sup>1</sup> Jonathan, his son, who knew nothing of his father's oath, and the command he had laid on his army, finding some honey, tasted a little of it to refresh himself, as he was very tired: "But Jonathan had not heard when his father adjured the people, and he put forth the end of the rod which he had in his hand, and dipt it in a honey-comb; and he carried his hand to his mouth."<sup>2</sup> And did Saul look on this as an unpardonable crime? Yes, and he condemned Jonathan to death on account of it: "As the Lord liveth, who is the Saviour of Israel, if it was done by Jonathan my son, he shall surely die."<sup>3</sup> All the people begged for mercy for Jonathan; but Saul was inexorable; he had taken an oath, and given a command that was transgressed, and he looked on that transgression as a crime that should be punished with death: "May God do so and so to me, and add still more: for dying thou shalt die, O Jonathan."<sup>4</sup> And he would really have been put to death, had not the people saved him: "So the people delivered Jonathan that he should not die."<sup>5</sup> See, my dear brethren, how exact Saul was in observing the law he had laid down for himself; but mark how he acted on another occasion. God had commanded him by the Prophet Samuel to destroy the Amalekites utterly, and not to spare one of them: "Now therefore go and smite Amalec and utterly destroy all that he hath; spare him not, nor covet anything that is his,"<sup>6</sup> etc. How did the King observe this command? Self-love and avarice furnished him with excuse enough for sparing the King of Amalec through pretended pity, and taking the best of his possessions: "And Saul 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."<sup>7</sup> And he

<sup>1</sup> Adjuravit autem Saul populum, dicens: Maledictus vir, qui comederit panem usque ad vesperam, donec ulciscir de inimicis meis.—I. Kings xiv. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Porro Jonathas non audierat, cum adjuraret pater ejus populum; extenditque summitatem virgæ, quam habebat in manu, et intinxit in favum mellis, et convertit manum suam ad os suum.—Ibid. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Vivit Dominus salvator Israel, quid, si per Jonatham filium meum factum est, absque retractione morietur.—Ibid. 39.

<sup>4</sup> Hæc faciat mihi Deus, et hæc addat, quia morte morieris, Jonatha.—Ibid. 44.

<sup>5</sup> Liberavit ergo populus Jonatham, ut non moreretur.—Ibid. 45.

<sup>6</sup> Vade, et percute Amalec, et demolire universa ejus, non parcas ei, et non concupiscas ex rebus ipsius aliquid, etc.—Ibid. xv. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Et pepercit Saul Agag, et optimis gregibus ovium et armentorum, et vestibus et artibus, et universis, quæ pulchra erant.—Ibid. 9.

thought he had acted well in doing so; for he boasted to the Prophet: "Blessed be thou of the Lord, I have fulfilled the word of the Lord."<sup>1</sup> What was the reason of the different state of his conscience on those two occasions? He observed the law he had made for himself with the utmost exactness, so as even to condemn his own son to death; while he had not the least scruple or anxiety in transgressing the command of God. Do you wish to know the reason of the difference, my dear brethren? The command to destroy the Amalekites came from God through the Prophet Samuel; but the observance of the fast till sunset was a law that Saul bound himself to under a vow, through special private devotion; this latter law had to be kept with the utmost exactness, while, as he imagined, the former did not require to be observed so strictly, although in reality it was of far greater importance than the oath.

There you have an example of how we often act. To be humble of heart, meek towards our neighbor, no matter who he is, to love those who in any way offend us, and to show that love by doing good to them, to obey at once and with reverence those whom God has placed over us, to bear the faults and frailties of others with patience, to be exact in the performance of the duties of our state, etc., these are things that we are commanded to do by the divine law, and in the fulfilment of them our true piety and holiness consist; yet sometimes we do not scruple to transgress in these matters. On the other hand, special private devotions, to which we are not bound by any command of God, are a law that we have invented and prescribed for ourselves, and we think that if we do not observe them all exactly, we do wrong, but if we have fulfilled them properly according to our own ideas, we congratulate ourselves on having "fulfilled the word of the Lord," and served God properly. But how fearfully our self-love deceives us herein! The words that St. John was told to say to the Angel of the Church of Laodicia could well be applied to us: "Thou sayest, I am rich, and made wealthy, and have need of nothing; and knowest not, that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."<sup>2</sup> You think you are pious, devout and rich in merits, and you know not that your soul is in a state of ignorance and misery. All this is mostly attributable to want of proper instruction, which must be re-

Such is the way in which those pretended pious people act.

<sup>1</sup> Benedictus tu Domino, implevi verbum Domini.—I. Kings xv. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Dicit: Quod dives sum et locupletatus, et nullius egeo: et nescis, quia tu es miser et miserabilis, et pauper, et cæcus, et nudus. —Apoc. iiii. 17.

ceived from the light of the Holy Ghost, teaching us by the Word of God. If those seemingly pious people came often to sermons with well prepared hearts, they would soon learn in what true Christian virtue and piety consist.

Fourthly, they seldom hear the Word of God, who are too busied with temporal affairs.

The fourth and last class consists of those who are overwhelmed with worldly cares and business, so that they have no time or leisure to hear the Word of God in sermons. For these I have very few words, or rather nothing, but a sigh of profound pity. Pitiably indeed is your state, O unfortunate people! you bury yourselves of your own accord, so deeply in temporal things, that you have no time to devote to the consideration of eternity! you undertake so many different kinds of business, that you must neglect the all-important business of your souls! Tell me, in God's name, why are we on this earth? To know God, to love Him, to keep His commandments, to do His holy will in all things, and to save our immortal souls; this is the one necessary business, to which all other things must be directed. Long ago, St. John Chrysostom bewailed in the pulpit in Constantinople all those who did not come at least twice a week to hear the Word of God. Ah, said he, you send your children twice a day to school to learn to read and write, and fence and dance, and sew and spin; but you are so involved in worldly cares, and so careless and negligent about your precious souls, that you cannot spare two hours in the week to acquire the knowledge necessary for your eternal salvation. What would he have said of those who hardly once in a month, nay, hardly once or twice in a whole year, hear a sermon with attention? I must say, in the words of our Lord, what does it profit a man to gain by his energy and industry the whole world and all its riches, and treasures, if his soul suffer loss thereby.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore it is a dangerous sign to hear the Word of God but seldom.

For God's sake, Christians, think of this, and let those of you who seldom come to sermons, see for yourselves whether you have not grave reason to fear that you may belong to one of those poor classes of people whose souls are in a bad state, or at all events in a very dangerous state. No matter who you are, it still remains true, that to go to sermons rarely, when one has an opportunity of going frequently, is a very bad sign for a Christian. "He that is of God, heareth the words of God," says Christ, "therefore you hear them not, because you are not of God."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quid enim prodest homini, si mundum universum lucretur, animæ vero suæ detrimentum patiat. — Matth. xvi. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Qui ex Deo est, verba Dei audit. Propterea vos non auditis, quia ex Deo non estis. — John viii. 47.

What a terrible conclusion that is to draw! yet it must be true, for Christ Himself says it.

But what is the use of speaking to those who are absent, and who therefore cannot hear what I say? The whole fruit of this sermon is for you, my dear brethren, who form my regular audience. Continue to refresh your souls and encourage yourselves in the divine service by constantly hearing the Word of God, unless some pressing business prevents you. Constantly I say, for to come once to a sermon and stop away two or three times after that, is not the sign of a man who is really anxious to save his soul, and who hungers for its spiritual food. The loss of one sermon may entail an eternal loss, for an opportunity of doing good once lost never comes back again, even if the same sermon were repeated. Still it is not certain that God, who by His grace, is the Author of all the good that is done by sermons, and who gives to each individual the special grace He has prepared for him, it is not certain that God will offer that grace again. "The Spirit breatheth where He will." Therefore, you must take the light whenever you can. "He that is of God, heareth the words of God;" let that be verified in us all; we are of God, and therefore we have derived fruit enough for to-day and we can rejoice and say, "This day is salvation come to this house;" that is, to our souls. Amen.

Exhortation  
to all to  
hear ser-  
mons con-  
stantly.

*Another introduction for the same sermon for the first Sunday after Epiphany.*

**Text.**

*Stupebant autem omnis, qui eum audiebant, super prudentia.*  
—Luke ii. 47.

"And all that heard Him were astonished at His wisdom."

How fortunate the Jews were at that time in having in Jerusalem the Incarnate Son of God to preach to them the eternal truths! If they had only profited by their good fortune! "If thou also hadst known," says our Lord, when weeping over the city, "and that in this thy day, the things that are to thy peace."<sup>1</sup> But what good did the Divine Preacher do His beloved city, towards which He meant so well? He only made its sin more inexcusable, and its wickedness more damnable. "All that heard him were astonished;" but they did not become any better. "They were astonished," says St. Augustine, "but they were

<sup>1</sup> Spiritus ubi vult spirat.—John. iii. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Et cognovisses et tu, et quidem in hac die tua, quæ ad pacem tibi.—Luke xix. 42.

not converted.”<sup>1</sup> Do you not wish, my dear brethren, that we had to-day the good fortune of hearing Christ Himself speak to us? Oh, what attentive and eager listeners we should be! But what am I saying? Have we not opportunity enough, if we only wish to make use of it, of hearing the Word of God in several churches, on all Sundays and holy-days, announced and explained to us by preachers who speak in the name of God? But, deplorable is the negligence of many Christians, etc., *continues as before.*

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*FORTY-SEVENTH SERMON.*

**ON THOSE WHO HEAR THE WORD OF GOD WITHOUT FRUIT.**

Subject.

Many hear the Word of God in sermons, but without fruit or profit; because the seed falls by the wayside.—*Preached on the eleventh Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

*Surdos fecit audire.*—Mark vii. 37.  
“He hath made the deaf to hear.”

Introduction.

O dear Lord, how necessary a miracle that would be now-days for many Christians, namely, that Thou shouldst make the deaf to hear! For there are many who, like deaf people, never, or at all events, very seldom hear Thy divine Word, although they have splendid opportunities of hearing it. Yet, why do I wish that a miracle should be wrought for them? They wish to be deaf; they have no desire to know and to understand the Word of God. I have spoken of those people already, my dear brethren, when I explained the dangerous state of those who seldom hear the Word of God in sermons. Now I go on to speak of those who are constant in hearing sermons, and amongst them too, a great many deaf people are sometimes to be found; those, namely, who listen very attentively, but derive as little fruit and profit for their souls from what they hear, as if they were really deaf and unable to hear a word. How can that be? What I say is not an invention of my own; it is founded on the infallible

<sup>1</sup> *Mirabantur, sed non convertebantur.*

Truth, Jesus Christ Himself, who speaks of those people in the parable of the sower in the Gospel of St. Luke: "as he sowed some fell by the wayside, and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it; and other some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it had no moisture; and other some fell among thorns, and the thorns growing up with it, choked it; and other some fell upon good ground, and being sprung up, yielded fruit a hundredfold." Thus we learn from the mouth of Jesus Christ the four causes why the seed of the Word of God produces little or no fruit in most of those who hear it; and at the same time we have the subjects of four instructions which I intend giving wherever the Gospel of the day affords the opportunity. I begin now with the first, and I say:

#### Plan of Discourse.

*Many hear the Word of God in sermons, but without fruit or profit; because the seed falls by the wayside. Who they are. Such is the subject of this instruction.*

O loving Saviour, who canst make the deaf to hear, grant by Thy grace that we may henceforward amend this fault, and never hear Thy word without fruit! This we ask of Thee through the merits of Thy Mother Mary and the holy angels guardian.

There are three causes which prevent the seed that falls by the wayside from bearing fruit. The first is, because the wayside is an open public place, where the seed can easily be blown away by the wind; the second, because the seed not being covered with earth, cannot strike root; the third, because it is liable to be trodden under foot by the passers-by, or to be eaten by the birds. In like manner the devil has three ways of taking the Word of God out of the hearts of those who hear it, so that it brings no fruit or profit to the soul. Some, as if they were like a public way that is open on all sides, he prevents from understanding the Word of God; and these, says St. John Chrysostom, are the idle; others he prevents from attending to the roots, that is, to the principal truth that is explained; and these are the curious; with others again he causes the truths they have heard and understood, to be trampled on and devoured; and these are

With three kinds of hearers the Word of God falls without fruit by the wayside.

<sup>1</sup> Dum seminat, aliud cecidit secus viam, et conculcatum est, et volucres cœli comederunt illud. Et aliud cecidit supra petram, et natum aruit, quia non habebat humorem. Et aliud cecidit inter spinas, et simul exortæ spinæ suffocaverunt illud. Et aliud cecidit in terram bonam, et ortum fecit fructum centuplum.—Luke viii. 5-8.

the tepid and lukewarm. With all these people the efforts of the devil are to "take the word out of their heart, lest believing they should be saved."<sup>1</sup>

The first consists of those who hear the sermon with distracted minds.

First then, there are those idle people who come to church to hear a sermon, not through a supernatural impulse to learn something good, and to be aroused to do good; but simply to pass away the time, or to accompany others, or to pass themselves off as good Christians, or merely that they may be able to say that they have been to the sermon. Thus they are in the church in which the sermon is preached, but they are, so to speak, not present at the sermon; their bodies are there, but not their minds and hearts, which are occupied with a hundred voluntary distractions, so that they hear the sound of the preacher's voice by the outward organs of sense, and yet understand little or nothing of what he says. They go to a part of the church where they can fix their eyes, not on the preacher, but on the congregation, so that they may see what strangers are present, greet those who are coming in, or going out, and even laugh and talk with those who, like themselves, have little desire to hear the Word of God. If they stand or sit in the midst of the congregation, they show clearly enough by their constant looking about at the least noise, by their nodding and bowing to those who come in, and sometimes too, by going asleep, that they have not brought attentive minds and hearts to the sermon, and that they are not listening with any desire to profit by what they hear. There are others who, through sheer ignorance, rob themselves of the fruit of the sermon under the appearance of devotion, by saying vocal prayers, or, when they see a priest going out on the altar (which does not occur in well-ordered churches during the sermon) by hearing Mass, and thus, as they think, doing two good works at once, and satisfying two obligations at the same time; but in reality neither of the obligations is fulfilled properly; the holy Mass is not heard with due devotion, nor the sermon with due attention. Prayer and hearing Mass are two good, praiseworthy and meritorious works; but when a sermon is being preached is not the time for them. These, and amongst their number may also be reckoned those who habitually come too late, show that they have not much desire to hear the Word of God, and that it does not matter to them whether they understand it or not, although they thereby certainly lose the light and knowledge that the good God had prepared for

<sup>1</sup> *Ne credentes salvi fiant.*—Luke viii. 12.

them in the explanation of the Gospel truth, a light that they will hardly have another chance of receiving.

What trouble a conscientious preacher gives himself during the week, studying, reading and writing! How many sighs and prayers he sends up to God and to the holy angels! Why? For what purpose? To obtain the light of the Holy Ghost for himself, that he may properly explain to the Christian people what God wishes him to explain to them; and for his hearers, that they may understand clearly the Gospel truths that are preached to them, take them deeply to heart, see from them what their own duties and obligations are, and regulate their lives and actions according to them. Now, you can easily imagine how grieved he feels, when he sees that all his trouble and labor are fruitless for many, who take up in a wrong sense what God has inspired him to say to them, or listen without attention, and therefore without fruit.

Such people make the labor of the preacher fruitless.

Demosthenes once delivered an oration in the city of Athens, before a great concourse of people, on a subject of vital importance to the welfare of the State. He saw some of the audience sleeping, others talking and laughing, and others staring about them. Interrupting his speech, he cried out to them in a loud voice: Hear, O Athenians, I am about to tell you something interesting that has just happened. All the sleepers awoke at once, and pricked up their ears. But Demosthenes stopped again, and made as if he were going away, when the people signed to him that he should continue the interesting story. Oh! the intolerable stupidity of man, cried out Demosthenes then, with every mark of displeasure, when I relate to you a foolish tale, you listen with the greatest eagerness; but when I speak of matters concerning the well-being of our whole country, you seem not to have the least desire of listening to me. Ah, how much more reason have we not to utter the same reproach against many Christians who come to sermons! If the preacher were there simply to amuse them with foolish tales, the church would be too small to contain all the people, and they would listen to him with all possible attention. But it is the Gospel truths that are treated of, which concern the welfare of our immortal souls that have been bought by the Precious Blood of Christ, and that have an eternal hell to avoid, an eternal Heaven to gain; and those truths interest people so little, that they listen, so to speak, with only half an ear, and thus show what small interest they take in what concerns their souls. Oh, intolerable and deplorable stupidity of the human heart!

And show that they are not much concerned about their souls.

And give  
great joy  
to the devil,  
for it is he  
who strives  
to distract  
their atten-  
tion.

And that is the very result that the spirit of envy, the devil, tries so hard to bring about. He knows what harm the Word of God can do him, when it is listened to with a certain amount of attention and eagerness; it fills him with bitter envy to see so many souls thereby freed from his slavery and led to love God zealously; and therefore he tries, in every possible way, when he cannot prevent people from coming to the sermon, at least to distract them, so that they understand little or nothing of it.

Shown by  
examples.

As St. Vincent Ferrer was once preaching with great fervor in a public square in the town of Murcia in Spain, three runaway horses came towards the assembled people at full gallop. The frightened people began to look about for some means of escape. Be still! said the holy man, do not be afraid, my dear Christians; those are not wild horses but devils. Thereupon he made the sign of the Cross over his audience, and commanded the evil spirits in the name of Jesus Christ to leave the town and never return to it; a command which was at once obeyed. See, he said to the people, those accursed spirits that you have just beheld in the form of wild horses, have been in this town for a long time past for the sole purpose of hindering people from deriving any fruit from the sermons they hear; now that they have seen how eagerly and attentively you listen, they could no longer contain their rage, and therefore they tried to distract your attention by running towards you and frightening you. But, thanks be to God! they were foiled in their design! St. Antony of Padua discomfited the devil in a similar manner. Once, while he was preaching, a messenger came in a great hurry, made his way through the crowd of people, and went up to a noble lady, who was listening very attentively to the sermon, and gave her a note, begging her to read it at once, as it contained something of the greatest importance. The news contained in the note was to the effect that her only son had been killed. St. Antony saw through the trick at once, and cried out to the lady: Do not be alarmed, your son is alive and well; the messenger is the devil, and his only object was to prevent you from paying attention to the Word of God; it was for that reason he invented that sad news for you. These examples will suffice to show what joy the devil experiences when he sees people giving way to voluntary distractions during a sermon; for without any trouble on his part, he secures what he most longs for. And what is that? That they may not attend to the Word of God, and so derive no fruit from it, "lest believing, they should be saved."

The second class of those who scatter the seed of the Word of God by the wayside, where it can neither strike root nor produce fruit, are the curious, who listen to sermons with great attention, nay, with great pleasure and eagerness, but do not pay any attention to the fundamental truth that is being explained; for they are simply anxious to hear how the preacher treats his subject, but they are not at all concerned about deriving profit for their souls from what they hear. They listen for the sake of an intellectual treat, not to have their wills moved to do good or to avoid evil. They are, to my mind, like those artists who come to the churches to look at the pictures of Christ and the saints. What do they look at them for? Their chief idea is to see whether the picture is in accordance with the rules of art, how the outlines, shades and colors harmonize with the subject, whether the limbs are in due proportion, etc. That is all they are concerned about. Oh, they exclaim with pleasure, what a beautiful picture! It is a real masterpiece! Whoever painted that knew what he was about! That other picture over the altar there, is not much of a success; there is too much straining after effect; the foot is too short, the hand is too long; and so they run on without the least devout or pious thought occurring to their minds. But if a pious man comes into the church and looks at the same pictures out of devotion, on his knees and with folded hands, they bring to his mind Christ, or the saints of God, and excite in him a true sorrow for sin, fervent love of Jesus Christ crucified, and a profound sense of humility and self-abasement by representing to him the lives of the saints. The others go away as they came; they gained nothing by looking at the pictures, except that they can say: I have seen a beautiful painting in such and such a church.

Those who go to sermons out of curiosity, represented by a simile.

Such is the case with many Christians who hear the Word of God constantly and with eagerness and pleasure; their curiosity is excited by the manner in which the preacher deals with his subject; they want to see how he proves it, and to hear the examples, parables, similes, traits of history, interpretations and adaptations of Holy Scripture, and the oratorical skill with which he develops it. Thus it is only the outward colors they consider, in order to gratify their curiosity; they pay no attention to the substance of the truth itself which is explained with a view of moving the hearers' hearts, nor to the cogency and weight of the arguments that are adduced to make them detest their sins and amend their wicked lives.

Such people  
do not profit  
by sermons.

Therefore, those people go away from sermons just as they came, nor have they gained anything except that they can say: oh, that was a fine sermon; that preacher knows his business, etc.; or else, that sermon was not worth much; the preacher did not take much trouble to prepare it, etc. Alas, is that all you have been able to learn from the Word of God? Oh, how I regret that you should have spent a precious hour so unprofitably! How sorry I am that you should have shown such patience in listening to no purpose! What a bad return you make the preacher for all his labor and trouble; for he certainly expected to do something more for you, than merely to tickle your ears, and excite your admiration! I know very well that the explanation of the Scripture truths must be made with a certain pomp and magnificence of language, so to speak, becoming the infinite Majesty of God, who speaks by the preacher's mouth; just as the altars in the churches are decorated with beautiful flowers, silken hangings, gold and silver vases and costly paintings, in order to show that the great God is really present there. I acknowledge, too, with St. Bernard, just as pills are gilded or sweetened, in order to make them less distasteful to the sick man who has to take them; so, in order to lessen the dislike that some weak Christians have for the Word of God, and to induce them to hear it more frequently, the Gospel truths must be explained by all means with earnestness and vigor, in order to instruct the hearers and to move their hearts, but at the same time they must be sugar-coated by being presented in an agreeable form, with apt similes, and examples, and in a pleasing style of oratory. "A sermon," says St. Bernard, "must be pleasing to the ear, solid in the nutriment it affords, and efficacious in healing."<sup>1</sup> But to seek the first of these qualities, alone, and to aim at nothing beyond the mere pleasure of having an intellectual treat, and so to pay little attention to the truth explained, that means simply to pervert the end for which one should hear the Word of God, and to rob one's self deliberately of all spiritual profit.

They are  
sick and  
do not wish  
to be healed.

If the sick man were simply to taste the sugar that covers the pill, but to reject the pill itself with disgust, what good would that do him? None, certainly; it would only make him worse. Alas, what dangerous and mortal illness of the soul many people have, who come to hear a sermon; illness which the good God

<sup>1</sup> *Deliciosa ad saporem, solida ad nutrimentum, efficans ad medicinam.*—S. Bern. serm. 67 in Cant.

is then and there prepared to cure by His all-piercing word! People come who are ill of a foolish, loquacious, blasphemous, slanderous, or impure tongue; of curious and lustful eyes; of unguarded ears; of impure, or thievish hands; who are sick in nearly all their actions and behavior; whose hearts are filled with the poison of hatred and envy against their neighbor, or burdened with the raging fever of impure passion, of pride, of avarice, of gluttony and drunkenness, of anger and ill-will, etc. The medicine that God has prepared to cure their diseases, is the preaching to them the truths of faith, in order to enlighten and to arouse them to a sincere repentance and amendment. Now, if those sick people seek only the outward ornament, and throw away the real medicine, the Gospel truths, without thinking of them; how will that medicine help to cure their spiritual diseases? Ah, certainly it is a sign that they do not know the miserable state in which they are, and do not desire a remedy for it; or, at least, there is no doubt that they have no hunger and thirst for the Word of God. He who is really hungry, is not in need of sweetmeats and delicacies to provoke his appetite; he is satisfied with plain, substantial food, and does not care how it is prepared. A piece of dry bread and meat tastes very well to him, although he has to eat it without sauce. On the other hand, he who has no appetite for wholesome food, but longs for sweetmeats and delicacies, gives evident proof that his stomach is weak and out of order, or else that he has already had enough to eat.

“Go to the ant,” says the Holy Ghost, to the slothful and lazy, who lead idle, useless lives, and learn from them how to employ your time. We might say to those curious hearers of the Word of God, “go to the bees,” and learn from them how to extract profit and advantage for your souls from sermons. Consider how the bees fly about in the garden, or in the open field. What sort of flowers are they seeking so diligently? Roses? violets? tulips? ranunculus, and the like, which lend most beauty to the garden by their varied colors? By no means; those thrifty little creatures do not care much for flowers of that kind; they are not attracted either by their delicious perfume, or their beautiful colors; all they want is honey that is so useful and so pleasing to the taste. Therefore, it is no matter to them what a flower or herb looks like, whether it grows wild in the fields, or is carefully cultivated in the garden, whether it is red

They should learn from the bees how to extract profit from a sermon.

<sup>1</sup> Vade ad formicam.—Prov. vi. 6.

or white, blue or black, sweet or bitter; it is all one to them, as long as they can find the precious honey they are looking for; and when they have found that, they are satisfied, for they have attained the object of their desires. "Go to the bees," O Christians, and learn from them what you must seek, and pay special attention to, when you hear a sermon. Learn to seek not the outward pomp and magnificence of words, but the substantial truth that is explained for you, the cogency of the arguments and proofs that are adduced, the infallible authority of the Holy Scripture, and the maxims and sayings of the holy Doctors of the Church which confirm that truth. Whether the truth is sweet or bitter, terrible or consoling, should be a matter of indifference to you, if you are concerned about your soul's welfare. The honey that you have to extract from it, and to bring away with you, is the clear knowledge of your past sins and of the faults that have hitherto escaped you, the impulse to amend your life, zeal in the divine service, and your spiritual advantage. If you do not seek that, the sermon is of no good to you, and you are only wasting your time listening to it; you scatter the precious seed of the Word of God by the wayside, where it cannot grow nor take root, and you are playing into the hands of the devil, whose whole effort is to take the word away from you, "lest believing, you should be saved."

The third class consists of those who immediately forget the truths they have heard.

The third and last class of those who let the seed of the Word of God fall by the wayside, and be eaten by the birds, consists of those Christians who are lazy and slothful in the divine service. They listen to the sermon, and listen to it with great eagerness and attention; nor are they indifferent to the truths preached to them, which they understand very well, so that they can offer no objections against them; frequently, too, their understandings are enlightened and their wills impelled to change their lives and to amend their faults; they find consolation in difficulties, and encouragement to be zealous in the service of God; but it all lasts only till the end of the sermon; when the preacher leaves the pulpit, they forget all he has said; they are just as quick in forgetting, as they were in learning, so that, if they were asked on the same evening, or on the following day, whether they remembered anything of the sermon, or learned anything from it, they would have to answer that they knew nothing more about it. St. James, in his epistle, compares people of that kind to a man who looks at himself in a glass: for the Word of God is a glass in which the beauty of virtue, the deformity of vice, the gravity

of sin, and the actual state of the soul may be seen. Now, he who hears this word, and immediately forgets it, is, according to the Apostle, like a man who looks at himself in the glass, and presently goes away and forgets what he is like. "For," says the Apostle, "if a man be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he shall be compared to a man beholding his own countenance in a glass. For he beheld himself and went his way, and presently forgot what manner of man he was."<sup>1</sup> St. Gregory compares the hearts of such people to a stomach which takes in food and drink with appetite, but rejects them with violence before the process of digestion begins: "The food of the soul," he says, "is the Word of God; but it is rejected, like food taken into a sick stomach, when it does not remain in the memory."<sup>2</sup> Just as it is a certain sign of a weak stomach to reject food and drink, so it is an almost infallible sign of a soul being injured by carelessness in the divine service, when it hears the Word of God, and at once forgets it. That forgetfulness is to be attributed to the fact that, when the sermon is over, those people at once occupy their minds with their usual worldly cares and occupations, and go into company, or engage in conversations which distract them, and prevent them from giving due consideration to the truths they have heard, so as to impress them on the memory. Thus, they profit as little by the sermon, as if they had never heard it.

The morning dew falls on the roses and lilies, but it does them no good; nay, it rather injures them and makes them fade and droop all the sooner. On the other hand, when it falls into the pearl-oyster, it produces a costly pearl. What is the reason of this difference? The dew falls off the flowers at once, or else it is quickly absorbed by the heat of the sun; but the oyster, as soon as it has received the dew-drop, closes its shell at once, and keeps it fast. In the same way, when the dew of the Word of God falls on a slothful, careless heart, it falls off at once, and so can produce no spiritual food of importance. A zealous soul, desirous of salvation, is not at all satisfied with merely hearing and receiving into itself the Word of God; no, it must produce a precious pearl from that word, and therefore it endeavors to retain in its memory, at least as far as their substance is concerned,

And derive  
no profit  
from them.

<sup>1</sup> Si quis auditor est verbi, et non factor, hic comparabitur viro consideranti vultum nativitatæ suæ in speculo: consideravit enim se, et abiit, et statim oblitus est, qualis fuerit.—James i. 23 24.

<sup>2</sup> Cibus mentis est verbum Dei, et quasi receptus cibus stomacho languente rejicitur, quando auditus sermo in ventre memoriæ non retinetur.—S. Greg. hom. 15. in Evang.

the truths it has heard. One who is thus disposed, even after the sermon is over, is still busied in his thoughts with what he has heard and learned; for days after he recalls it again to his memory, and renews every morning the resolutions he has made to derive spiritual profit from it. These are the hearers that Jesus Christ pronounces blessed: "Blessed are they who hear the Word of God, and keep it."<sup>1</sup> But the others are the people of whom our dear Saviour complains, because they scatter the seed of His divine word by the wayside, so that it is either trampled under foot, or devoured by the birds: "And they by the wayside; are they that hear: then the devil cometh, and taketh the word out of their hearts." To what end? Alas, "lest believing they should be saved."<sup>2</sup>

How to remember the truths one hears in sermons.

Ah, some pious souls will probably say with fear and trembling, if it is necessary to keep constantly in the memory what one has heard in sermons, then certainly, I am not one of those whom Jesus Christ has pronounced blessed! For, no matter how attentive and eager I am to hear and to retain what I have heard, I still forget it, and am never able to say what I have heard on the preceding Sunday. I have no difficulty in believing that you are speaking the truth, and that there are many who are in the same state as yourselves. But it is not necessary by any means to be always able to relate what you have heard in a sermon; I myself could not now tell you exactly what I said in my sermon last Sunday, although I knew it then word for word. It is enough for us that the thing itself, that is, the truth we have learned remains in the memory; it is not at all necessary for us to be always recalling it to our minds. It is, in fact, an utter impossibility for us to do that, because we have so many different things to think of during the day. But when an opportunity offers of doing or omitting anything according to the truth we have learned, we must then try to remember that truth, and to act according to the impulse we received when we were listening to it, although the words and style of the sermon, and the proofs and argument brought forward, have entirely escaped our recollection.

Explained in particular instances.

For instance, you have heard a sermon about Christian patience under trials, and you have learned that all crosses, no matter by what name they are called, or how they come to us,

<sup>1</sup> *Beati qui audiunt verbum Dei, et custodiunt illud.*—Luke xi. 28.

<sup>2</sup> *Qui autem secus viam: Hi sunt, qui audiunt; deinde venit diabolus et tollit verbum de corde eorum, ne credentes salvi fiant.*—Luke viii. 12.

are to be attributed to a most wise and just arrangement of the Providence of God, who with the best intentions and out of the fulness of His Fatherly love for us, sends us those crosses for our spiritual good, and is looking on while we are suffering pain and anguish, etc. Now you do not think of all this for some time after, and you would not be able to say if you were asked, what proofs, or texts of Scripture, or examples of the saints, the preacher brought forward to substantiate the truth he was explaining; nor is it necessary that you should be able to do so. But suppose that after an interval of six months, some calamity, or sickness, or trouble befalls you; at first you are quite disturbed and bewildered, and you get angry with the person whom you blame for the misfortune that has happened you; but, when you recollect yourself, the thought occurs to you: oh, I heard once in a sermon that all trials come from God, and must therefore be borne with patience and resignation. I acknowledged the truth of that, when I heard it, and I also made a resolution to resign myself patiently to the will of God in all troubles. Now I have a fine opportunity of carrying that resolution into effect; I must, then, and will be patient under this trial. You have heard a sermon about the necessity of avoiding the dangers and occasions of sin, because God withdraws His grace from him who, presumptuously and without necessity, ventures into them, and allows him to fall into sin. You forgot that sermon soon after you heard it; but after some time you were invited to an evening party in which many people of both sexes were to meet and spend the time in dancing and amusing themselves. All at once you remember having heard that such parties are dangerous and you make up your mind to refuse the invitation politely and to remain at home. You have heard a sermon about detraction, what a grievous sin it is, and how difficult to make proper reparation for; it escapes your memory for a time, until one day you happen to be in company in which people are speaking ill of their neighbor; the sermon occurs to your mind at once; I have heard, you say to yourself, that it is not right, that it is against charity, and against the right that my neighbor has to his good name, thus to speak ill of him behind his back; and that the loss he thus suffers in his honor must be made good. Why then should I join in this uncharitable conversation? I will hold my tongue and say nothing. You have heard a sermon about the gravity of the insult that is offered to God, in His very presence, by irreverence in church;

you acknowledged the truth of what you heard, and now if you continue to behave with reverence in church, you show that you have profited by it sufficiently. You have heard and acknowledged that it is very pleasing to God, as it is right and just, that one should consecrate the first of the day to Him by devout morning prayers; you have long ago forgotten what you heard; nevertheless, you still come every morning to praise God in the public devotions. You have heard and acknowledged that it is most useful and almost necessary, in order to keep in the state of grace, to receive the Sacraments often with due preparation; from that time you have been accustomed to go to Confession and Communion every fortnight, or at least every month; that is quite enough, even though you have forgotten every word of the sermon. And so on with regard to other truths. That is the right fruit and profit to derive from hearing the Word of God, that is the way to keep it constantly before one's mind.

Exhortation  
to hear the  
Word of God  
frequently  
and with  
desire.

In a word, he who often hears sermons with a good intention, and with an eager desire to profit by them, will always derive some spiritual advantage from them, even though he can never clearly recall them to his memory. Ruffinus writes of a young hermit, who once complained to his abbot that his memory was so bad, that he could not retain a word of the sermons he heard, although he listened to them eagerly and with a great desire to profit by them, and therefore he was of the opinion that it was simply a loss of time for him to hear sermons. The abbot took two earthen vessels, and giving one to the young hermit, said: there, go and fill that with water and when you have washed it quite clean, throw the water out. The young man did so three or four times. Now, said the abbot, which of the two vessels is the cleaner! Of course the one I have washed so often, said the young man. It is just the same with the soul, <sup>1</sup> rejoined the abbot, although the water is at once poured out of the vessel that is washed, still that vessel is cleaner each time. The Word of God is the water provided by Him, to cleanse souls with; if you hear it constantly and with eagerness, although you imagine that it all escapes your memory at once, and that you can retain none of it, still it always cleanses your soul more and more from the filth of sin, and makes it more beautiful with virtue and more pleasing to God. I conclude, my dear brethren, with the same advice, "Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it;" blessed are they who with attention and eagerness and a

<sup>1</sup> Sic est et anima.—Ruffinus, l. 3.

*Hearing the Word of God with Hard Hearts.* 133

desire to know the truth, receive the seed of the Word of God and make it fructify in their hearts. Amen.

*Another Introduction to the same sermon for the second Sunday after Epiphany.*

**Text.**

*Quodcumque dixerit vobis, facite.*—John. ii. 5.

“Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye.”

Certainly a salutary and holy exhortation, and one worthy to fall from the lips of the Most Blessed Virgin, who was specially enlightened by God, and whose will was never different from the will of God. “Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye;” if you are attentive to every word and sign of my Son, you cannot go wrong. My dear brethren, let us all take this exhortation to ourselves, just as if we heard from the lips of Mary, our dearest Mother, every time we hear a sermon “whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye”; be eagerly attentive to all that God is about to say to your hearts, so as to live in accordance with it. Oh, if that were always done, what great profit would accrue to souls! But unfortunately, how many Christians there are who despise the Word of God, and seldom go to sermons! What a bad and dangerous sign that is, I have explained last Sunday. Now I go on to speak of those who constantly hear sermons, amongst whom also there are many who profit as little by what they hear, as if they never came to a sermon at all. How so? This is no invention of my own, etc.—*continues as before.*

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**FORTY-EIGHTH SERMON.**

**ON THOSE WHO HEAR THE WORD OF GOD WITH HARD HEARTS.**

**Subject.**

There are some who hear the Word of God in sermons without deriving any profit therefrom, and without amending their vicious lives, because the seed falls on a rock, that is, on a hard heart.—*Preached on the twelfth Sunday after Pentecost.*

**Text.**

*Viso illo, præterivit.*—Luke x. 31.

“And seeing him, passed by.”

**Introduction.**

Certainly that priest must have been hard-hearted, as he was not moved to compassion by the sight of misery and pain. He saw the poor robbed and wounded man lying half dead by the wayside, but "seeing him, passed by," and went on his way without a word of consolation for him. We find the same hardness of heart nowadays, my dear brethren, amongst many Christians who, not to speak of their refusing to help their poor and needy fellow-Christians, when they could easily do so, and of their want of pity and compassion for their suffering brethren, have within themselves a poor, sick and mortally wounded soul, and cannot be moved by any inspirations and exhortations to take pity on it, and to save it from eternal destruction. And to their number belong the second class of those who hear the Word of God, but do not profit by it, because the seed falls on the hard rock; of these I will speak to-day, and I say:

**Plan of Discourse.**

*There are some who hear the Word of God in sermons without deriving any profit therefrom, and without amending their vicious lives, because the seed falls on a rock, that is, on a hard heart. Such is the whole subject of this instruction.*

O Almighty God, who holdest in Thy hands the hearts of men, soften those hard rocks, that they may be at last penetrated by Thy divine Word, and produce the wished-for fruit of eternal salvation! This we ask of Thee through the merits of Mary and our holy angels guardian.

Some sinners hear sermons with hard hearts.

There are some people even amongst Catholics, who are so sunk in depravity, that they have recourse to diabolical arts, and by the help of the devil, make themselves invulnerable, so that they may fearlessly engage in battle, or in whatever quarrel they have on hand. If the devil keeps his promise to those people, which he generally does not do, for he often shamefully deceives them, or else his black art is frustrated by the power of God and the holy angels; but if he does fulfil his promise, neither sword nor dagger, nor bullet will be able to hurt them; nothing can inflict a wound on them; the point of the dagger, the edge of the sword and the bullet can only make a blue mark on their bodies, but cannot penetrate the flesh, because it has been made so hard and firm. In the same way, amongst Christians, there are some whose hearts are so hard and flinty, that no matter how undeniable the

truths they hear in sermons are, they cannot be moved to repent of their sins, to change their unchristian habits, and to amend their wicked lives.

As we have seen already, the holy Apostle, St. Paul, writing to the Ephesians, calls the Word of God a sharp sword; "Take unto you the helmet of salvation; and the sword of the Spirit (which is the Word of God);"<sup>1</sup> and a sword which penetrates both soul and body. "For," he says writing to the Hebrews, "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, of the joints also and of the marrow."<sup>2</sup> There is no vice that cannot be slain and exterminated by the sword of the Word of God. If pride or vanity impels you to extol yourself above others, take that sword immediately: "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return."<sup>3</sup> Remember who and what you are; you are but a handful of earth, and you will have to return to earth; "under thee shall the moth be strewed, and worms shall be thy covering;"<sup>4</sup> why should you be proud of your beauty? It will one day be the food of worms. "Every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled."<sup>5</sup> "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble."<sup>6</sup> If impure passions and the desires of the flesh assail the soul; take at once the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God: "neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor the effeminate shall possess the kingdom of God."<sup>7</sup> Impure and sensual souls, "which of you shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"<sup>8</sup> how will you bear the eternal fires that await your momentary pleasure? If you are tempted to avarice and the greed of temporal things, take the sword of the Spirit in your hand at once; "What doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul."<sup>9</sup> "Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee; and whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?"<sup>10</sup> Why do you torment yourself, and grub in the earth like a mole?

Although the Word of God is powerful against all sins and vices.

<sup>1</sup> Galeam salutis assumite, et gladium spiritus (quod est verbum Dei).—Ephes. vi. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Vivus est enim sermo Dei, et efflax et penetrabilior omni gladioincipiti et pertingens usque ad divisionem animæ ac spiritus, compagum quoque ac medullarum.—Hebr. iv. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris.—Gen. iii. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Subter te sternetur timea, et operimentum tuum erunt vermes.—Isai. xiv. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Qui se exaltat, humiliabitur.—Luke xiv. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Deus superbis resistit, humilibus autem dat gratiam.—James iv. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Neque fornicarii, neque adulteri, neque molles regnum Dei possidebunt.—1. Cor. vi. 9-10.

<sup>8</sup> Quis habitavit ex vobis cum adoribus sempiternis?—Isai. xxiii. 14.

<sup>9</sup> Quid enim prodest homini, si mundum universum lucretur, animæ vero suæ detrimentum patitur.—Matth. xvi. 26.

<sup>10</sup> Stulte, hac nocte animam tuam repetunt a te: quæ autem parasti, cujus erunt?—Luke xii. 20.

Perhaps this very night your soul will be hurried into eternity. If the perverse world tries to lead you astray by its scandalous, and vain usages, take at once the sword of the Word of God: "Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world."<sup>1</sup> "Whosoever will be a friend of the world, becometh an enemy of God."<sup>2</sup> If the calamities and miseries of life assail you, disturb your heart and mind, and threaten to drive you into despair; arm yourself at once with the sword of the Word of God: "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." "The world shall rejoice, and you shall be made sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy;"<sup>3</sup> your sorrow will last but a short time, and will then be exchanged for eternal joy: "The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us." "Look up and lift up your heads; because your redemption is at hand;"<sup>4</sup> and your tears will be turned into eternal gladness: after the short suffering of this life, you will have the everlasting joys of Heaven which no one will take from you, etc. In a word, there is no vice, nor temptation which the powerful Word of God cannot overcome, subdue and utterly exterminate.

Yet it is of  
no good to  
those hard-  
hearted  
people.

But all this is of no good to those hard-hearted people of whom we are speaking. The sword may strike where it wills; it cannot penetrate. They hear from the Word of God of the magnificent promises of an exceeding great reward for virtue, and threats of eternal punishment in hell that awaits sinners, of the uncertainty, and the speedy approach of an unforeseen and unprovided death, and of the strict judgment that will follow it; the bitter sufferings of Our Lord Jesus Christ are represented to them in the most moving manner; the most powerful motives are suggested to them for loving above all things God, who is infinitely beautiful, and infinitely amiable, etc. But nothing can touch their hearts; they are incapable of being softened; they go home from the sermon with the same hearts and minds that they brought to it. They are like a student who spends two, three, four or six years at school, and leaves it just as ignorant as when he entered it, because he was unable to learn on

<sup>1</sup> *Nolite diligere mundum, neque ea, quæ in mundo sunt.*—I. John ii. 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Quicumque voluerit amicus esse sæculi hujus, inimicus Dei constituitur.*—James iv. 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Beati, qui lugent, quoniam ipsi saturabuntur.*—Matth. v. 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Mundus gaudebit, vos autem contristabimini, sed tristitia vestra vertetur in gaudium.*—John xvi. 20.

<sup>5</sup> *Non sunt condignæ passionibus hujus temporis ad futuram gloriam, quæ revelabitur nobis.*—Rom. viii. 18.

<sup>6</sup> *Respicite et levate capita vestra, quoniam appropinquat redemptio vestra.*—Luke xxi. 28

account of the dulness of his understanding. In the same way, they hear in the school of Jesus Christ, many truths that are most useful and necessary to salvation, but they remain as before, addicted to the same pride and vanity, the same avarice and injustice, the same impurity and sensuality, the same gluttony and drunkenness, the same laziness and sloth in the service of God; they are now just as they have been for the last five, ten or more years; the sword of the Word of God does not touch their hearts. Why? Alas, habitual indulgence in sin and vice has made them hard and callous; the Word of God can make no impression on them. Father Kircher relates a wonderful circumstance that occurred in the province of Tungil in Africa; a large tract of country with all it contained, was one summer's night turned into hard stone, amidst terrible earthquakes and storms; the trees and crops in the fields, the plants and vegetables in the gardens, the wild beasts in the forests, domestic animals and fowls in their sheds, even human beings, men, women and children in their houses, were all turned to stone, and each individual retained the posture he had when the catastrophe occurred.<sup>1</sup> One might have talked to those people for a long time, my dear brethren, without making any impression on them, for they were but stone; you might strike, beat or shoot at them without wounding them, they could not be wounded, neither would they run away afraid. Why? Because they were hard, lifeless stones. And there are men who are just as insensible to the otherwise powerful Word of God, as if, like those people in Africa, they were turned into stone. You may say to them what you will, strike at them a hundred times with the sword of the Word of God, it will not wound their hearts; they are turned into stone.

Such was the acknowledgment made by that old man, of whom Father Cataneus writes; he was on his death-bed, and the priest who was attending him was doing his best to excite him to repentance for his sins, and to persuade him to receive the last Sacraments to help him on the journey into eternity. He reminded him of the necessary articles of faith, of hope, of charity and confidence in God, of supernatural sorrow and repentance; he spoke to him of the infinite mercy of God, to whom one never appeals in vain for forgiveness, and of the strict, inexora-

Shown by  
an example.

<sup>1</sup> Vicius Viedoblo in provincia Tungil in Africa mediterranea aestivo tempore nocte in-tempesta cum incolis, et animalibus, et arboribus et frumentis omnibus, ad:repentibus in modum horrendum fragoribus, non sine frequenti soli concussione in saxa durissima brigit —Kircher, mund. subter. tom. 2, p. 53.

ble justice of God which, after this life, will condemn the impenitent sinner to hell, and of other things of the kind, as far as his charity and zeal for the conversion of the soul that was now so near the end, suggested to him. But the dying man, although still in his senses, gave not the least sign of being moved to repentance; he looked around him on all sides, and gave a sign to his wife and children, as if he wished to say the last good-bye to them; the priest continued exhorting him to look up to Heaven, for this earth was at an end for him: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, have mercy on me according to Thy great mercy!" At last the sick man grew impatient, and he said to the priest: Hold your tongue, Father, it is all of no use; "the bread is too hard, the knife cannot cut it;" meaning thereby that his heart was too hard for the priest's words to make any impression on it. Thereupon, he turned his face away from the priest and gave up his hardened soul, without the least sign of repentance.

How the heart grows hardened, shown by a simile.

"The bread is hard;" there you have, my dear brethren, a simile which shows clearly how the human heart grows callous in wickedness, until it is incapable of being moved to repentance by the Word of God. When bread is first put into the oven, it is soft dough, and will receive any impression or shape that one wishes to give it; but when it remains for a certain time in the oven, the heat forms around it a hard crust, which can, however, still be easily broken with the hand or cut with a knife; but if the bread is left in the oven for several days, or exposed a long time to the heat of the sun, it gets so dry and hard, that neither hand, nor tooth, nor knife can make any impression on it. So it is with the human heart. At first, while it is still innocent, it is, so to speak, a soft dough, which can be easily shaped and moulded into any form by the divine inspirations, by the teaching and instruction given by parents, and by the exhortations of preachers and confessors to virtue and piety. That is the proper time, too, for parents to fulfil the important duty and obligation that God has imposed on them under pain of eternal damnation, of keeping their children from all dangers and occasions of sin, and after the example of the elder Tobias, training them from their very childhood to fear God, to love Him, and to serve Him alone: "And from his infancy," says the Holy Scripture, he taught him to fear God, and to abstain from all sin."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quem ab infantia timere Deum docuit, et abstinere ab omni peccato.—*Tob. i. 10.*

*Hearing the Word of God with Hard Hearts.* 139

But if one who is still innocent, learns to know evil through the carelessness or bad example of his parents, or through the influence of wicked companions, and falls into grievous sin; then, alas, the crust begins to form itself around the dough; the first tenderness of conscience, the modesty and the softness of the heart disappear. Still the heart may yet be moved without difficulty, and be brought on a better way. A single thought on the part of the uneasy, gnawing conscience, that cries out, as it generally does in one's earlier years: Unhappy man, what have you done? where are you going to? You have lost your soul, offended God, forfeited Heaven, and lost all! A single word on the part of his confessor, to show him the deformity and the grievous malice of sin, and the severe punishment that awaits it; a single sermon that speaks to him of God, and of divine truths, may be a sharp knife that cuts into his heart, and moves it to sorrow and repentance. But if he afterwards gets into other temptations and occasions of sin, so that he falls frequently; then the crust gets harder and harder; the former horror and dread of mortal sin disappear gradually, until at length the sin becomes habitual, the voice of conscience is hushed, and the sinner feels quite at ease in his miserable state. O wretched and miserable state indeed! The good inspirations of God and of his angel guardian find no hearing any longer, the exhortations and threats of parents, confessors and preachers cannot frighten him; the great truths of the certainty and uncertainty of death, of the strict judgments of God, of the eternal joys of Heaven, of the undying fires of hell, cannot reach his heart or soften it, because he has heard them often before. See, already "the bread is too hard to be cut with a knife." Not that the knife has lost its sharpness and power, for the Word of God is always a two-edged sword; but it cannot penetrate the hard and flinty heart. Therefore, with people of that kind the Word of God falls on a rock, and through want of moisture, dries up and produces no fruit.

It does not occur all at once, but gradually.

There is another class of hearers of the Word of God, who are not altogether hard and unimpressionable: they are like those wicked men who enter into a compact with the devil, in virtue of which only a part of their bodies becomes invulnerable, for instance, parts that are covered by their clothing; so that if a bullet or a sword strikes them on the breast, it cannot hurt them, while if it strikes the hand or face, it inflicts a wound. In the same way, I repeat, there are Catholics who hear the

Some have partially hardened hearts.

Word of God with eagerness and satisfaction, and who are even impressed by it, so that they are moved to do good and to avoid evil; but not every truth that is preached to them has that effect, in some things they are so hard and unimpressionable, that nothing can touch their hearts. For there are certain vices, certain abuses to which they are addicted, and which, as they have persuaded themselves are of no great harm, they do not intend to amend or renounce. With regard to those vices and abuses, the Word of God, and the Gospel truths are powerless; before the sermon has well commenced they have already hardened their hearts, and fully determined to take no notice of anything that is said against their pet failings; and when they hear anything of the kind, they at once distract their minds from the sermon by thinking of something else; or else they listen to it, but laugh at it in their hearts. You may say what you like, they think, you will not persuade me in this matter; I will believe you in other things, but as far as this is concerned, you may preach till to-morrow without making any impression on me, for I have fully made up my mind not to change, etc.

In some things they avoid themselves to be moved to good, but in other things they are only embittered.

Therefore, they listen with pleasure to a sermon in praise of certain practices of devotion and virtue, which they are accustomed to perform, or against certain vices they are not much given to, such as cursing, swearing, blasphemy, detraction, drunkenness, injustice, adultery, and the like. Oh, excellent! they say, when they hear those vices sharply animadverted on; that sermon is very practical; it is a pity so and so is not here; those are really fundamental truths that the preacher is explaining, etc. But if their own bad and vicious habits are attacked; if the authority of the Holy Scriptures and the Christian law, and the testimony of the holy Fathers are appealed to against certain unlawful, and sinful customs of the world; for instance, against the deplorable carelessness of many parents who train up their sons and daughters to vanity and idleness, against extravagance and indecency in dress, against dangerous company, and evening parties in which both sexes meet, not only to squander away in an unchristian and wicked manner, in dancing, gambling, and folly, the precious time that was given them for the sole purpose of saving their souls, but who to sacrifice their hearts to the perverse world, the corrupt flesh, and, as a matter of course, to the devil too; if the preacher ventures to say that all outward works of piety, such as prayer, hearing Mass, visiting the churches, Confession and Communion

are of no good as long as one disobeys the precepts of God or of the Church, even in one particular, or as long as one is not ready always to follow the divine will when it is made known to him, and so on; oh, then it is a different matter altogether! The preacher might have held his tongue about that, they think; he is only making decent people ashamed, and disturbing consciences unnecessarily, and filling them with scruples; he is too coarse and blunt; he does not know how respectable people must live in the world; he cannot draw the line between them and the common herd, etc.

The only fruit they reap from the Word of God is anger, displeasure and bitterness against the preacher, a still greater hardness of heart, and a firmer determination not to amend their lives in spite of what they have heard. They resemble the high-priests, the Scribes and Pharisees, who, although Jesus Christ, the Teacher of all teachers, preached to them Himself in the most forcible manner, condemning their pride, deceitfulness and hypocrisy, yet derived no fruit from what they heard except to become still more embittered against Jesus Christ, who was so anxious for their spiritual welfare; so that they more than once took up stones to throw at Him; until at length they became so hardened and obdurate in wickedness, that they condemned the innocent Son of God to be nailed to the shameful Cross as a public malefactor. The only comfort to me and to other preachers under those circumstances, is this very example of Our Saviour Jesus Christ who, as the eternal Wisdom, foresaw with unerring certainty that His preaching would only make the Scribes and Pharisees more embittered and obdurate, nevertheless continued to preach to them, and to condemn severely their sins and vices.

Like the Pharisees when Christ preaches to them.

Many of those people are not satisfied with being themselves so hard-hearted in certain things that they do not profit by sermons; they cannot even bear to see others profiting by such sermons; and therefore they try to have as many companions as possible in their unlawful customs and abuses, that they may indulge therein with all the more freedom. To this end they spare neither adverse comment nor ridicule against the preacher, when they are in company, so as to lessen his authority; they agree among themselves to adhere to their customs with all the greater pertinacity; they laugh at those who, having seen the truth, renounce and amend those abuses; they always speak of them as simple, unsophisticated

They even try to make others obdurate.

people who do not know how to live like the rest of the world. Thus they prevent from profiting by the Word of God many others for whom God had prepared graces that they were to receive in sermons; and thus too, they act the part of the hellish bird of prey who makes every effort to take the seed of the Word of God out of the hearts of men, "lest believing they should be saved." There we have again those flinty hearts, which cannot be moved, at least in certain things, by the Word of God. "The bread is too hard, and the knife cannot ent it."

Such people should hear the Word of God all the more constantly.

But, does it then follow that those people must absent themselves from sermons altogether, and think, oh what is the use of my going to a sermon; it will not do me the least good! Not by any means. On the contrary they should hear sermons constantly; because it may be that the reason of their obduracy with regard to certain vices, is the fact that they seldom, and with frequent interruptions, and only when their humor takes them, hear the Word of God; while they often put in an appearance long after the sermon has begun. Thus they hear a little about some truth or other; but they lose what is most necessary for them and what would be most likely to stir their hearts and convert them. There is not much good in people of that kind hearing the Word of God now and then; one or two sermons will not make any impression on them; nothing but emphatic and oft-repeated exhortation and instruction will enable them to overcome their bad habits. But no matter how hard a heart is, it must at last be softened and brought to a knowledge of the truth by being frequently touched by the Word of God. If you cannot cut a piece off a hard loaf the first, second, or third time, you will at all events succeed if you saw at it perseveringly. A strong fortress cannot be taken at the first, second, or third assault; but it can be taken after a long siege, when the garrison has been starved out.

And they will be softened by it at last.

The Abbot Pastor being once asked what was the best way to convert a hard-hearted sinner, replied: "Water is by nature soft, but stone hard;"<sup>1</sup> yet no stone is so hard that if water constantly drops on it from a height, it will not be eventually worn away and bored through; "so also the Word of God is soft and gentle, and our hearts are hard."<sup>2</sup> Consequently, if a man hears the Word of God frequently and constantly, it is hardly possible that his heart will not be at last softened and

<sup>1</sup> *Natura aquæ mollis est lapidis autem dura.*—Heribert Roswold. L. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Sic et verbum Dei dulce et molle est, cor autem nostrum durum.*

penetrated, so that he will fear God and love Him;’ according to the promise of the Lord in the Book of Ezechiel: “And I will pour upon you clean water, and you shall be cleansed from all your filthiness, and I will cleanse you from all your idols.”<sup>2</sup> What sort of water is that? “The water of the teaching of the Word of God;”<sup>3</sup> answers the Glossa. And what else will follow? “And I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and will give you a heart of flesh; and I will cause you to walk in My commandments, and to keep My judgments, and do them.”<sup>4</sup>

Was not the heart of Augustine as hard as a stone, and so habituated to pride and sensual indulgence, that, as he himself publicly acknowledges, he had so much difficulty in the beginning of his conversion, that it seemed to him an utter impossibility to abstain from vice! Yet by hearing frequently the Word of God in the sermons of St. Ambrose, that flinty heart became softened and impressed, so that it glowed with the love of God in a most remarkable manner; in consequence of which St. Augustine is often represented as holding a burning heart in his hand. When Father Jerome Lopez, of our Society, as we read in his Life, was giving a mission in a certain town, there was amongst those who came to hear his sermons a merchant who had amassed great wealth by usury and injustice, and who was so possessed by the greed of gold, that when he heard some sermons against that vice, he swore to himself that he would never give it up. Let the preacher, he said to himself, shout and cry out till he is hoarse, against making money unjustly; if a thousand demons were to come to carry off my soul, I will not amend in that respect. He continued in these bad dispositions, and heard all the sermons of the mission one after the other, without being in the least impressed by them. At last the close of the mission came, and Father Jerome drew a vivid picture of the wrath and anger of God against those who still refused to repent and amend their wicked lives, and what a wonder of the divine mercy! the hitherto hardened and obdurate man was at last overcome, and his heart completely softened; he

As was the case with many obdurate sinners.

<sup>1</sup> Homo ergo audiens frequenter verbum Dei, aperitur cor ejus ad timendum Deum.

<sup>2</sup> Et effundam super vos aquam mundam, et mundabimini ab omnibus inquinamentis vestris, et ab universis idolis vestris mundabo vos.—Ezech. xxxvi. 25.

<sup>3</sup> Aqua doctrinæ sermonis Dei.

<sup>4</sup> Et dabo vobis cor novum, et spiritum novum ponam in medio vestri, et auferam cor lapideum de carne vestra, et dabo vobis cor carneum; et faciam, ut in præceptis meis ambuletis, et judicia mea custodiatis et operemini.—Ezech. xxxvi. 26-27.

made a good confession of all his sins, and not only made full restitution of all his ill-gotten goods to the last farthing, but also distributed large sums of what belonged to him by right, to the poor and needy of the town. So that although it is useless for men to scatter good seed on a hard rock and expect to reap a crop from it; it is not always in vain that the Almighty scatters the seed of His divine word on the flinty hearts of men; and therefore we must never despair of the conversion of a sinner, as long as he continues to hear the Word of God in sermons regularly.

Conclusion  
and exhortation  
to hear the  
Word of God  
in sermons  
constantly.

Therefore, if any of those here present is a hard-hearted sinner, which I hope and believe is not the case; to him I would say with all possible earnestness: ah, my dear Christian, whatever you do, no matter how deep you are sunk in vice, do not on any account absent yourself from sermons! Come regularly; and if you feel no inclination or desire to repent, at least beg of God in the beginning of the sermon, to give you a desire of repentance; offer to Him your obdurate heart, and beg of Him to soften it according to His will, and to give you the grace to know and repent of your sins; say with the Prophet David: "I will hear what the Lord God will speak in me."<sup>1</sup> "O my God, enlighten my darkness;"<sup>2</sup> and pierce my hard heart with the two-edged sword of Thy word, etc. I assure you that in the end your heart will be softened, and you will derive the greatest spiritual advantage from the sermon. That is what I humbly ask of Thee, O Almighty and merciful God, for myself and all poor sinners, in the words of the prayer of Thy Church, in which alone salvation is to be found: "graciously compel our rebellious wills to turn to Thee."<sup>3</sup> Draw them to Thyself by Thy powerful word; send forth Thy holy angels and drive us against our wicked wills, to hear Thy word; leave our hearts neither rest nor ease until Thou hast fully conquered them, pierced them with true sorrow and repentance for sin, and attached them inseparably to Thy love and service; "that believing we may be saved;" that the seed of Thy word may produce abundant fruit in us, that we may believe in it, act according to it, and at length be eternally happy with Thee. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Audiam, quid loquatur in me Dominus Deus.—Ps. lxxxiv. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Deus meus, illumina tenebras meas.—Ibid. xvii. 29.

<sup>3</sup> Nostras rebelles ad te propitius compelle voluntates.

*Another Introduction to the same sermon for the third  
Sunday after Epiphany.*

**Text.**

*Tantum dic verbo, et sanabitur puer meus.*—Matth. viii. 8.

“But only say the word and my servant shall be healed.”

When Jesus heard the centurion say those words, “He marvelled,” as we read in the Gospel of to-day, “and said to them that followed him: Amen I say to you, I have not found so great faith in Israel.” Indeed the centurion’s faith in Our Lord was great, for he looked upon Him as the Almighty God, and instead of asking Him to come down to his house, as others did in similar circumstances; “Lord come down before that my son die;”<sup>1</sup> was the importunate prayer of the ruler whose son lay at the point of death; “Lord, my daughter is even now dead; but come, lay Thy hand upon her, and she shall live;”<sup>2</sup> said the ruler to Him, in the Gospel of St. Matthew; “Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died;”<sup>3</sup> was the complaint that Mary made to Him, when her brother Lazarus died; instead I say, of the centurion desiring anything of the kind, he simply made known to Our Lord what he wanted; “Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, and is grievously tormented.” And when Our Lord said, “I will come and heal him,” the centurion answered: No, Lord, it is not necessary for Thee to take that trouble; “but only say the word, and my servant shall be healed;” a single word from Thee will suffice; for if I, a weak mortal, can command my subjects by a word, canst not Thou do what Thou wilt by thy almighty word? There is no doubt, my dear brethren, that, as the centurion said, nothing is impossible to the Word of God; yet there are Christians nowadays, whose hearts are so hardened, that not even the Almighty God, who has left man his liberty with regard to good and evil, can penetrate them with His word. And they belong to the second class of those who hear the Word of God, and in whom the seed falls on a rock, etc.—*continues as before.*

<sup>1</sup> Domine, descende priusquam moriatur filius meus.—John iv. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Domine, filia mea modo defuncta est, sed veni, impone manum tuam super eam, et vivet.—Matth. ix. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Domine, si fuisses hic, non esset mortuus frater meus.—John xi. 32.

*FORTY-NINTH SERMON.*

**ON THOSE WHO DO NOT PRACTISE WHAT THEY HEAR IN  
SERMONS.**

**Subject.**

Many hear the Word of God in sermons without any fruit or profit to their souls, because being engrossed with unnecessary cares, and with the pursuit of honors, riches and pleasures, they do not fulfil what they hear.—*Preached on the Feast of St. Bartholomew, Apostle.*

**Text.**

*Qui venerant ut audirent eum, et sanarentur a languoribus suis.*—Luke. vi. 18.

“Who were come to hear Him, and to be healed of their diseases.”

**Introduction.**

And they were quite right too; they found what they sought for. They came to hear the preaching of Jesus Christ, and to be healed of their infirmities; nor were they disappointed; for, “virtue went out from Him, and healed all.”<sup>1</sup> Would to God, my dear brethren, that such was the case too, with us Christians, nowadays! Alas, how many infirm souls come to sermons to hear the Word of God, and go back with the same infirmities! Why so? Has the Word of God perhaps lost its power? No; it is always a powerful medicine for spiritual maladies. The fault lies in ourselves, we do not use that medicine properly; we do not receive the seed of the Word of God as we should; with some, as I have shown in the first sermon on this subject, it falls by the wayside, and is trampled under foot, or devoured by the birds, and these are the idle, who hear sermons without proper attention, the curious, who listen to them only for pleasure, and take no notice of the truth explained so as to profit by it, and the careless, who hear a sermon only now and then, or who at once forget what they have heard. With others the seed falls on a rock and withers up; and these are the hard-hearted, who cannot be moved to good, either through long-continued habits of sin, or because they are specially attached to some vice which

<sup>1</sup> *Virtus de illo exibat, et sanabat omnes.*—Luke vi. 19.

they do not wish to give up. With the third class of hearers, of whom I mean to speak to-day, the seed falls amongst thorns and is choked. And who are those hearers? Christ describes them in that well-known parable in the Gospel of St. Luke: "And that which fell among thorns, are they who have heard, and going their way, are choked with the cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and yield no fruit."<sup>1</sup> There we have the subject of this instruction; namely:

**Plan of Discourse.**

*Many hear the Word of God in sermons without any fruit or profit to their souls, because, being engrossed with unnecessary cares, and with the pursuit of the honors, riches and pleasures of this life, they do not fulfil what they hear. Let us earnestly try to avoid this fault, and to live according to the truths that we learn from the Word of God. Such shall be the conclusion.*

Help us thereto by Thy grace, O merciful God! we ask it of Thee through the intercession of Mary and the holy angels guardian.

There are three reasons why the seed that falls among thorns cannot fructify; first, because the thorns cover the seed, and prevent it from benefiting by the warmth of the sun, which is so necessary to growth; secondly, because, even if the seed has taken root, the thorns rob it of the moisture necessary to its growth, so that it dries up and withers; thirdly, even if a plant comes from the seed, it is soon pierced by the sharp thorns, and prevented from growing higher and coming to maturity. There you have the three bad effects produced by unnecessary cares, and by the riches, honors and pleasures of this world, which prevent him whose heart is occupied by them, from deriving any profit, or at least, any great profit from the Word of God. In the first place, they close the entrance of the heart to the Sun of justice, and prevent God from approaching it with His light and His salutary inspirations in order to move it to good.

Unnecessary cares, like thorns, prevent the divine light from reaching the heart.

And here we must not forget, my dear brethren, that it is a certain truth, as I have proved elsewhere, that the words which the preacher speaks, have not of themselves the least power to deter the hearers from evil, or to invite them to good; they are only an empty sound that strikes the ear, and, like the report of

For all the good done by sermons must come from God.

<sup>1</sup> Quod autem in spinas cecidit: hi sunt, qui audierunt, et a sollicitudinibus, et divitiis et voluptatibus vite euntes suffocantur, et non referunt fructum.—Luke viii. 14.

a gun in which there is only powder and no bullet, they make a noise, but cannot inflict a wound. The bullet, that must accompany the sound of the preacher's voice, has to come from Heaven; it is God, and God alone, who by the powerful light of His grace can bring the hearers to acknowledge the truth explained, and move their wills to accept and act according to that truth. "All the teachers and preachers of the Church," says St. Augustine, "are heard externally," but besides them, there is another Preacher, "whose pulpit is in Heaven, and who speaks inwardly to the heart."<sup>1</sup> If He remains silent, and does not help with the light and impulse of His grace, all our talking and declaiming is but an empty beating of the air. That is the reason why, before the sermon begins, all the people pray and sing together, to implore the light of the Holy Ghost; and they may be assured that they will derive great profit from the sermon, who prepare their hearts for it by earnest and fervent prayer.

But He and His light are driven away from the hearts of those people.

Now, I maintain that the lights and inspirations of grace find no entrance into the hearts of those who are already pre-occupied by unnecessary temporal cares, by avarice and greed of gold, by the love of the perverse world, and by the impure desires of the flesh. For, on the one hand, the most Holy Spirit of God cannot abide in the same heart with the sinful spirit of the world and of the flesh; and on the other hand, a man who is thus pre-occupied, has fixed his heart, his thoughts, his desires, and his inclinations only on outward and perishable things, and therefore he is incapable of noticing what goes on within himself, and what he is told for the good of his soul; or else, if the voice of God makes itself heard in his heart, he rejects it, because his heart is already filled with other cares.

We have an example of this in the rich young man of the Gospel.

We have a clear example of this in that young man in the Gospel of St. Matthew, of whom I have often spoken to you before. Jesus Christ Himself spoke to his heart, in order to induce him to lead a more perfect and holy life: "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven; and come, follow me."<sup>2</sup> Who would have thought that this invitation on the part of an all-wise and Almighty God, who is the Lord of hearts, and who called His Apostles in much fewer words, would not have at once found

<sup>1</sup> *Omnia Ecclesie magisteria forinsecus sonant; cathedram habet in cœlo qui intus docet.*—S. Aug. Tract 3 in Ep. Joan.

<sup>2</sup> *Si vis perfectus esse, vade, vende, quæ habes, et da pauperibus, et habebis thesaurum in cœlo, et veni, sequere me.*—Matth. xix. 21.

its way to the heart of that innocent and pious young man, who according to his own confession, had never transgressed one of the divine commands; "The young man saith to him: All these have I kept from my youth;"<sup>1</sup> and that young man who, through an earnest desire of saving his soul, went of his own accord to Jesus, and asked Him how he should live so as to gain eternal life: "good Master, what good shall I do, that I may have life everlasting?"<sup>2</sup> And after Our Lord had told him to keep all the commandments of God, and he answered that he had kept them all from his childhood, he added: "what is yet wanting to me?"<sup>3</sup> What more have I to do, in order to be more sure of eternal life? Who, I ask again, would have thought that the inspiration and invitation of Jesus Christ would have been without effect in this case? Did He not win the hearts of His Apostles by the one word, "Follow me?" Did he not bring Zachaeus and other public sinners to repentance and amendment by a simple friendly look? And yet, who would have thought it? He cannot induce this otherwise pious and good young man, who was so anxious to save his soul, to act on divine inspiration and obey His call; for, as the Gospel says: "when the young man had heard this word, he went away sad."<sup>4</sup> Why? What prevented him from following Our Lord's advice? The reason is stated clearly enough; "for he had great possessions;"<sup>5</sup> and his heart was attached to them. And therefore Christ said to His Apostles: "Amen, I say to you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of Heaven;"<sup>6</sup> "And again I say to you: it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of Heaven;"<sup>7</sup> on account of the inordinate attachment and love that the heart generally has for temporal things.

What beautiful and salutary lessons the traitor Judas had received for three whole years from Our Lord, with whom he lived in constant companionship! What a great grace and favor, what a special love was shown to him, when Christ humbled Himself to earth, washed his feet, kissed them, and gave him Himself as his food and drink! In what a friendly manner He warned

In the traitor Judas.

<sup>1</sup> Dicit illi adolescens: Omnia hæc custodivi a juventute mea.—Matth. xix. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Magister bone, quid boni faciam, ut habeam vitam æternam?—Ibid. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Quid adhuc mihi deest?—Ibid. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Cum audisset autem adolescens verbum, abiit tristis.—Ibid. 22.

<sup>5</sup> Erat enim habens multas possessiones.—Ibid. 22.

<sup>6</sup> Amen dico vobis, quia dives difficile intrabit in regnum cœlorum.—Ibid. 23.

<sup>7</sup> Et iterum dico vobis: Facilius est camelum per foramen acus transire, quam divitem intrare in regnum cœlorum.—Ibid. 24.

him, when He said, one of you is about to betray Me; “woe to that man by whom the Son of man shall be betrayed: it were better for him if that man had not been born.”<sup>1</sup> And when Judas asked Him, “Is it I Rabbi?”<sup>2</sup> Jesus answered: “Thou hast said it.”<sup>3</sup> Mild words those were! They ought to have softened a heart of stone. And when the traitor accomplished his crime by the kiss in the Garden, did not Our Lord say to him: “Friend, whereto art thou come?”<sup>4</sup> But all this could not pierce his obdurate heart; he was before, and he still remained a thief, an apostate, a traitor, a despairing wretch who afterwards hanged himself. How did a disciple of Jesus Christ come to be so hard-hearted and obdurate? Because his heart was filled with greed of gold, and therefore the friendly, yet impressive warnings of Jesus Christ could not reach it.

Much less does the Word of God make an impression on the impure heart.

Sensual pleasures, impure attachment to creatures, what shall I say of you, when you have once taken possession of the heart? Alas, there is very little hope for a heart of that kind! All-powerful must the graces be, wonderful the light sent from Heaven to touch and to move it! No; neither exhortation, nor preaching, nor blandishments, nor threats can do any good. Heaven has not joys enough, nor hell terrors enough, nor death bitterness enough, nor the judgments of God severity enough to make an impression on the heart of him who is given to the lusts of the flesh, and who indulges his impure passions, as I have shown already more at length, as experience proves, and as these voluptuaries themselves confess. Thus unnecessary cares, and the riches and pleasures of life hinder the salutary influence of the Sun of justice, and prevent its brilliant rays from reaching the hearts of those who hear the Word of God, so that they do not profit by that word.

Unnecessary cares prevent the seed of the Word of God from bearing fruit, even when it has been received.

Supposing even, that the hearts of people of this kind are touched by a ray of light in hearing a sermon, and that a salutary knowledge, and a desire to amend their lives actually takes root in them; there is still another disastrous effect of riches and pleasures, which chokes the seed, and prevents it from bearing fruit; for, like thorns, they rob the salutary knowledge and the good desire of the necessary moisture. That is to say, that knowledge and desire cannot be retained in the memory,

<sup>1</sup> *Væ autem homini illi, per quem filius hominis tradetur: bonum erat ei, si natus non fuisset homo ille.*—Matth. xxvi. 24.

<sup>2</sup> *Numquid ego sum, Rabbi?*—Ibid. 25.

<sup>3</sup> *Tu dixisti.*—Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> *Amice, ad quid venisti?* *Ibid.* 50.

and be duly considered and nourished; because when those people return home after the sermon, their whole hearts are at once given to a hundred worldly cares and occupations, so that they never earnestly consider and ponder on what made the impression on them, while they were listening to the sermon.

King Nabuchodonosor had a remarkable, terrible, and at the same time a most mysterious dream, as we read in the Book of Daniel; but he forgot it so completely, that when he awoke, he remembered nothing of it. "Nabuchodonosor had a dream," says the Holy Scripture, "and his spirit was terrified with it, and his dream went out of his mind."<sup>1</sup> "I have dreamed a dream," he said to his diviners and magicians, "and am troubled in mind, and know not what I dreamed."<sup>2</sup> Rupertus asks here, what was the reason of this forgetfulness; because, generally speaking, if one tries to remember what he has dreamt he will recall part of it at least. And he answers, that, as Nabuchodonosor was a proud, avaricious and sensual man, distracted by a thousand questions relating to war and statecraft, and bent only on increasing his treasures, and enriching himself with the goods of others, and indulging his sensual passions, "how could he in the midst of so many distractions, remember the mystery that was represented to him in his sleep?"<sup>3</sup> Nor is the case different with those people when they hear the Word of God. They learn from sermons many a divine truth, many a secret that was before unknown to them, they are even sometimes moved to entertain good desires, and make good resolutions; but it is all like a dream to them, for when they awaken to their usual cares and occupations, the good impressions vanish completely out of their hearts and memories.

Finally, although now and then a little plant may shoot up from the seed of the Word of God; that is, the hearts of those hearers may be moved to make a resolution to abstain from that vice, to give up that sinful attachment, to amend that abuse, to perform that work of piety, etc.; a resolution which is actually retained and nourished in the memory; yet the cares of the world, and the inordinate pleasures of life, like sharp thorns, very soon take the life out of that tender plant, and prevent it from coming to maturity. That is, on account of the great and insurmountable difficulty that men who are buried in business

Shown by a simile.

They prevent good resolutions from being carried into effect.

<sup>1</sup> Vidit Nabuchodonosor somnium, et conterritus est spiritus ejus: et somnium ejus fugit ab eo.—Dan. ii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Vidi somnium; et mente confusus ignoro, quid viderim.—Ibid. ii. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Quomodo anima discissa continere posset rem tanti sacramenti, quam viderat?

cares, find in acting according to the truths they have learned, their good resolutions are hardly ever carried into effect. "They believe for a time," says Our Lord of them, "and in time of temptation they fall away."<sup>1</sup> For a short time they mean very well; but when the first temptation comes they give way to it, and their good purposes come to naught. They are like King Herod, who used to listen with pleasure to the sermons and instructions of St. John the Baptist, and no doubt often made fine resolutions. "For Herod feared John," says the Holy Scripture, "knowing him to be a just and holy man; and when he heard him, did many things; and he heard him willingly."<sup>2</sup> But how long did those good dispositions of Herod's last? Until he had seen the dancing girl: "And when the daughter of the same Herodias had come in, and had danced, and pleased Herod;"<sup>3</sup> his heart was quite changed and perverted, so that to please her, he had the preacher he thought so much of beheaded: "Sending an executioner, he commanded that his head should be brought in a dish. And he beheaded him in the prison."<sup>4</sup>

Such hear-  
ers are like  
King Saul  
when he  
wept.

While the sermon is going on, those people occasionally heave deep sighs, because something they have heard has touched them, and bitter tears fall from their eyes. One would be almost sure that they are now on the right way at all events; but they are just as bad as before. We read in the First Book of Kings, that David, having to fly from the wrath of King Saul, concealed himself with his followers in a cave. Saul, not knowing that there was any one in the cave, entered it quite alone, thus giving David an excellent opportunity of ridding himself forever of the enemy who had been persecuting him so long, and of placing himself in safety. In fact some of David's followers advised him to avail himself of the opportunity thus offered, but David was satisfied with merely cutting off a small piece of the King's mantle, so quietly that the latter was not aware of it. When Saul returned to the camp, David followed him, and called out to him: "My Lord the King:" see how unjustly you persecute me; "why dost thou hear the words of men that say: David seeketh thy hurt? Behold this day thy eyes have

<sup>1</sup> Ad tempus credunt, et in tempore tentationis recedunt.—Luke viii. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Herodes enim metuebat Joannem, sciens eum virum justum et sanctum; et audito eo multa faciebat, et libenter eum audiebat.—Mark vi. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Cumque introisset filia ipsius Herodiadis, et saltasset, et placuisset Herodi.—Ibid. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Misso spiculatore præcepit afferri caput ejus in disco. Et decollavit eum in carcere.—Ibid. 27.

seen, that the Lord hath delivered thee into my hand in the cave; and I had a thought to kill thee, but my eye hath spared thee; for I said: I will not put out my hand against my lord, because he is the Lord's anointed. Moreover, O my father, reflect and see that there is no evil in my hand, nor iniquity, neither have I sinned against thee; but thou liest in wait for my life, to take it away."<sup>1</sup> This appeal softened the hard heart of Saul, and he began to weep bitterly, to acknowledge his guilt, to praise the generosity of David, and to promise him his favor and friendship in future. Hear what he said, and how he spoke under the influence of this change: "Is this thy voice, my son David? And Saul lifted up his voice and wept; and he said to David: Thou art more just than I, for thou hast done good to me, and I have rewarded thee with evil." Now I see that the Lord has given me into thy hands, and thou hast not taken my life, "But the Lord reward thee for this good turn, for what thou hast done to me this day."<sup>2</sup> What beautiful expressions these were of a heart that was moved to repentance for past misdeeds, and to meekness, respect and love towards David! But how long did those good dispositions last? "Only for an hour," says De Lyra; and then the former hatred, anger and persecution of the innocent David broke out as bad as ever. Saul renewed his repentance and again made an offer of his affection to David on a subsequent occasion, when the latter took away his goblet and spear, and calling to his army from afar, reproached them with guarding their king so badly. On this occasion too, Saul said to him: "I have sinned; return my son David, for I will no more do thee harm, because my life hath been precious in thy eyes this day; for it appeareth that I have done foolishly, and have been ignorant in very many things; blessed art thou, my son David."<sup>3</sup> And yet in spite of all, Saul never admitted David to his friendship; for the fear of

<sup>1</sup> *Domine mi Rex. Quare audis verba hominum loquentium: David quaerit malum adversum te? Ecce hodie viderunt oculi tui, quod tradiderit te Dominus in manu mea in spelunca, et cogitavi, ut occiderem te. sed pepercit tibi oculus meus. Dixi enim: non extendam manum meam in dominum meum, quia christus Domini est. Animadvertite, et vide, quoniam non est in manu mea malum, neque iniquitas, neque peccavi in te: tu autem insidiaris animae meae, ut auferas eam.—I. Kings xxiv. 9-12.*

<sup>2</sup> *Numquid vox haec tua est, fili mi David? Et levavit Saul vocem suam, et flevit: dixitque ad David: Justior tu es, quam ego: tu enim tribuisti mihi bona: ego autem reddidi tibi mala. Dominus reddat tibi vicissitudinem hanc pro eo, quod hodie operatus es in me.—Ibid. 17, 18, 20.*

<sup>3</sup> *Peccavi, revertere fili mi David, nequaquam enim ultra tibi malefaciam, eo quod pretiosa fuerit anima mea in oculis tuis hodie: apparet enim, quod stulte egerim, et ignoraverim multa nimis. Benedictus tu, fili mi David.—Ibid. xxvi. 21, 25.*

losing his kingdom left him neither peace nor ease, and made it impossible for him to ratify his repeated promises, and to keep his good resolutions.

They often  
sigh and  
shed tears  
during ser-  
mons, but to  
no purpose.

In the same way do those people act who are engrossed with worldly cares, and with the search after riches and pleasures. If in a sermon an affecting picture is drawn for them of the wonderful goodness and patient mercy of God towards the greatest sinner, of the bitter Passion and Death of Our Saviour Jesus Christ, of the precious human soul purchased so dearly, of the eternal joys of Heaven, of the never ending pains of hell; oh, their hearts are stirred to the very depths; they sigh and cast down their eyes humbly to earth, and shed copious tears! One would think they were so many Peters or Magdalens! Their eyes are indeed the eyes of a Peter or a Magdalen; they weep through natural emotion; but their hearts are not those of a Peter or a Magdalen, which were inflamed with an ardent love for Jesus Christ, and filled with an unalterable determination to act according to His instructions; they retain their former inordinate love of creatures, just as before. Their tears are like summer showers, that fall in great drops on the thirsty ground, but because they pass so quickly, do not sink into the earth, and consequently have no effect beyond laying the dust, from which worms and other vermin afterwards come.

Like little  
children.

Their tears are like those of little children who weep when they see their parents suffering. If a child happens to be looking on while its mother is being bled, it sees the blood flowing out of her arm, and begins to cry at once; oh, it says, "my mother is dying!" But suppose the mother were to ask the child in that moment, while it is still crying out of pity for her to give her the apple or the cake it has in its hand: Oh no, the child does not love her enough for that! O dearest Saviour Jesus Christ, dost Thou not often see people shedding tears and hear their sighs when they are listening to an explanation of Thy mysteries? Does it not seem that they love Thee with their whole hearts? That they are filled with sorrow for having ever offended Thee? One could almost be sure that such is the case. But ask one of those people who sigh and weep, to give Thee the apple or cake he has, that is, his heart, which alone Thou desirest and wishest to fill entirely; ask him to give up that inordinate greed of temporal things, that impure attachment that has so long enslaved him, that sensuality and worldly vanity to which he is addicted, that ill-gotten property which he still has in his pos-

session; say to him, O dear Lord, with one of thy inspirations, "give me that!" Ah, there is little likelihood of thy getting it! His love and friendship for Thee do not go so far. He can weep through natural compassion, but he will not disengage his heart from those things which have taken possession of it. In a word, those people are just as bad as they were before. They hear, understand and learn many good things; but the seed they received is smothered by thorns, so that it cannot produce fruit, nor enable them to act according to the truth they have learned.

Now, my dear brethren, what are we to think and say of all those people of whom I have spoken? How will the hearing of the Word of God help them to Heaven, since they do not practise the truths they have learned, nor carry out their good resolutions? Certainly St. Paul gives them very poor consolation; "For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified."<sup>1</sup> Not they who learn and understand much good in the sermons they hear, will go to Heaven; but they only who fulfil the will of God when they have learned and understood it. A peasant once went into the Academy at Paris, where many learned doctors were disputing about all sorts of subtile and intricate questions. He listened for a long time, and at last said: "Gentlemen, may I ask you a question? Which is the better and more profitable for a man; to do what he knows, or to puzzle his brains trying to find out what he does not know?" The doctors looked at him with astonishment, and seemed rather nonplussed by his question; but at last they all agreed in saying that, beyond all doubt, it was better for a man to do what he knows how to do, than to try to find out what he is ignorant of; and they confirmed their answer by the saying of St. Isidore: "It is a lesser evil to be ignorant of what you wish to know, than not to fulfil what you do know."<sup>2</sup> Oh, said the peasant, if that is the case, then you gentlemen must be a set of ignorant clowns, or else you have lost your wits altogether, since you make no use of your understanding but to dispute and argue with each other for the sole purpose of learning more and more; while you never make the least practical use of your knowledge. The doctors were thunderstruck at this; they looked at each other, not knowing what to say,

The hearing of the Word of God does not help vain people to Heaven.

<sup>1</sup> Non est auditores legis justii sunt apud Deum, sed factores legis justificabuntur.—Rom. ii. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Minus malum est nescire quod appetis, quam ea, quæ noveris, non adimplere.

and at last they had to acknowledge that the peasant had the best of it. My dear brethren, do not some of us perhaps deserve the same reproof? Sad indeed is it to have to say! but there are many who hear the Word of God in sermons, and learn many salutary truths therefrom, and yet we rarely see them practising what they have learned; they remain as they were before, subject to the same faults and defects, the same sins and vices, the same pride and vanity, the same avarice, the same anger, vindictiveness, ill-will, impurity, the same sloth and tepidity in the service of God; they are not a whit better than before. Now, I ask again, what is the use of sermons to such people?

But to a  
deeper dam-  
nation.

Not only does the seed of the Word of God thus remain without fruit; but it will be the reason why they will have to render a stricter account at the bar of divine justice for having made such a bad use of the means of salvation, and for having been, as the Scripture says, "rebellious to the light,"<sup>1</sup> which shone on them. Alas, said St. John Chrysostom, in one of his sermons, "if, in spite of all our trouble to keep you in the right way to Heaven, you still remain as you were before, you can easily imagine, how great our grief must be, and what a damnation is in store for you!"<sup>2</sup> For, as Our Lord says in the Gospel of St. Luke, "And that servant who knew the will of his lord, and prepared not himself, and did not according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes."<sup>3</sup>

Shown by a  
simile.

You know the parable in the Gospel of St. Matthew, of the man who distributed talents in different numbers to his servants, and went into a far country. Now one of his servants very carefully hid his talent in the ground, and when his master returned, gave it back to him. "I hid thy talent in the earth" said he, "behold here thou hast that which is thine."<sup>4</sup> "How," said his master in anger; "wicked and slothful servant, is that all the use you made of the talent I intrusted to you? Thou oughtest therefore to have committed my money to the bankers, and at my coming I should have received my own with usury. . . . And the unprofitable servant cast ye out into the exterior darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Rebelles lumini.*—Job xxiv. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Si nobis itaque omne studium exhibentibus, vos in hisdem permanebatis; quantum nobis dolor, quanta vobis damnatio.*—S. Chrys. hom. 78.

<sup>3</sup> *Ille autem servus, qui cognovit voluntatem domini sui, et non præparavit, et non fecit secundum voluntatem ejus, vapulabit multis.*—Luke xii. 47.

<sup>4</sup> *Abscondi talentum tuum in terra: ecce, babes quod tuum est.*—Matth. xxv. 25.

<sup>5</sup> *Serve male et piger, . . . oportuit ergo te committere pecuniam meam numulariis, et veniens ego recepissem utique, quod meum est, cum usura. Inutilem servum eijete in tenebras exteriores: illic erit fletus et stridor dentium.*—Ibid. 26, 27, 30.

What is that talent? It is the Word of God, says St. Chrysostom; it is the wholesome doctrine that we explain to you in sermons, and that you listen to; it must not remain uselessly buried; it must bear a rich interest which God will demand of you on the day of reckoning; "the interest of the doctrine is nothing else than the performance of the work;"<sup>1</sup> namely, carrying out in practice what you have been taught. If this interest is wanting, the hearing of the Word of God will not profit us. Wicked and slothful servant, God will say to us; is it thus you allow the graces I offered you to remain idle and useless? Away with you, out of my sight! Come ye demons, and carry this unprofitable servant away into eternal darkness!

A well-known story is related by St. Antony. A religious who had to preach on a certain day, got sick, and could not appear in the pulpit. His brethren were much disconcerted thereby, as none of them was prepared to take his place. While they were in this difficulty, a stranger, clad in the habit of their order, appeared and asked them what was the matter. They told him. Oh, said he, if that is all, you need not be troubled; I am quite willing to take the preacher's place with the help of God. He ascended the pulpit and preached with such zeal and earnestness of the joys of Heaven, the pains of hell, and the grievous malice of mortal sin, that his hearers were moved to tears and went away after the sermon full of sorrow for their sins. A holy man, who happened to be in the church, knew by divine inspiration, that the preacher was no other than the devil, and when the sermon was over he went up to him. Wretched deceiver of man, said he, I know who you are. How dare you have the insolence to usurp the office of an apostle? I adjure you in the name of Jesus Christ to tell me why you are here. "And," said the devil, "did I not manage the business very well? You have heard how well I preached on the grievousness of sin, and on Heaven and hell; you have also seen how the people went away sighing and weeping. But I know the ways of those people very well; in a short time they will forget all I have said to them; they will not keep one of the good resolutions they have just made, and since they will be all the more inexcusable before the judgment-seat of God, their damnation for all eternity will be all the worse. That was my only object." Whereupon the evil spirit vanished.

Confirmed  
by an exam-  
ple.

Ah, my dear brethren, let us not give the envious demon the

Exhortation  
to put in

<sup>1</sup> *Usura autem doctrinæ nihil aliud est, quam operum exhibitio.*

practice  
what one  
hears in ser-  
mons.

satisfaction of seeing that we pervert the means of salvation, that God has given us to enlighten our souls and bring us to Heaven, into a means of bringing eternal ruin and a deeper damnation on ourselves! “Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it;”<sup>1</sup> that is, who practise, and live according to what they have heard. Joannes Junior writes of a young student who went to Paris to the university, and who, having heard in one of the lectures the words, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, etc.,” immediately got up and went away. The other students asked him what was the matter that he left in such a hurry. “Nothing,” said he, “but I must fulfil what I have heard, before I hear any more.”<sup>2</sup> Having given this answer, he went straight to the first convent he could find, bade adieu to the world and entered the holy state of religion in order to love God therein with all his heart, during the remainder of his life. Let us try to remember this, Christians, when we are going home after a sermon; let us say to ourselves: now I will begin to put in practice what I have heard and learned. Oh, if we always did that! if we only tried during the week to fulfil a single point that was explained to us in the sermon of the preceding Sunday or holy-day, and continued doing so from one week to another, how many good works we should perform to the honor and glory of God and the salvation of our souls! what great perfection and holiness of life we should eventually attain! Blessed are they, and eternally blessed, who constantly hear the Word of God, and thus keep it in their hearts? May we all do so. Amen.

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### FIFTIETH SERMON.

#### ON THE SMALL NUMBER OF THOSE WHO HEAR SERMONS PROPERLY.

##### Subject.

How good hearers of the Word of God may be recognized; what abundant fruit they derive from sermons; how small their number.—*Preached on the thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

<sup>1</sup> Beati, qui audiant verbum Dei, et custodiunt illud.—Luke xi. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Nihil, sed antequam plus audiam illud volo opere complere.—Joan. Jun. Scala codi.

**Text.**

*Et factum est, dum irent, mundati sunt.*—Luke xvii. 14.

“And it came to pass as they went, they were made clean.”

**Introduction.**

By those few words of Our Lord, “go, show yourselves to the priests,” which the ten lepers at once obeyed, they were immediately made clean; “And it came to pass, as they went, they were made clean.” Such is the wonderful power of the Word of Christ; such is the wonderful effect and fruit it produces when one willingly obeys it. We have hitherto, my dear brethren, treated of three different kinds of hearers who derive little or no profit for their souls from the Word of God in sermons, because the seed falls either on the public wayside, or on a hard rock, or amongst thorns. Now we come to the fourth and select class of really good hearers with whom the seed falls on good ground and brings forth fruit a hundredfold, with whom Christ concludes His parable, and I make an end of this subject. “But that on the good ground are they who in a good and very good heart, hearing the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit in patience.”<sup>1</sup>

**Plan of Discourse.**

*How those good hearers of the Word of God may be recognized, and what abundant fruit they derive from sermons; but how small their number; such is the subject of this instruction.*

I hope that all here present will be of that number. O God of goodness, give us all Thy powerful grace, that we may for the time to come at least, endeavor to be amongst the number of the good hearers of Thy Word. This we ask of thee through the intercession of Mary and the holy angels guardian.

Who are they that hear the Word of God in sermons with a good, very good heart, and bring forth fruit in patience? We can recognize and distinguish them from other hearers of the Word of God, in the same way in which King Solomon distinguished natural flowers from artificial. The Queen of Saba, as Basilensis writes, wishing to test Solomon’s knowledge, proposed to him different riddles and difficult questions, one of which was to decide which of two bouquets of flowers that she presented to him, was natural and which artificial; the artificial one she had

How to distinguish between good and bad hearers of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> Quod autem in bonam terram: Hi sunt, qui in corde bono et optimo audientes verbum retinent, et fructum afferunt in patientia.—Luke viii. 15.

caused to be made with such consummate skill, that it could not be distinguished from a natural bouquet by sight, touch or smell. What did Solomon do? He caused a number of bees and flies to be brought into the room, and then looked carefully to see on which bouquet they would settle down; for he knew that the bees would alight on the natural flowers, and the flies on the artificial. In the same way in a congregation of Christians assembled to hear a sermon, there are different hearers of the Word of God; some are earnest and sincere, others are false and hypocritical hearers, and these latter derive no profit from the sermon, except that they have merely heard what the preacher said. Outwardly these two classes of hearers resemble each other, and one can hardly distinguish between them. But he who wishes to know to which class he belongs, must look carefully at his own heart in order to see whether it retains the wholesome doctrine and the Gospel truths he has heard, which, like bees, settle on it, to suck from it the precious honey of good works; or whether the devil, whose imps like flies are continually buzzing about, takes away the word from the heart, as Christ says, so that it produces no fruit. If he finds the latter to be the case, he can conclude with certainty that he belongs to the number of those false hearers of the Word of God, of whom, as we have seen, there are three kinds; of the former, he may congratulate himself on being in the number of the good, sincere and select hearers, who receive the Word of God in a good, very good heart and bring forth abundant spiritual fruit. St. Bernard, writing on the Canticle of canticles, gives still clearer signs by which to distinguish good hearers of the Word of God, by their fruit. "A good soul," he says, "seeks the word that she may use it for her own correction and amendment, that she may be enlightened with knowledge, that she may be strengthened to practise virtue, that she may conform to it so as to beautify herself, that she may enjoy it as her consolation;" fruits that a soul desirous of salvation produces by hearing the Word of God! Let us consider them briefly one after another.

The good hear it with a desire to be corrected and amended thereby.

First then, a soul of that kind seeks and hears the Word of God for her own correction and amendment. That is, she comes to the sermon with an honest, sincere desire to discover her hidden faults and failings, and to be moved to repentance for her known faults, and to a lasting amendment of them. Thus she is far from resembling those who avoid going to those sermons in which they know by experience that the truth will be told

them very plainly in order to induce them to amend their lives, so great is their fear of hearing their faults and secret vices condemned; or who, when they go to sermons and feel their consciences disturbed, go away filled with anger and bitterness towards the preacher, and vilify and abuse him, like a dog barking at a person who throws a stone at him. No; quite different are the dispositions of a good soul desirous of salvation. She is quite anxious and willing to hear her faults; she earnestly desires to amend them, and therefore she listens with pleasure and inward satisfaction to the earnest reproof, the sharp threat, the just anger and displeasure at sin and vice that the preacher gives expression to. Good! she thinks, when going home after the sermon, that suits me exactly; the preacher has certainly told me the plain truth; now I know where I was wrong. Thanks be to God and to the good angel who placed in the preacher's mouth the words that stirred up my conscience, disclosed my faults to me, and reminded me of my obligation to amend and avoid them in future. "Thy words have I hid in my heart," she says with David; "that I may not sin against thee."<sup>1</sup> I will keep Thy warnings, O Lord, deep in my heart, and they will prevent me from ever again offending Thee by a deliberate sin, and from continuing to live as I have hitherto done, through want of recollection and instruction.

That was the way in which Francis Sforza, Duke of Milan, acted. A zealous preacher once commented so sharply in presence of Francis and his whole court, on a certain vice, that all present knew at once that what he said was meant for the Duke. The courtiers and officials began to murmur against what they looked upon as a grave want of courtesy in the preacher, who did not hesitate thus to put their master to shame before the whole congregation; and they urged the Duke to have satisfaction for the insult. But the latter, who was otherwise a sensible man and a good Christian, told them with great modesty of manner, that the preacher had only done his duty and discharged the office entrusted to him by God; "and, would to God," he added, "that you and I were always just as anxious to do our duty! Not one of you had the courage or candor to tell me the truth, although you were bound to do so; you have no reason then to be displeased with him who has made up for your deficiencies. I am very grateful to the preacher for having warned me of my fault; now I know how I have been in the wrong, and what I

After the  
example  
of pious  
Christians.

<sup>1</sup> In corde meo abscondi eloquia tua, ut non peccem tibi.—Ps. cxviii. 11.

must do to amend my conduct in future.” That is the way to hear the Word of God in sermons, and to use it to correct and amend one’s faults.

Knowledge of divine things is rare amongst men.

“ A good soul seeks the Word of God that she may be enlightened with knowledge.” This is the second fruit she derives from sermons. How rare the knowledge of divine things is amongst the greater number of men! In spite of its usefulness and necessity, there are few who trouble themselves about it. They take great interest in all other kinds of knowledge and science, and devote themselves to their pursuits with unwearied diligence. Thus the tradesman tries to learn all he can about his handicraft, that he may be able to support himself and his family; the man of business attends to everything that will help him to make some temporal gain; the lawyer labors to acquire skill in his profession, that he may conduct the cases entrusted to him to a successful issue; the master and mistress of a household know how to look after their property, so that the servants may not spoil or steal anything; men of the world try to be well acquainted with different languages and to follow the fashions in dress, manner, behavior, conversation, eating and drinking, etc. It is by knowledge of this kind that one gets the reputation of being clever and well-informed in the eyes of the world; to this children are brought up, in it they are trained and practised daily almost from their cradles, and he who is well versed in this knowledge, is said “ to know how to live,” as the phrase goes. But with regard to things that concern our last end, which is the sole reason of our being on this earth, and to which all other knowledge and science should be directed; namely, to know our great God, to love and honor Him above all things, with all our strength, to find out and enter on the narrow way of penance and the Cross that leads to Heaven, to make sure of our eternal salvation, in a word, to live a holy life according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to die a happy death; O what ignorance there is on these points, even among the most clever and most learned men, some of whom do not know even the rudiments, the very A B C of this science!

Many have this knowledge but do not live according to it.

There are many indeed who have a sort of speculative knowledge of these things; but in practice, in their lives and actions, they show that they understand little or nothing about them. Heaven should be preferred to earth, eternal things to temporal and transitory, the precious soul to the corruptible body, the divine law to the usages and maxims of the vain world, and God

to every one and every thing. That they all know and make open profession of; but meanwhile they live in such forgetfulness of God, neglect of their souls, disregard of Heaven and heavenly things, as if they were to live on this earth forever. They transgress daily the divine commands and heap up sin on sin with as little concern as if the Almighty God, who is present everywhere and sees even our most secret thoughts, who is most just and perfect and worthy of all love and honor, were a mere poetic fiction, a fable! Alas, says St. Augustine in his "Confessions," "unhappy the man who knows all created things; but does not know Thee, O God: and happy he who is ignorant of all the rest, as long as he knows Thee."<sup>1</sup>

It is for the sake of this knowledge, and to make a practical use of it, that a soul who is really desirous of salvation hears the Word of God in sermons constantly and with attention. She knows well that this is not the work of one or two days, of one or two instructions such as are given in sermons, and therefore she comes to this divine school as regularly and frequently as possible, so as not to miss a single lesson. She is far different from those who come only now and then, and who are like scholars that go to school one day and stay at home four, and who know nothing at the end of the year, and have not the least chance of carrying off a prize. No; he who is desirous of saving his soul will come constantly to sermons. For it is thus that he can learn what he has to value, and what to despise, what to hate and avoid, what to seek and to love. Thus he will learn to prize heavenly and eternal things and to despise the perishable things of earth; to fear and hate sin alone above every other evil; to love and honor God alone above every other good; to avoid and shun the least shadow of an occasion of sin; to desire and seek his eternal salvation with the greatest care. Thus his memory and understanding will be deeply impressed with oft-repeated exhortations to fear God on account of His strict justice, to love Him for His infinite goodness and mercy, to adore Him with the greatest reverence on account of His omnipresence, to serve Him with all possible zeal and fidelity on account of His infinite power, to have a childlike confidence in Him and the greatest resignation to His will under all circumstances, on account of the wonderful and all-wise arrangements of His Providence, etc. "Happy he who is ignorant of all the rest, as long

Such is the knowledge that good hearers see in sermons.

<sup>1</sup> Infelix homo qui scit omnia creata; te autem, Deus nescit; beatus qui te scit, etiam nescit illa.

as he knows Thee!" Happy indeed he who thus learns to know Thee alone, O Sovereign God, and more than learned enough, if he has this knowledge alive, even if he were quite ignorant of all other things in the world!

Great is the weakness of man, and his inconstancy in good.

"A good soul seeks the Word of God, that she may be strengthened to practise virtue;" and that is the third fruit she derives from sermons. No matter what supernatural and divine light a man receives; no matter how great his knowledge of heavenly things, and how strong his resolution to avoid even the least sin, and to be always zealous in the love and service of God; he is still liable to experience the effects of the weakness and inconstancy he has inherited from our forefather Adam, on account of which he is always in need of something to renew his courage and strength; like a little boy who is apt to neglect his lessons, unless his teacher constantly urges him on to study by repeated exhortations and threats. Self-love is liable to get fatigued and disgusted with the difficulties that are to be met with in the way of virtue, and consequently to oppose the good resolutions that are made by the will; the evil inclinations and desires of the flesh rise up in violent rebellion against reason and the knowledge that the understanding has; the devil is unceasingly at work with his evil inspirations and temptations; the world with its deceitful and treacherous maxims, with its flatteries and its ridicule, is capable of perverting even the most pious man, and leading him away from the path of virtue; men even, when they meet together, are a source of temptation and an occasion of sin to one another. I am attacked on all sides, says David, that most holy king, with fear and trembling; "Being pushed I was overturned that I might fall."<sup>1</sup> And he would really have fallen often, but that the Almighty God supported him; "but the Lord supported me. The Lord is my strength and my praise, and He is become my salvation."<sup>2</sup> "Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my paths."<sup>3</sup> "Strengthen thou me in Thy words."<sup>4</sup>

Therefore good hearers of the Word of God seek to be strengthened in virtue.

The constant and attentive hearing of the Word of God in sermons is the very thing that gives to the heart that strength which enables one who is desirous of salvation to persevere in the way of virtue and in his good resolutions, in spite of his natural weakness and inconstancy, and the attacks and wiles of all the

<sup>1</sup> Impulsus eversus sum, ut caderem.—Ps. cxvii. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Et Dominus suscepit me. Fortitudo mea, et laus mea Dominus, et factus est mihi in salutem.—Ibid. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Lucerna pedibus meis verbum tuum, et lumen sentis meis.—Ibid. cxviii. 105.

<sup>4</sup> Confirma me in verbis tuis.—Ibid. 28.

enemies of virtue. For it encourages him to fulfil his good resolutions with renewed fervor; it gives him fresh strength against all kinds of temptations and seductions, it reminds him again of the necessity of avoiding all dangerous occasions of sin with the utmost caution; it gives him a fresh impulse to continue in the practice of Christian humility, modesty, meekness, temperance, mortification, watchfulness over the senses, purity, tender devotion to God and the saints, the works of mercy and charity, the frequent reception of the sacraments, and other virtues, in spite of what vain worldlings may say or do to prevent him, or to turn him into ridicule. In that way the hearers, that is, souls that are eagerly desirous of Heaven, will be strengthened and encouraged in the practice of the Christian virtues, by the frequent hearing of the Word of God in sermons, as the Prophet David says: "By the word of the Lord the heavens were established; and all the power of them by the spirit of His mouth." "

"A good soul seeks the Word of God in order to conform to it so as to beautify herself;" this is the fourth fruit that is derived from hearing sermons properly. A good man who sincerely desires to serve God, is not at all satisfied with merely avoiding all mortal sin, which destroys completely the bond of friendship between the soul and God; but he cannot bear the least fault or defect that is displeasing to God whom he loves above all things. Nor is he satisfied with being free from all deliberate venial sin; he endeavors as far as possible to become like to Jesus Christ, the Saint of saints, and His pattern and example, and to imitate His life; for he is well acquainted with the words of St. Paul to the Romans: "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."<sup>1</sup> A twofold beauty is caused in the soul by the Word of God, when it is heard with a good and a very good heart. "Now you are clean by reason of the word which I have spoken to you."<sup>2</sup> That is to say, he who constantly hears the Word of God in sermons with sincere desire to profit by it, acquires as a general rule, in virtue of such oft-repeated exhortations and graces, such a horror, disgust and fear of offending God, that he would almost be as unwilling to commit a deliberate venial sin, as a careless Christian or a worldling would to forfeit the friendship of God

And also to be purified, that they may be more like Our Lord.

<sup>1</sup> Verbo Domini cœli firmati sunt, et spiritu oris ejus omnis virtus eorum.—Ps. xxxii. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Nam quos præcivit et prædestinavit conformes fieri imaginis Filii sui, ut sit ipse primogenitus in multis fratribus.—Rom. viii. 29.

<sup>3</sup> Jam vos mundi estis propter sermonem, quem locutus sum vobis.—John xv. 3.

by a mortal sin. And this is proved by experience. If a pious Christian of this kind happens, through sudden surprise of passion, to offend against what he knows to be a Gospel truth, and to transgress the law of Christian charity by angry or abusive words, a fault like this, which is otherwise one that weak nature is liable to commit, is enough, when he recollects himself, to fill him with such fear, trouble and perturbation, that he has neither rest nor peace until he has got rid of the guilt of this sin, which to his conscience is intolerable, by the Sacrament of Penance, and has again made his peace with God. St. Thomas, the Angelic Doctor, says that "by hearing the Word of God a man receives a certain share of the divine virtue and purity."<sup>1</sup> That was what the Apostle alluded to when he wrote to the Galatians: "My little children of whom I am in labor again, until Christ be formed in you."<sup>2</sup>

Finally, that she may receive divine consolation.

Finally, a good soul seeks the Word of God, "that she may enjoy it as her consolation." Nothing is sweeter or more agreeable to one who loves, than to converse with the object of his affection, and the longer this lasts, and the oftener it takes place, the better he is pleased. In the same way, he who has proved and experienced how sweet the Lord is, finds special comfort and consolation in speaking with God, and in frequently hearing His word, as St. John Chrysostom says, so that he is never tired of hearing it. "They who hear the Word of God with great desire, will never grow tired of it."<sup>3</sup> The sermon never seems too long, but nearly always too short to them; nor do they notice that they are tired standing until it is over. They go to hear it with far greater desire than the vain children of the world have for their balls and parties; and often they would prefer going without their meals to losing a sermon. In fact, they almost live on the Word of God, according to what Our Lord says, "Not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God."<sup>4</sup> This was the better part that Magdalen chose when she left all household cares to seat herself at the feet of Jesus her divine Teacher, and to hear what He had to say to her. This is that heavenly sweetness in comparison with which all the joys and pleasures of the vain world are but bitterness, and of which David says: "How

<sup>1</sup> Ex sermone Dei homo aliquam participationem divinæ virtutis et puritatis consequitur.

<sup>2</sup> Filii mei, quos iterum parturio, donec formetur Christus in vobis.—Gal. iv. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Qui divinos sermones audiunt si sitientes acceperint, nunquam fatigabuntur.—S. Chrysostom. hom. 50. in Evang. Joan.

<sup>4</sup> Non in solo pane vivit homo, sed in omni verbo, quod procedit de ore Dei.—Matth. iv. 4.

sweet are Thy words to my palate, more than honey to my mouth.”<sup>1</sup> Thy divine word is to assuage the torments, to comfort me in the trials and to give me joy in the troubles of my soul. See, my dear brethren, there we have at last the good soil which produces a hundredfold from the seed of the Word of God; these are the good hearers, “these are they who in a good and very good heart, hearing the word, keep it.”

Let us now reflect a little on what we have hitherto learned of this subject. The first thought that occurs to me is this: if we take out of the whole population of this city those alone who are regular in hearing the Word of God in the sermons which they know to be most profitable to their souls (for it would be impossible for them to be present at all the sermons that are preached everywhere), how many would there be? Certainly a very small number in comparison to the remaining inhabitants of the city. Is not that so? Yes; we know by experience that there is no doubt of it. Now if we divide this latter and smaller number into four parts, we shall find that only one part will hear the Word of God in a good and very good heart so as to derive spiritual profit from it; but the remaining three parts will not profit by it at all, because the seed will fall either by the wayside, where it will be trodden under foot or be eaten by the birds; or on a rock, where it will dry up for want of moisture; or among thorns which will choke it. Is not that also true? Yes, and we have the infallible word of Jesus Christ to confirm it. Therefore, if they who are of God hear His word, as Our Lord says; and if they alone who hear it with profit to their souls can be counted among the sheep of the fold of Christ, who hear His voice; then all the others must be among the reprobate, since the devil takes the word out of their hearts, “lest believing they should be saved,” as Christ assures us. Alas, what a terrible consequence follows! For, “Many are called, but few chosen.”<sup>2</sup> Alas, we cannot but acknowledge that such must be the case!

From this we may see how small is the number of good hearers and consequently of the elect.

Again, I must ask, if among the small number of those who hear the Word of God constantly, three-fourths derive no profit from it; what spiritual profit can one expect those tepid Christians to make, who seldom or never come to sermons, although they have time and opportunity enough to do so? And what will become of those who avoid the sermons in which they know

How wicked the conduct of those who prevent others from hearing sermons.

<sup>1</sup> Quam dulcisa faucibus meis eloquia tua, super mel ori meo!—Ps. cxviii. 103.

<sup>2</sup> Multi enim sunt vocati, pauci vero electi.—Matth. xx. 16.

the truth will be told them, and avoid them solely that they may be able to continue in sin without having their consciences disturbed? And what of those who are not satisfied with losing the Word of God themselves, but try to keep others also from hearing it? What of those masters and mistresses who prevent their servants from going to sermons, although the latter are willing to go? What of those husbands who prevent their wives from going, lest they should become scrupulous, as they pretend? What of those parents who hinder their sons and daughters from often hearing the Word of God, although the latter are anxious to hear it, and that with the hellish intention of preventing their children from being too pious? Ah, my Lord and my God, I would not willingly take the place of those people at Thy judgment-seat, and answer for them! At all events, if you are determined not to learn good yourselves, nor to do it, nor to go to Heaven, you should not close the way to others who wish to save their souls.

Shown by  
an example.

God was once pleased to show this to a certain married man in a miraculous manner. As Surius relates in the life of St. Antony of Padua, that Saint was compelled to preach in the open field, on account of the number of people who flocked to hear him. In the town there was a pious lady who was anxious to hear the holy man; but her husband would not allow her, so that the only consolation she had was to ascend to the top of the house, that she might at least see the congregation, and thus give her eyes the satisfaction that was denied her ears. But, wonderful to relate, although the field in which St. Antony was preaching, was two miles distant from the house, she heard every word he said, just as well as if she had been amongst the people. Her husband, wondering what she was doing up there, called to her to come down. I am listening to the sermon, said she. What sermon? asked the other in a rage, and he ran up to where she was. There, to his surprise, he found that he, too, could hear distinctly every word the Saint was saying. He then knew what a great fault he was guilty of, and, from that day forward, he never missed going to the sermon with his wife whenever he had the opportunity.

Conclusion.

The third and last conclusion each one of you must draw for himself. You must ask yourselves, To what class do I belong? Am I of the number of those who seldom or never hear the Word of God? Alas, if that is the case, I am not among the chosen sheep of Jesus Christ, who hear his voice, and obey it; and the

terrible words of Christ may be applied to me, "Therefore, you hear them not: because you are not of God."<sup>1</sup> I must then amend my conduct in this respect and from this day forward hear the Word of God as regularly as my circumstances will allow. If I belong to one of the three classes of men who indeed hear sermons regularly, but derive no profit from them, because the seed falls by the wayside, or on the hard rock, or among sharp thorns, and therefore cannot produce fruit; I have just as little reason to expect that things will go well with me; for I shall have to render to God a strict account of the graces and inspirations that I have neglected, and of the many times that I knowingly disobeyed the divine will; therefore, I must and will do better in future; I must hear the Word of God with eagerness and attention, and always make a practical use of the truths that I shall learn. Have I been hitherto diligent in this respect? Do I belong to the fourth class, to the number of those who hear the Word of God in sermons with a good and very good heart, so that they are encouraged to correct their faults and sins, are enlightened in heavenly things, are strengthened against temptations, and have their souls purified? In a word, can I say with truth that I have hitherto heard sermons constantly with an earnest desire to learn something good from them, and that having learned it I have tried to practise it? Oh, if that is the case, I can rejoice with all my heart, and comfort myself with the thought that I have one of the surest proofs of being elected to eternal happiness, according to the words of Jesus Christ, my Saviour: "Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it;" and therefore, full of spiritual consolation, I can cry out with St. Bernard: "I am in the number of the elect, of the predestined, of the children of God."<sup>2</sup> And this my certain hope is founded on the words of Eternal Truth: "He that is of God, heareth the words of God." Therefore, as long as God gives me health and opportunity, I will be constant in hearing His word with a good and very good heart. Strengthen us all in this resolution O God, by Thy grace! Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Propterea vos non auditis, quia ex Deo non estis.—John viii. 47.

<sup>2</sup> Ego de electis sum, ego de predestinatis ad vitam, ego de numero filiorum Dei.—S. Bern. serm. 1 de Septuag.

170 *Small Number of Those who Hear Sermons.*

*Another Introduction to the same sermon for the fourth Sunday after Epiphany.*

Text.

*Homines mirati sunt, dicentes: Quails est hic, quia venti et mare obediunt ei?*—Matth. viii. 27.

“But the men wondered, saying: What manner of man is this, for the winds and the sea obey him?”

Such power and efficacy has the Word of Jesus Christ, that it not only induces people from all parts to follow Him, as we read in to-day’s Gospel, “His disciples followed Him;” and not only excites their astonishment and admiration: “The men wondered;” but it is able even to restrain the fury of the winds and waves: “Rising up he commanded the winds and the sea, and there came a great calm.” “What manner of man is this, for the winds and the sea obey him?” Hitherto, my dear brethren, we have treated of three kinds of people.—*continues as before.*

*On how to act before and after hearing a sermon, see the preceding First Part. On the necessity sinners are under of hearing the Word of God, see the following Third Part.*

*On the same necessity for the innocent and the just, see the Fourth Part. On the hearing the Word of God as a sign of election to eternal happiness, see the Fifth Part.*

# ON DISGRACING THE SEASON OF SHROVE-TIDE.

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## FIFTY-FIRST SERMON.

### HOW UNJUSTLY THEY ACT WHO DISGRACE THE SEASON OF SHROVE-TIDE.

#### Subject.

1. The days of Shrove-tide belong to God as well as the other days of the year; therefore it is as unlawful to sin on those as on other days. 2. The days of Shrove-tide should be by right kept more holily than other days; therefore it is even more unbecoming to sin on them.—*Preached on Septuagesima Sunday.*

#### Text.

*Quid hic statis tota die otiosi?*—Matth. xx. 6.

“Why stand you here all the day idle?”

#### Introduction.

If there are any days in the year on which most men lead an idle, or rather an unchristian and sinful life, it is on these days of Shrove-tide. For there are now many Christians who might be asked, with holy anger, the question: “Why stand you here all the day idle?” Why do you spend the day and the night in such a licentious and unchristian manner? What season are we in now, my dear brethren? In the season of Shrove-tide; that is to say, the time that immediately precedes the Lenten fast; a time that, according to the vicious custom of the world, is supposed to begin almost on Christmas day, as far as revelry and dissipation are concerned. It is Shrove-tide then. In some towns, there is a custom of giving thieves and robbers free license on yearly fair-days, so that they may enter the town without let or hinderance.

In the same way, it seems that there are many who imagine that this season is like one of those fairs, and that the Christian law is abrogated for the time being, so that dissipation, wantonness, and all kinds of vices may be indulged in freely. If a sin is committed during this season, people say that it does not matter; it is Shrove-tide now; we must enjoy ourselves, etc. To show how false, erroneous and unchristian this view is, is my object to-day; and I say:

#### Plan of Discourse.

*The days of Shrove-tide belong to God as well as the other days of the year; therefore it is as unlawful to sin on those as on other days. That I shall prove in the first part. The days of Shrove-tide should by right be kept more holily than other days; therefore it is even more unbecoming to sin on them, as I shall prove in the second part. The first part shall be in the form of an argument against the devil and his followers. The second shall serve as an encouragement to the children of God.*

O dear Lord, if I could prevent even one sin, would not my labor be amply recompensed? But all that I can say is not powerful enough to do that! Thou canst do it, O Almighty Master of hearts, and therefore I humbly beg of Thee to help me by Thy grace, through the merits of Thy Mother Mary and the holy angels guardian.

There is no doubt that in heathen times the season of Shrove-tide was given to the service of the devil.

Why do you wish to give to another what belongs to me alone? Why do you try to take away the season of Shrove-tide from me? So it seems to me that I hear the devil, the chief of sinners, crying out to me. Father of lies, if you can only tell me the truth on this occasion, let me hear what pretensions you have to claim those days as yours? From time immemorial I have been in peaceable possession of them; so that during those days, in all parts of the world, reason was laid aside, and full liberty was given to eyes, ears, tongue, hands and all the senses, while gluttony and drunkenness, impurity and wantonness, and all kinds of sinful pleasures were openly led in triumph. What? Do you mean to persuade me of that? Yes; read Livy, Plutarch and other historians on the subject; or if you look on them as untrustworthy witnesses, because they belong to my side, read St. Augustine in his seventh Book of the City of God, and you will find the time of the Bacchanalian festival, which is now called Shrove-tide, written down as red-letter days in my calendar. Rome, the mistress of the world, in her first beginning under Romulus, as well

as under her consuls, and under the rule of foreign emperors, always observed this season according to my wish and desire. In that city the signal for general revelry was usually given by an old drunken or foolish woman. The grave senators and rulers of the world were then amongst the first to lay aside all decency and self-respect, and to go about, masked and disguised, like fools or madmen, with green branches in their hands, through the streets and lanes of the city, announcing unrestrained license to all. They were followed by crowds of people, young and old, great and small, men and women, crying and shouting at the top of their voices; and even the gravest individual would have been ashamed not to make a fool of himself on such an occasion with the others. After that the people amused themselves with impure plays and comedies, with drinking and dancing, and all kinds of sin and vice. In like manner those days were devoted to my service by the Greeks, Egyptians, and all nations under the Roman dominion. Now if the right to a thing must be accorded to him who has been in possession of it so long, unless a clear proof is brought forward to disprove that right, according to the rules and maxims of jurists; if even the peaceable possession of only a few years is sufficient to establish a valid prescription; who can or will dare to dispute the possession of these days with me, since the most enlightened nations of the world have unanimously given them to me for centuries?

Be silent, unhappy spirit, treacherous deceiver of souls! Why do you bring forward your heathen follies here? Do you think you will find among us the rights that were given you by your idolatrous servants and slaves? You must know that we are Christians, members and brethren of Jesus Christ, and adopted children of God, who acknowledge and adore only the one, true, living God; and we must keep these days holy to our God, for the very reason that they were formerly devoted to your service by heathens, with whose laws and idolatrous customs we have not the least sympathy. In those times you could boast of being a prince of the world, as the Apostle Paul says of you and the other infernal spirits: "Principalities and powers, the rulers of the world."<sup>1</sup> But now your rule is at an end, for He has come whose object was, as St. John says in his first Epistle, "That he might destroy the works of the devil;"<sup>2</sup> and to deliver us from the power of darkness,<sup>3</sup> as St. Paul says. So that these are

For that reason Christians should spend it in a different manner.

<sup>1</sup> Principes et potestates, mundi rectores.—Ephes. vi. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Ut dissolvat opera diaboli.—I. John iii. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Qui eripuit nos de potestate tenebrarum.—Colos. i. 13.

the happy times of which our Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, has said: "Now is the judgment of the world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself." <sup>1</sup> Therefore you are expelled from this world.

The Catholic Church seeks to abolish all the relics of heathenism.

Our holy mother, the Catholic Church, from the very beginning, never showed greater zeal than in the utter extirpation of all the remnants and abuses of heathenism. When a city or country was converted to Christianity, the first question was, what are those idolatrous temples doing here? Away with them! But what harm is in them? They are mere buildings which have cost a great deal of labor and trouble to erect. Would it not be better to allow them to remain, and after having destroyed the images of the false gods, to devote them to the worship of the one true God? No; they are relics of heathenism and must not be tolerated; they must be burnt to ashes, so that not a vestige of them remains. That was what the early Christians did in the reign of the great emperor Constantine: "Constantine destroyed everywhere the most beautiful temples of the gods;" <sup>2</sup> and St. Augustine testifies that throughout the whole of Africa the images of the gods were broken in pieces, and trampled under foot, and the very stones of their temples were held in such abomination, that no one would use them for building purposes. In the reign of Julian the Apostate, the flesh of the animals that had been sacrificed to the idols was offered publicly for sale at a very low price, but not one Christian could be persuaded or forced to purchase or touch a bit of it. But why not? That meat was as good as any other; it did not matter whether it was offered to an idol or not. No, no, said the Christians of those times; such is not the case; God forbid that we should touch anything that comes from heathens! We would rather die of hunger, than eat the least thing that has been offered to idols. Away with the meat; we will not touch it!

Therefore she cannot tolerate the dissipation of Shrove-tide.

Now if the Christian religion shows such zeal in extirpating and abolishing the dead relics of heathenism, is it likely that it will tolerate its living abuses and scandals, I mean the dissipations of Shrove-tide? No, says St. Cyprian, "the Catholic Church condemned all kinds of plays, dances and other abuses when she abolished idolatry." <sup>3</sup> Certainly there were

<sup>1</sup> Nunc judicium est mundi: nunc princeps hujus mundi ejectetur foras. Et ego, si exaltatus fuero a terra, omnia traham ad meipsum.—John xii. 31-32.

<sup>2</sup> Constantinus fana toto orbe celeberrima funditus destruxit.

<sup>3</sup> Omnia ista spectaculorum genera damnavit, quando idololatriam sustulit.

Christians in former times, and perhaps there are many now-days, too, who imitate the blind heathens in those abuses; but the holy fathers always reprov'd their conduct with the greatest zeal. St. Ambrose seeing those customs carried on in Milan, ascended the pulpit in his episcopal vestments, and began to complain most bitterly as follows: "I have a great complaint to make of many of you; namely, that you keep the festivals of the heathens."<sup>1</sup> What a crime that is? Are we Christians? If we are the living temples of God, why do we keep the feasts of false gods in the temple of the true God? Souls consecrated to God, where is your faith? Do those heathenish customs suit the religion you profess? St. Augustine also writes against the dissipations of Shrove-tide. When the plague has left the town, he says, the inhabitants burn all their clothing, no matter how costly it is, so as to destroy every germ of the pestilence. In the same way the Church of God acts; she cries down the poisonous remnants of heathenism, and warns her children against them in their public assemblies, by the pens of her teachers, the voices of her preachers, and the zeal of all true Christians. Water, water, she cries out; bring some water to throw on the smouldering ashes of this hellish fire! See now, you lying spirit, if you can say with truth that you have ever during Christian times been in peaceable possession of the season of Shrove-tide, so that you can claim it as belonging to you and to sin! No; good Christians have never given, and never will give you any such right. The days of this season belong to God, as well as the other days of the year, and must be kept sacred to Him alone.

But the arch-deceiver will answer, can you then make no distinction between one time and another? There is a time to pray and a time to enjoy one's self. Even the holiest hermits in the desert, Antony, Arsenius and others laid aside their hair-shirts on certain days in the year, and cooked their vegetables and herbs with oil and salt to give them a better flavor than usual. I will not dispute with God the other seasons of the year; Advent, Lent, Easter and Pentecost I freely give up to Him; He may keep them for Himself and His service; during those seasons people can go to church, work most earnestly to save their souls, confess, communicate as often as they will, and centre all their thoughts and desires on Heaven. I have nothing against

It is never  
lawful to do  
evil.

<sup>1</sup> Est mihi adversus plerosque de vestris querela non modica, gentilium se ferils dederunt.  
—S. Ambr. serm. 17 Querap. de Calend. Jan.

that. But I must have a few days in the year on which people can get rid of their melancholy thoughts and enjoy themselves a little in my service. You must make some allowance for young people. Poor boys, poor girls, why should you spend your youth in perpetual gloom, and never have an opportunity of enjoying yourselves together? Mark this, my dear brethren; see how the devil builds a chapel where God has a church. The vain children of the world talk exactly in that way nowadays; Shrove-tide comes only once a year, they say, and we must have a little pleasure; as if they could not enjoy themselves without indulging in sinful, impure, forbidden, unchristian and heathenish pleasures! No; I repeat, there is no day in the year on which such things are lawful. I read in the Holy Scriptures that there is a time for every human occupation: "All things have their season," says the wise Ecclesiastes, "and in their times all things pass under Heaven. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted. A time to weep, and a time to laugh. A time to keep silence, and a time to speak."<sup>1</sup> And he goes on to give a list of twenty-eight different times; but the words, "a time to sin," a time to behave in an unchristian manner, a time to imitate heathenish abuses I cannot find any mention of. When there is question of keeping the commandments of God, all the times in the year are alike, Christmas-tide and Quarter-tense, Shrove-tide and Holy Week.

That is also true of Shrove-tide.

The earth has gone around the sun a great many times, yet it has never brought with it a single day or hour in which sin might be lawfully committed. Even during Shrove-tide sin is forbidden under pain of eternal damnation. Even during Shrove-tide impurity and drunkenness are brutal vices, immodest conversation and behavior have a flavor of hell about them, and masquerading and nightly revelries of both sexes, no matter what regard people may pretend to have for decency in them, must necessarily be a proximate occasion of many sins and abuses, and therefore can never be allowed. Shrove-tide, or not, black remains black, and sin is always sin and offensive to God. Among the Babylonians, as Berosius writes, there was a custom that from the seventeenth of August to the twentieth, the servants should take the place of the masters, and the masters

<sup>1</sup> Omnia tempus habent, et suis spatiis transeunt universa sub cœlo. Tempus nascendi, et tempus moriendi; tempus plantandi, et tempus evellendi quod plantatum est; tempus fœndi, et tempus ridendi; tempus tacendi, et tempus loquendi.—Ecc. iii. 1, 2, 4, 7.

that of the servants. Is it likely that the Almighty God will consent to come to such an arrangement as that with us, and lay aside His authority during Shrove-tide, so that we can do whatever we like, and gratify our unruly passions as we please? Is that likely? Oh no; we must always remain as we are, most obedient servants, who can never withdraw ourselves from the obligation of obedience; and God must always remain as He is now, that is, the Ruler and Master of everything in Heaven and on earth; whom it is never lawful to offend under pretext of enjoying ourselves. What would you think, married men, if one of you were to find out that his wife had been unfaithful to him, and if she said in excuse of her crime, oh it is Shrove-tide, it does not matter; I was only amusing myself; it will be all right again when Lent begins? What? the justly enraged husband would say, you faithless wretch, did you not promise to be true to me till death? How can you excuse yourself by saying that it is Shrove-tide? And why should I tolerate now what can never be lawful? In the same way, let a thief try to excuse himself to the judge; I have robbed and stolen, it is true; but it is now Shrove-tide, and we can venture to infringe the law a little. Shrove-tide, indeed, the judge would say; to the wheel or the gallows with you, and keep Shrove-tide there! Now if men do not allow any difference to be made between this and other seasons of the year, as far as unlawful things are concerned, how could the God of infinite justice and sanctity tolerate such a difference? "Jesus Christ," says the Apostle, "yesterday and to-day and the same forever."<sup>1</sup> What He was yesterday, he is to-day; what he forbade yesterday under pain of hell, He forbids to-day under the same penalty, and will forbid it at all times.

So that the saying of the Wise Man remains true: "A fool will laugh at sin, but among the just grace shall abide."<sup>2</sup> Foolish, indeed, is he who, at any time, dares to think lightly of offending God, and to say to himself, now I may commit sin; it is Shrove-tide, and we can enjoy ourselves now with greater freedom. Thus the hellish foe, and all his followers are convicted of a lie and an evident injustice in claiming these days for themselves. Still I am ready to make a compromise with him, if he will only consent and promise to observe two conditions. Hear, then, unhappy spirit! Can you assure us all

Therefore they act unjustly who dishonor this season.

<sup>1</sup> Jesus Christus, heri et hodie, et in sæcula.—Hebr. xiii. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Stultus illudet peccatum, et inter justos morabitur gratia.—Prov. xiv. 9.

that no one will die and leave this world during this season? or if any one dies without repentance, that he will not be condemned to hell with you? That is one condition. Again, can you assure us that God will not see the sins that are committed now, or if He sees them, that He will not be offended at them, nor write them down in His Book that He may hereafter demand payment for them to the last farthing? Answer me; can you make us that promise so that we can depend on you? If so, perhaps you might be allowed to claim this season as your own; but since you cannot, away with you! These days belong to the service of God and to working out our salvation, as well as all other days in the year, and no good Christian will give you a single moment of them. But alas, I have reckoned without the host! The evil spirit will trouble himself little about my arguments, for in spite of all that can be said against him, he will find followers enough to devote these days to him by sin, whether they belong to the service of God, or not. Even among Catholics, there are many, as St. Peter Damian says, who are Catholic in faith, but heathen in practice.<sup>1</sup> Alas, that such should be the case, that people should be guilty of such deplorable wickedness! Therefore, I now turn to you, pious Christians, and seek your help and assistance in the lost cause of God, so to speak. You have good reason to be all the more zealous in sanctifying these days to your Lord and your God, and to be more careful than ever in avoiding even the least sin. The reason of that you will hear in the

### Second Part.

True love and friendship are proved in time of necessity.

A truly affectionate friend has no better opportunity of showing his love and fidelity, than when his friend is in difficulties and wants consolation. "If thou wouldst get a friend," says the wise Ecclesiasticus, "try him before thou takest him; for there is a friend for his own occasion, and he will not abide in the day of thy trouble."<sup>2</sup> For there are friends who remain faithful for a time, that is, as long as things go well with their friend; but when the day of trial and calamity comes they turn the cold shoulder to him. Never should a son show more filial love, than when his father or mother is in affliction; if he were to abandon his parents under such circumstances, he would

<sup>1</sup> Est qui catholicus credat, et gentilitur vivat.

<sup>2</sup> Si possides amicum, in tentatione posside eum, est enim amicum secundum tempus, et non permanebit in die tribulationis.—Eccles. vi. 7, 8.

inflict a twofold pang on them. Amongst the dying injunctions that David gave his son Solomon, there was the following, as we read in the Third Book of Kings: "But show kindness to the sons of Berzellai the Galaadite, and let them eat at thy table;" this is the last request I, thy father, make of thee my son. Why did David remember those children in such a special manner? There were other servants of his who seem to me to have better deserved being recommended to Solomon's care; for there were the heroes who fought for David and conquered his enemies, and brought whole countries under his sway and risked their lives and shed their blood in his service; yet he does not mention them. What great benefit then did he receive from the children of Berzellai, that he remembers them even on his death-bed? "For they met me," he says, "when I fled from the face of Absalom thy brother." When my greatest friends abandoned me, they came to my assistance; when the major part of my subjects revolted against me, they remained faithful and proved their fidelity to me in the time of need; therefore I now commend them to your favor and protection; let them eat at your table like your own children. So highly is true friendship and affection prized in time of difficulty and trial; while the friendship of words alone, that is shown merely in prosperity, is thought nothing of; therefore the Wise Ecclesiasticus says: "And there is a friend, a companion at the table, and he will not abide in the day of distress."

My dear brethren, if what St. Paul writes to the Hebrews is true: "Crucifying to themselves again the Son of God, and making Him a mockery," I say, if it is true that they who commit a mortal sin, crucify anew their Saviour Jesus Christ, and make Him a mockery as far as they can; then it is quite certain, as I remarked in the introduction, that of all the seasons in the year, the present is that in which Jesus Christ endures the greatest trouble and distress, and He would really feel it if, in His glory, He were capable of suffering; and that too, not only from heathens and infidels (in which there would be nothing astonishing) but from His own adopted brethren and children, from those who are co-heirs to Heaven with Him. Are there not, in fact, many Christians, who carefully avoid mortal sin during the rest of the year, but at this season, under the pretext of enjoying

During this season Christ is in great distress.

<sup>1</sup> Sed et filijs Berzellai Galaaditis reddes gratiam, eruntque comedentes in mensa tua.—III. Kings ii. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Occurrerunt enim mihi, quando fugiebam a facie Absalom fratris tui.—Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Rursum crucifigentes sibi metipsos Filium Dei, et ostentui habentes.—Hebr. vi. 6.

themselves, abandon the path of virtue, and offend the good God who is worthy of all love, by the most shameful transgressions? At this time there is not merely one, but there are thousands of ill-conditioned Absaloms, who afflict their loving heavenly Father by all sorts of sin; these are the days to which we might justly apply the words of St. Paul: "See therefore, brethren, how you walk circumspectly, not as unwise, but as wise; redeeming the time, because the days are evil."<sup>1</sup> These are the days of which the Lord Himself complains by the Psalmist: "As in the provocation, according to the day of temptation in the wilderness; where your fathers tempted me;"<sup>2</sup> that is your ancestors, the heathens of old, from whom these Shrove-tide revelries have come down to us. Now is the time when the devil tries to develop human wickedness to its greatest extent; and as Holy Week terminates Our Lord's sufferings, that evil spirit begins now even before Lent, with his followers, bad Christians, to torment the Son of Man, and to fulfil all that was foretold of Him by the prophets: "All things shall be accomplished which were written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man." And what did they say about Him? "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."<sup>3</sup>

All the mysteries of His bitter Passion are then renewed.

Now, does not this take place during these days of Shrove-tide, I will not say here in Treves (and I hope I have reason to make this exception,) but here and there throughout the world even in Catholic cities? Is not Christ again given over to the gentiles, since heathen practices are again indulged in? Is He not mocked in nightly assemblies, in dancing-houses and in impure plays? Is He not blindfolded by indecent masquerading in which men appear disguised as women, and women as men? If such disguises are adopted without necessity, a sin is committed, according to the teaching of theologians; a mortal sin, if the disguise is intended for a wicked purpose, a venial sin, if it is adopted merely for amusement. Is not Our Lord scourged and crowned with thorns by deliberate drunkenness, by uncharitable and impure talk, and by indecent liberties? And finally, is He not nailed again to the Cross as far as may be, by the

<sup>1</sup> Videte itaque, fratres, quomodo caute ambuletis: non quasi insipientes, sed ut sapientes; redimentes tempus, quoniam dies mali sunt.—Eph. v. 15, 16.

<sup>2</sup> Sicut in irritatione secundum diem tentationis in deserto: ubi tentaverunt me patres vestri.—Ps. xciv. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Consummabuntur omnia, quæ scripta sunt per Prophetas de Filio hominis. Tradetur enim gentibus, et illudetur, et flagellabitur, et conspuetur: et postquam flagellaverint occident eum.—Luke xviii. 31, 32, 33.

many sins which arise from dangerous company, and nightly carousing? "Crucifying again to themselves the Son of God, and making Him a mockery."

Children of God, can you see all this without being moved with compassion for your heavenly Father, if you have a spark of love for Him? Friends of God, can you bear to see such treatment offered to your best Friend, who shed His blood and gave His life for you? And would any of you be so heartless as to associate with the impious rabble who desecrate this season, and thus offer another insult to your persecuted Lord? "And you too Brutus," said the dying Julius Caesar, when he saw his dear friend Brutus amongst his assassins. Are you also one of my murderers? Must I then die by your hand? In the same way, pious Christian, might Christ address you, if He saw you taking part in the dissipations of this season. And you, my dear child, are you too among those who crucify Me again? My dear brethren, I do not imagine that any of you will be guilty of such a crime; but you should try to sanctify these days to your Lord and your God in a special manner, to be more faithful to Him than ever, now that He is so much offended, and to show more zeal and earnestness than usual in your works of devotion and piety. Where fire is spreading devastation I should bring, not wood to feed the flames, but water to quench them; when my Lord and my God is so wantonly offended in so many places throughout the world during this time, should I not pray and sigh, and weep tears of contrition in order to appease the divine anger, instead of helping to increase the number of sins committed?

Therefore  
pious  
Christian  
must not  
associate  
with the  
wicked.

You have doubtless heard the story of Jonas, the jester of the Roman Emperor, Ferdinand II. Jonas was always expected to make his appearance at the Emperor's table; but during Shrove-tide he was not to be seen. They sought him for a long time, and at last found him in the church of St. Stephen at Vienna. Being brought before the Emperor, and asked why he absented himself in such an unusual manner, he answered: During the whole year the Almighty God is busy giving audiences to great lords, and to the common people, and we poor jesters can hardly have a chance of appearing before Him; but in these days, when others make fools of themselves, we can afford to be wise, and to do homage to God, who is really present in the Blessed Sacrament, and who is now abandoned by the greater number of His friends. Truly, that was not a foolish

Proved by  
an example.

answer, and the example of this jester might well be followed by all Christians who deserve the name; and since the majority of people lay their reason aside, and abandon their God during this season, those who wish to remain faithful to Him should redouble their zeal in His service. That is the reason why during the three last days of Shrove-tide the forty hours adoration is established, for assisting at which a plenary indulgence may be gained. The object of this devotion is, by adoring the Blessed Sacrament publicly exposed, and by frequent Confession and Communion, to atone, to some extent at least, for the injuries and insults that are offered to Our Lord Jesus Christ (for what He had to suffer long ago in Jerusalem is now re-inflicted on Him afresh by the wickedness of bad Christians), and to redeem part of the time at all events, which is now so unjustly stolen from His service by the devil. Thus the pious servants of God endeavor to practise the advice of St. Paul by “redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”

**Exhortation to the just to be more zealous in showing their love of God during this season.**

It is to you then, pious Christians, that our forsaken Lord flies for refuge in His distress, according to what He Himself said to St. Gertrude, when He appeared to her on the Saturday before Quinquagesima Sunday: “Do you, My beloved, be My protectress; now that I am driven away by others, I fly to you for protection.”<sup>1</sup> To you, says St. Cyprian, does the Church of God stretch forth her hands, “that by your fidelity you may dry up her tears, and console her in some degree for the deplorable fall of so many of her children.”<sup>2</sup> Courage, then, my dear brethren, be firm, and show that you are faithful friends and loving children of God, and that you will never break faith with your beloved Father at any time, but rather serve Him with all the more zeal, the more He is offended by others! There is not much in being pious when every one is so; but to be pious and faithful to God in the midst of the wicked, as Tobias was in Ninive, Daniel in Babylon, Joseph in the court of King Pharaoh, and Abraham among the Chaldeans, that is a certain sign of a real, sincere love of God. And so one day Jesus Christ will be able to say of you, as He did formerly of His Apostles: “You are they who have continued with Me in My temptations;”<sup>3</sup> you are the faithful friends who have remained true to

<sup>1</sup> *Sis tu mihi dilecta in protectricem; nunc a cæteris fugatus ad te confugi.*—L. 4, vitæ c. 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ut lacrymas Matris Ecclesiæ quæ plangit ruinas et funera plurimorum, vos vestra lætitia teratis.*

<sup>3</sup> *Vos autem estis, qui permansistis mecum in tentationibus meis.*—Luke xxii. 28.

Me in the time of trial. And if King David was so grateful to the children of Bezellai, who helped him in his distress, that he recommended them specially to his son Solomon; what will not the most generous Jesus do to prove His gratitude to those who stood by Him when others abandoned Him? See, he will say to His heavenly Father, these are they who served Me truly, while others deserted Me. While the majority of men were indulging in heathenish pleasures, in impurity, in gluttony and drunkenness, in dancing and revelry, these spent their time in the church in humble prayer, in order to please Me. I will never forget their fidelity for all eternity: "And I dispose to you," He will say to them, "as My Father hath disposed to Me a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom;"<sup>1</sup> there you will be treated as I am Myself, and while the others are weeping and gnashing their teeth, you will possess eternal joys with Me.

Yes, O Lord, so it shall be! We will be true to Thee and serve Thee alone in these evil days! We will cry out with Thy servant Mathathias: "Although all nations obey King Antiochus, so as to depart every man from the service of the law of his fathers, and consent to his commandments; I and my sons, and my brethren will obey the law of our fathers. God be merciful unto us; it is not profitable for us to forsake the law, and the justices of God. We will not hearken to the words of King Antiochus, neither will we sacrifice, and transgress the commandments of our law, to go another way."<sup>2</sup> So also, O God, do I now say, that if all the nations on earth were to devote themselves these days to the service of the devil and the flesh, after the manner of the perverse world, yet I and my children, and these my brethren and sisters who are here present, will remain true to Thy holy Christian law; and although all the others cry out, like the Jews, that we should conform to the customs of the heathens, yet we will say with all the more devotion, like the blind man in the Gospel: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."<sup>3</sup> Although they all are more daring now in committing sin, yet will we be still more careful not to offend Thee by the least sin. And with regard

Conclusion  
and resolution.

<sup>1</sup> Et ego dispono vobis, sicut disposuit mihi Pater meus regnum, ut edatis, et bibatis super mensam meam in regno meo.—Luke xxii. 29, 30.

<sup>2</sup> Et si omnes gentes regi Antiocho obedunt, ut discedat unusquisque a servitute legis patrum suorum, et consentiat mandatis ejus: ego et filii mei, et fratres mei obedimus legi patrum nostrorum. Propitius sit nobis Deus: non est nobis utile relinquere legem et justitias Dei. Non audemus verba regis Antiochi, nec sacrificabimus transgredientes legis nostræ mandata, ut eamus altera via.—I. Mach. ii. 19–22.

<sup>3</sup> Jesu, fili David, miserere mei.—Mark x. 47.

to the wicked, although we cannot and do not wish to associate with them, yet, O gracious Saviour, we pray for them as for our fellow-creatures, and we beg Thee to show them Thy mercy and patience, in the same words in which Thou didst pray on the Cross for Thy murderers: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"<sup>1</sup> They are blind and foolish; they do not know or see what great wickedness it is to despise their God and their Lord; nor what a misfortune it is to lose Thee, their highest Good, even during Shrove-tide. Lord and Master of hearts, do not allow innocent souls to be led astray! Holy angels, take special care of the souls entrusted to you in these dangerous times, (for many parents are now neglectful of their children;) be with them always, speak to them, make their consciences uneasy, that they may not go into any place or company where their innocence might be exposed to danger; but that they, like us, may resolve to serve faithfully God, who, even during Shrove-tide, deserves to be constantly loved and praised by all men above all things. Amen.

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*FIFTY-SECOND SERMON.*

**ON THOSE WHO, DURING SHROVE-TIDE, PREFER TO FOLLOW THE DEVIL, RATHER THAN CHRIST.**

**Subject.**

During these days especially, each one has to choose between following the devil with the children of the world, and following Jesus Christ with the children of God; therefore each one should make up his mind as to which he will follow.—*Preached on Quinquagesima Sunday.*

**Text.**

*Ecce ascendimus Jerosolymam, et consummabuntur omnia, quæ scripta sunt per prophetas de Filio hominis.*—Luke xviii. 31.

"Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and all things shall be accomplished which were written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man."

**Introduction.**

How do those two things harmonize, the gospel of to-day,

<sup>1</sup> Pater, dimitte illis: non enim sciunt, quid faciunt.—Luke xxiii. 34.

and the present season? The change in the ceremonies of the Church, and the change in the manners of the world during these days? Jesus, as we read in the Gospel, goes up to Jerusalem, and speaks of nothing but the bitter torments and death that await him, "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;" but the perverse world speaks of nothing but the amusements of Shrove-tide. A fortnight ago the Catholic Church showed her grief by suspending the recitation of the joyful *Te Deum*, and the *Alleluia*; but the world now, more than ever, indulges in dissipation and revelry. How do these things harmonize, I ask again. Does not the Holy Ghost say by the wise Ecclesiasticus: "A tale out of time is like music in mourning."<sup>1</sup> Singing and music on one side, silence and weeping on the other; there is surely little harmony there. My dear brethren, not without reason does the Catholic Church in her sorrowful silence, and omitting the usual signs of joy, appoint for this day the gospel that I have read for you; for her object is, partly to show the sorrow that afflicts her motherly heart at seeing so many of her children following the customs of the vain world, nay, the abuses of the godless heathens, and thus taking sides with the devil during these days, and partly to exhort and encourage her faithful children to remain true to their crucified Redeemer during these days, by living in a pious and holy manner. Such, too, is the object I aim at to-day, and I say:

#### Plan of Discourse.

*During these days especially each one has to choose between following the devil with the children of the world, and following Jesus Christ with the children of God. Christians, consider well what choice you intend making! Such is the subject of this exhortation. Sincere Christians, are we not determined to remain faithful to Jesus Christ? Such shall be the conclusion.*

And do Thou, O God, give us grace to practise it; we ask this of Thee through the intercession of Mary and the holy angels guardian.

Our holy Father, St. Ignatius, in his golden book of the "Spiritual Exercises," a book which owes its origin more to God Himself than to human understanding, and which has hitherto had such wonderful effect and influence on numbers of souls,

At all times  
Christ and  
the devil are  
opposed to  
each other.

<sup>1</sup> *Musica in luctu importuna narratio.*—Eccles. xxii. 6.

(would to God that all Christians made a habit of using this powerful means of salvation once a year, and, laying aside all other concerns, spent three days or a week in silence, meditating on divine things and attending solely to their eternal salvation. Oh how many souls would then be rescued from the infernal serpent! How the number of the elect would then be increased!) in this book, I say, there is one meditation in which St. Ignatius represents on the one side the standard of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and on the other, that of Lucifer, the prince of darkness. Lucifer is represented as sitting on a high throne in a large plain near Babylon, with a terrible countenance and eyes darting fire, and surrounded by smoke and flames and great numbers of devils and human beings, holding in his hands a standard, on which are painted the vain pomps of the world, the lusts of the flesh, the greed of riches and the pride of life. Jesus Christ is represented as standing modestly and humbly on the ground, in a large plain near Jerusalem, with a mild and friendly countenance, holding the standard of the Cross and accompanied by His angels, Apostles and those who work for the salvation of souls. Mark the different circumstances here, my dear brethren. Lucifer is near Babylon, a word which signifies confusion; Jesus Christ is near Jerusalem, the city of peace and rest; thus showing how the wicked, who take sides with the devil, are full of uneasiness and trouble, while the just, who follow the example of Christ, enjoy eternal peace and consolation. Lucifer appears with a terrible, Christ with a friendly countenance, in order to distinguish between the cruel slavery of the devil, and the sweet yoke of Christ. Lucifer sits on a lofty throne as a sign of pride; Jesus stands on the ground as a sign of humility.

Both invite  
men to fol-  
low them.

Then the Saint goes on to consider how those two opposing generals invite men to join them. "Come to me all you that labor and are burdened," says Christ in winning accents, "and I will refresh you. Take up my yoke upon you, and learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart; and you shall find rest to your souls. For my yoke is sweet and my burden light."<sup>1</sup> Go, my Apostles and servants, throughout the world; try to win over souls to My side; persuade them to enlist under my standard, to obey My law, and to imitate Me; preach to them contempt of the world and of all temporal and perishable things,

<sup>1</sup> Venite ad me omnes, qui laboratis, et onerati estis, et ego reficiam vos. Tollite jugum meum super vos, et discite a me, quia mitis sum et humilis corde, et invenietis requiem animabus vestris. Jugum enim meum suave est, et onus meum leve.—Matth. xi. 28-30.

and impress on them the necessity of meekness and humility, of temperance and sobriety, of mortification of the flesh and its desires. The daily pay that I will give in this life to those who serve Me truly, will be spiritual consolation and a sweet joy of conscience; and if they are faithful to Me for a short time, their reward will be eternal joys with Me in the kingdom of Heaven. Go, ye devils, cries out Lucifer, in a terrible voice, go through the world and compel souls to enter my service, to enroll themselves under my banner; leave them neither rest nor peace by day or night, until they yield to you; attack them by your evil suggestions and temptations; make use of wicked men to help you to corrupt and lead the innocent into sin by their bad teaching and example; inspire them with the love of worldly honors, of money and riches and of sensual pleasures, promise them, in my name, if they serve me truly, a comfortable, luxurious, pleasant and happy life; but when I have once got them safely under my yoke, I will make them pay dearly enough for the little pleasure I will give them; say nothing to them of that, however, and after they have thus enjoyed themselves for a short time, they will receive their reward from me in the eternal flames of hell; but this latter you must drive out of their thoughts for the present, and persuade them to look on it as a mere fable that is not worth a moment's serious consideration.

Having thus proposed the two points of the meditation, St. Ignatius represents the human soul placed between those two antagonists, and considering which of them it will join, under which of the two standards it will fight. And finally he bewails the madness and folly of most men in allowing themselves to be deceived by the devil and to be led astray by him, for the sake of an imaginary breath of honor, a worthless piece of money, or a brutish passion, so that they crowd after him and are hurried into hell; while only a very small number prefer to enlist under the standard of Jesus Christ, and to take on themselves His sweet yoke. Alas, when we think of this, how can we help weeping hot tears, like St. Bernard when he cried out, "Christ, who gives life, loses, while the devil, who betrays, gains."<sup>1</sup> Reason enough has the hellish serpent to defy his Lord and his God, and to cry out boastingly to Jesus Christ: See how many follow me, and how willingly they do so; nearly all are on my side; I can promise no reward but eternal torments, and yet the whole world is with me; while you can hardly find a single follower,

At all times  
most men  
take sides  
with the  
devil.

<sup>1</sup> *Christus reficiens, deficit: diabolus decipiens, proficit.*

although you have given your life for men, and promised them eternal joys in Heaven! Such, my dear brethren, has always been the way of the world, that most people, by transgressing the divine commands, take sides with the devil.

But especially during Shrove-tide.

But at no period is this deplorable folly more evident than during the present season of Shrove-tide. At other times we might compare the devil to a dog, tied up with a strong chain, who can bark, but cannot bite any, unless those who, of their own accord, approach too near him. But in these days it seems as if he had broken his chain, and is running raging through the world, attacking every one, without distinction of age, sex, or condition, so that he drags away from the side of Jesus Christ, and over to his own, by sin, many who were before pious innocent souls, who loved God with all their hearts. Is it not so, my dear brethren? Do not many, far too many, live during these days as if they knew neither God, nor Heaven, nor hell, nor Christ crucified, nor Gospel law? As if there was full and free permission for them to commit what sins they please? If we consider the state of many, even Catholic, cities, would we not have reason to be horrified at the dissipation and debauchery carried on in them, were it not that the wicked customs of the world find an excuse for those excesses, and palliate them to such an extent as to make them appear respectable?

As we see in the public streets.

If we go through the public streets, what do we see? All sorts of foolish conduct, ridiculous disguises, and masquerading pleasure-seekers, who try to rival each other in indecent and unbecoming buffoonery; men disguised as women and women as men, who, having thus put off their natural modesty, can indulge all the more freely in licentious excesses. What are we to think of this, Christians? And Thou, O all-seeing God, dost Thou still recognize Thy image in the soul of one who degrades himself by such unmeaning buffoonery? Ah, canst Thou not cry out now, as Thou didst long ago to our forefather Adam, when he hid himself from Thee, after having fallen into sin, Adam where art thou? Human soul, where art thou? Where are the marks of my beauty in thee? Where is the reason I gave that young man? Where is the modesty that that young girl received as a natural gift.

In private houses.

And if we go from the streets into many of the houses, what do we see? The tradesman gives up his work, the shopkeeper his business, and the lawyer his studies, the master and mistress their usual domestic cares; everybody seems to keep holiday. And in

whose honor? God's? Yestruely, in honor of a certain god; of that god of whom the Scripture speaks: "Whose god is their belly;"<sup>1</sup> of that god to whom the blind heathens in former times consecrated their feast days, and whom they called Bacchus; and of the goddess of impure love, whom they called Venus! Heathenish pleasures, dangerous intercourse, immoderate eating and drinking, drunkenness, immodesty and other sinful pastimes are indulged in during these days without the least shame. There is no use in speaking or preaching against them; the one all-sufficient excuse is always ready; it is Shrove-tide. Thus thousands of souls run, without being asked, to enlist themselves under the standard of the devil; the gain is all on the side of the arch-enemy, who betrays souls to destruction. Jesus Christ, exposed on the altar under the sacramental veils, cries out to His children: "Come to Me all you, and I will refresh you;" remain with Me, keep the faith you so solemnly swore to Me in baptism, and I will reward you eternally! But in vain; the loss is all on the side of Christ, who gives life. Most people refuse to listen to Him during these days; many who have laid aside the burden of their sins in the Sacrament of Penance during the morning, and entered into a fresh compact with their God and Saviour by receiving Him in the Holy Communion, banish Him again from their hearts during the afternoon with the greatest ingratitude, by going into dangerous company and into the occasion of sin, and thus burden their consciences anew with sins which they will have to repent of again and to confess during Lent. But the true children and followers of Christ, who are unfortunately very few in number, are all the more faithful in their attachment to the standard of the Cross during these days, and all the more careful to avoid doing even the least thing to offend their dear Saviour, the more they see that others shamefully abandon Him.

Such is the state of the case, my dear brethren. And what are you now going to do? "If it seem evil to you to serve the Lord," I say to you in the words in which the heroic Josue addressed the Israelites just before his death, when he was exhorting them to persevere in the service of the true God, "If it seem evil to serve the Lord, you have your choice; choose this day that which pleaseth you, whom you would rather serve, whether the gods which your fathers served in Mesopotamia, or the gods of the Amorrites in whose land you dwell;" you can do as you please,

Each one  
can now  
choose  
which side  
he will take

<sup>1</sup> Quorum Deus venter est.—Phillip. iii. 19.

but you must know that; “as for me and my house we will serve the Lord.” In the same way, Christians, I say to you, “you have your choice;” take whichever side you please; make up your minds as to whether you will join the rabble who are following the devil, and serve the false gods of the vain worldlings among whom you are living; or whether with your holy ancestors, who so bravely shed their blood for Jesus Christ, you will remain faithful to the true God. But consider first which of the two has the greater claim on your love and service. You are quite free; make what choice you please.

Pious  
Christians  
should not  
hesitate in  
choosing.

Alas, perverse and wicked world, why do you compel me to propose such a choice? Christians, can one of you hesitate for a moment, as to which side he should join, Christ’s or the devil’s? How, my soul! Do you then require such a long time to determine whether you will serve God, or the devil? Your God, who has given you all that you have, or that wicked spirit from whom you cannot expect anything that is good? Your God who, through excess of love gave up His life for you, to save you from eternal death, or the devil, who, if God allowed him, would at once hurry you into hell as a reward for having served him? Your God, who gives Himself to you as your food and drink, that you may have eternal life, or the devil who tries to give you a poison that will cause your eternal death? Your God in whose service you now enjoy the sweetest repose, the greatest interior consolation and comfort, or the cruel demon, in whose slavery your wretched conscience will be unceasingly tortured and afflicted? Your God, who has promised you the eternal joys of Heaven as a recompense, or the devil, who is already fanning the flames of hell, that he may torture you therein for serving him faithfully? Think well before you decide!

But remain  
faithful to  
God.

Vain children of the world, I say with Josue, do as you please; “as for me and my house we will serve the Lord,” and serve Him alone. My dear brethren, I am sure that you too will make the same determined answer that the Israelites made to Josue; “and the people answered and said: God forbid we should leave the Lord, and serve strange gods. The Lord, our God, He brought us and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; and did very great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the ways by which we journeyed, etc.

<sup>1</sup> *Sin autem malum vobis videtur ut Domino serviatis. optio vobis datur: Eligite hodie, quod placet. cui servire potissimum debeatis, utrum diis, quibus servierunt patres vestri in Mesopotamia, an diis Amorrhæorum, in quorum terra habitatis; ego autem et domus mea serviemus Domino.—Josue xxiv. 15.*

Therefore we will serve the Lord, for He is our God.”<sup>1</sup> Yes, answered Josue, but I foresee that the Amorrhites, among whom you live, will lead you astray after a time, so that you will serve their false gods. “You will not be able to serve the Lord,” that is, according to commentators, you will not be able to serve God, and at the same time remain amongst idols, “for He is a holy God, and mighty and jealous,”<sup>2</sup> who cannot brook a rival in His service. Ah my dear Christians, I too am afraid that the servants of the world and the wicked followers of Satan, in whose company you will perhaps be during these dangerous days, may lead some of you astray by their seductive and bad example, so that you will become like themselves and abandon the way of the children of God. Will you do so? No, cried out the people of Israel unanimously to Josue; “No, it shall not be so as thou sayest, but we will serve the Lord.”<sup>3</sup> So, too, must you think and say, my dear brethren. No, what you are afraid of will never come to pass; we will serve the Lord our God, and remain faithful to the standard of Jesus Christ.

But our companions will object, and will say, it is Shrove-tide. And what if it is? Must we therefore leave our God and serve the devil? O great God, must I now, because it is Shrove-tide, banish Thee from my heart and from my mind, in order to make room for Thy sworn enemies, the wicked world, the corrupt flesh, the treacherous Father of Lies, until this season is past? That seems to me to be like the way in which they manage in some places where Catholics and heretics live together. In some small towns there is only one church, which Lutherans or Calvinists and Catholics have in common; this unfortunate church has to change its appearance every Sunday in such a manner as to appear to laugh sometimes and at other times to weep. How so? In the morning the Catholics have their hours appointed for the true service of God, and then the altar is, as the expression goes, “decked out in grand gala;” the pictures of the saints are hung on the walls, the Cross is in a place of honor, the Tabernacle is opened and the Blessed Sacrament exposed to the adoration of the people, the holy Mass is said and heard, the Word of God is preached from the pulpit

How disgraceful to be unfaithful during Shrove-tide shown by a simile.

<sup>1</sup> Responditque populus, et ait: Absit a nobis, ut relinquamus Dominum et serviamus diis alienis. Dominus Deus noster ipse eduxit nos et patres nostros de terra Ægypti, de domo servitutis: fecitque videntibus nobis signa ingentia, et custodivit nos in omni via, per quam ambulavimus. Serviemus igitur Domino, quia ipse est Deus noster.—Josue xxiv. 16-18.

<sup>2</sup> Non poteritis servire Domino: Deus enim sanctus, et fortis æmulator est.—Ibid. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Nequaquam ita ut loqueris, erit, sed Domino serviemus.—Ibid. 21.

and the souls of the faithful are fed with the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ in the Holy Communion. Oh certainly a joyous sight for God and His angels! But wait a while and see what a change takes place. When the time appointed for the Catholics is over, the church hardly looks like a church any more. And why? The images of the saints are removed, the Cross is brought into the sacristy, the tabernacle closed, and the altar covered with a curtain; the Catholics go out, and the heretics come in and take their place; the preacher ascends the pulpit, opens a falsified Bible, and gives out a long winded harangue advocating a false doctrine that is opposed to the gospel of Christ. Poor church, it seems as if your walls and pillars must complain of the bitter necessity to which they are reduced by the pressure of troublous times, since they must now serve two masters, Christ, their legitimate Master, and the apostates Luther and Calvin! In the same way, I repeat, these days seem to change people very much. During the rest of the year every good Catholic at least knows that the first and chief command must be exactly observed: "Thou shalt love the Lord Thy God with thy whole heart," etc., and with all thy strength and above all things; that the exhortation of St. Peter must be observed: "Be sober and watch; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist ye strong in faith;"<sup>1</sup> that the exhortation of St. John must be exactly fulfilled: "Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world,"<sup>2</sup> much less the abuses introduced by the world; that the law of Christ must be obeyed to the letter: "If thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee;"<sup>3</sup> if it is an occasion of sin to thee, away with it at once; for it is expedient for thee to go into Heaven with one eye, rather than to go to hell with two eyes. Then good Catholics can keep their feast-days by a true service of God. Oh, let me say it again, what a joyful sight that is for God and His angels! But it is Shrove-tide now; away then with all those pious ornaments; the holy altar must be covered; the humble, crucified Jesus must be banished from the heart and mind; heretics, (that is not saying half enough!) heathens and idolaters must now have their turn in the temple; the dangers of the soul are dangers no longer; the perverse customs of the world have to replace the law of Christ;

<sup>1</sup> Sobrii estote et vigilate, quia adversarius vester diabolus tanquam leo rugiens circuit, quaerens quem devoret: cui resistite fortes in fide.—I. Pet. v. 8-9.

<sup>2</sup> Nolite diligere mundum, neque ea, quæ in mundo sunt.—I. John ii. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Si oculus tuus dexter scandalizat te, erue eum, et projice abs te.—Matth. v. 29.

drunkenness, intemperance, wantonness must have full freedom; Bacchus and Venus must be raised on the altars and adored. Away with you, says the devil to Christ, the days and hours appointed for your service are over; my feast-days have now begun, and they must belong to me alone!

Ah, my God, shall I consent to this? No, O Lord, worthy of all love, my soul has been once for all consecrated as Thy temple; never, not even during Shrove-tide, shall sacrifice be offered therein to any one but Thee! No, my God, Thou art absolute Lord of all time; not a single moment should be employed for anything but Thy honor and glory! No, Thou omnipresent God, whose eye sees me wherever I am; in no place should I ever do, think, or say the least thing that is displeasing in Thy sight! No, Almighty God, without whom I can move neither hand nor foot; never should I do anything, or take the least step against Thy holy will! No, O God of justice, who in any place, at any time, even during these days, canst hurl me into hell on account of my sins; no worldly custom should ever lead me astray, or place me in the least danger or occasion of offending Thee! No, O God of infinite goodness, on whose grace and favor I, like a poor beggar, must always depend, even during Shrove-tide; not in the least thing should I make Thee an evil return for the countless benefits Thou hast bestowed on me! "God forbid we should leave the Lord and serve strange gods." I and all true Christians are determined now to serve Thee alone Our Lord, because Thou art our only God worthy of all love.

But it is Shrove-tide, say the vain children of the world and the partisans of the devil. And what then? Oh, one must enjoy one's self! And so you can enjoy yourselves; but in a manner befitting Christians and children of God; that is, you can rejoice in the Lord, as St. Paul says: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say, rejoice. Let your modesty be known to all men."<sup>1</sup> He can rejoice in the Lord; but generally speaking, the pleasures of Shrove-tide are against the Lord.

But is it rejoicing in the Lord and acting as becomes the children of God to go into places and company in which Christian modesty and humility, as well as the purity of the heart, if not of the body, are exposed to certain danger? And here I allude not only to those nightly meetings in dancing-houses, but also to all assemblages in which persons of both sexes spend the night amusing themselves. Is it rejoicing in the Lord like children of God, to mask and disguise one's self in such a way as to provoke

<sup>1</sup> Gaudete in Domino semper: iterum dico: Gaudete. Modestia vestra nota sit omnibus hominibus.—Philipp. iv. 4-5.

the Almighty to disgust? Hear what He says in the Book of Deuteronomy: "A woman shall not be clothed with man's apparel, neither shall a man use woman's apparel; for he that doth these things is abominable before God."<sup>1</sup> Is it rejoicing in the Lord like children of God, to rob one's self deliberately of reason by excessive drinking, and, as is the custom in these days, to indulge in all sorts of immodest buffooneries and liberties? Is it rejoicing in the Lord like children of God, to do things which will afterwards make the conscience uneasy, because there is a reasonable doubt as to whether a mortal sin has been committed or not, or because there is no doubt of the obligation of confessing and repenting of a sin that has been certainly committed? If you wish to know, my dear brethren, whether the pleasure you intend indulging in is an innocent and Christian one, before you begin, make the good intention, as I have elsewhere explained and see how it suits what you intend doing. For every thing that is in itself neither good nor bad, can and must be made meritorious and deserving of Heaven by virtue of a supernatural intention, when it is performed in the state of sanctifying grace; and everything that cannot reasonably be directed to that supernatural end is, beyond all doubt, not innocent, but unlawful. Think therefore, I will go to that place, to that company, I will do this or that, or act in such and such a manner to Thy greater honor and glory, O God, and because it is pleasing to Thy holy will, that I may thereby be strengthened to serve Thee better; I unite this intention with the infinite merits and bitter Passion of Jesus Christ, my Lord, that Thou mayest have a greater pleasure in it, and that it may be more advantageous to my eternal salvation. Then see how the pleasure you intend enjoying suits that intention; if it is unsuited to it, then I say again, and you can look on it as a certain general rule in similar cases, that the pleasure is not an innocent one, and that it is unlawful.

For they  
are never  
lawful.

Therefore it still remains true that, if I wish to act as a true Christian and child of God, I will have nothing to do with such pleasures. I will enjoy myself, but "in the Lord." Others may act as they please, I will remain true to my God and my Lord; the whole world may side with the devil, I will never desert the standard of Jesus Christ, even during Shrove-tide. The soldier is always bound to perform his military duties; there is no

<sup>1</sup> Non induetur mulier veste virili, nec vir utetur veste feminea: abominabilis enim apud Deum est, qui facit hæc.—Deut. xxii. 5.

Shrove-tide in which it is lawful for him to desert his post, or to rebel against his officer; if he is caught in the act of committing any such transgressions even during Shrove-tide, he is punished at once. The civil and criminal laws are always binding on subjects, and no Shrove-tide can excuse from punishment those who are guilty of robbery, murder, coining false money, and rebelling against their lawful sovereign. And therefore no thief dares to steal openly; if he were to do so, the fact of its being Shrove-tide would not excuse him from being brought before the judge. The law of holy matrimony is always to be strictly observed, and no husband or wife is allowed during Shrove-tide to be guilty of conjugal infidelity. Now the Christian law is a military law; I am a soldier who in holy baptism have publicly sworn fidelity to the standard of Jesus Christ, and thus I have renounced for ever the devil, the world and the flesh. I have renewed my oath in the sacrament of confirmation, and I have again sworn to fight bravely for God and the true faith, even to the shedding of my blood. The Christian law is a just one; I am a subject and owe homage to God as my only sovereign Lord, and to Him I have promised obedience. The Christian law is one of spiritual matrimony; my soul is the bride, God the Holy Ghost is the bridegroom, and to Him I have promised perpetual love and fidelity. Did I perhaps as a soldier, when promising to be true to the standard of Christ, make an exception in favor of Shrove-tide, so that I could then desert my post without incurring blame? When I, as a subject, offered homage to my God, did I reserve to myself Shrove-tide as a time during which I could with impunity rebel against Him? When I was espoused to the Holy Ghost by sanctifying grace, did I look on Shrove-tide as a time during which I might commit spiritual adultery with the devil? No; every agreement I made is made for all time; all these laws are binding on me forever.

Therefore I renew my resolution; and do you, good Christians, keep yours faithfully. Far be it from us to desert the Lord, even during these days of Shrove-tide, and to serve strange gods. If I see people running off in crowds to join the side of the devil, I will think of the exhortation that Jeremias gave the Jews, when he forewarned them in an epistle that they should dwell among the Babylonians, and should see people adoring gods of gold, and silver, and stone: "Beware therefore that you imitate not the doings of others. But when you see the multitude behind and before adoring them, say you in your hearts: Thou

Conclusion  
and resolution  
to be  
faithful to  
Christ.

oughtest to be adored O Lord.”<sup>1</sup> Thou alone art the true God whom I must fear, honor and love. If others try, by ridicule or invective, to induce me to join them and so run into the danger of sin, I will at once remember the fidelity I owe the standard of Jesus Christ, and I will act as Catulus the Roman general did in former times. Catulus was once engaged in battle when the tide of success seemed turned against him, and he was on the point of being deserted by his soldiers, when he suddenly seized the standard, held it up on high, and cried out in a loud voice, “see what you are fighting under;”<sup>2</sup> remember the oath you have sworn under this standard. These few words re-activated the drooping courage of his soldiers, so that they returned boldly to the attack, and fought with the greatest bravery, until they put the enemy to flight. If during these days I find it hard to pray while others are dancing and amusing themselves, hard to appear at the Table of the Lord while others are indulging in gluttony and drunkenness, hard to remain in solitude at home while others are enjoying themselves with heathenish pleasures; or if I perhaps go into company which is dangerous to Christian modesty and purity, I will at once take courage and ask myself, under whom am I fighting? and I will answer with St. John Chrysostom; “I have sworn an oath of fidelity to Christ; how then can I desert to the army of the devil?”<sup>3</sup> No; away with the thought. Avaunt Satan! Away with your temptations, O corrupt flesh! Away with your foolish abuses, O perverse world! I am Thine, O my sovereign Lord and God! I am Thine altogether and at all times even during Shrove-tide! And I am now determined to show more than ever, by redoubling my works of piety, that I am thoroughly devoted to Thee alone and to Thy service, the more others appear to put Thy holy, humble and pure law publicly to shame. Thine will I be for all eternity, in spite of all the partisans of Thy antagonist! Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Videte, ergo, ne et vos similes efficiamini factis alienis. Visa itaque turba de retro et ab ante, adorantes, dicite in cordibus vestris: Te oportet adorari, Domine.—Bar. vi, 4-5.

<sup>2</sup> Ecce sub quo militatis!

<sup>3</sup> Sacramentum Christo dixi, et quomodo ergo ad diaboli castra transfugiam?—St. Chrysost. Hom. 54 ad pop.

*Another Introduction to the same sermon for the Feast of St. Matthias the Apostle, when it occurs before Ash-Wednesday.*

**Text.**

*Cecidit sors super Matthiam, et annumeratus est cum undecim Apostolis.*—Act. i. 26.

“And the lot fell upon Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven Apostles.”

How different in this case the lot of two men of the same class. How unhappy that of one, how fortunate that of the other. Matthias was numbered among the Apostles of Jesus Christ; Judas, whose place he took, was numbered among the demons in hell. My dear brethren, to which side do we wish to belong? I can no longer conceal my displeasure and at the same time my compassion; to which side, I ask again, do we wish to belong during these days of Shrove-tide? With whom do we wish to be numbered? With the Apostles and disciples of Christ, or with the friends and partisans of the devil? If there is any time during the year at which there is reason for asking such a question, it is the present. I repeat it, etc.—*continues as before.*

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*FIFTY-THIRD SERMON.*

**ON THE INDECENCY AND THE BITTERNESS OF THE PLEASURES OF SHROVE-TIDE.**

**Subject.**

1. The pleasures of the season of Shrove-tide are, generally speaking, unbecoming, and therefore unsuited to a Christian. 2. They are not really joyful pleasures, and therefore no sensible man would indulge in them.—*Preached on Quinquagesima Sunday.*

**Text.**

*Cæcus quidam sedebat secus viam.*—Luke xviii. 35.

“A certain blind man sat by the wayside.”

**Introduction.**

O dearest Saviour, come down on earth again. Not one, but countless blind mortals wilt Thou find in the streets and houses, who will not cry out to Thee, as the blind man in the Gospel

did, "Jesus Son of David, have mercy on me;" but who make merry and amuse themselves in spite of their blindness! And such Thou wilt find to be the case especially in this season of Shrove-tide. He who is blind wanders about and knows not where he is, nor whither he goes; he gropes about with his hands, but cannot tell whether what he touches is black or white. And so it is in these days with the blind world and its deluded children. They all seek enjoyment; but like the blind man, where they think they have a real pleasure, they have only found a false one, in which there is neither honor nor true enjoyment, and which therefore is quite unsuited to the name of Christian, nay, even to sound reason. To-day I will prove this to be true, and show what this blindness is, that I may warn all good and sensible Christians against it.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*The pleasures of the season of Shrove-tide are, generally speaking, unbecoming, and are therefore unsuited to a Christian. That I shall show in the first and longer part. They are not really joyful pleasures, and therefore no sensible man would indulge in them. That I shall show in the second part. Rejoice in the Lord and be glad ye just; such shall be the conclusion.*

To this effect, let us cry out with the blind man in the Gospel, "Jesus Son of David have mercy on us," and give us all the grace Thou gavest the blind man, that we may faithfully imitate, love and praise Thee during these days. This grace we beg of Thee through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary, and our holy angels guardian.

Whether  
an amuse-  
ment is be-  
coming or  
not, depends  
on the cir-  
cumstances  
of the per-  
son.

The decency and suitability of an action depend on the circumstances and qualities of the person who undertakes to perform it; for that person has to consider whether such an action is, in the general estimation of men, one that becomes his or her birth, condition, age, and sex. This rule is acknowledged and observed even by the perverse world. Thus, for instance, it is a becoming and suitable thing for a poor peasant, who is bringing a load of wood to a house, to sit down on a stone in the street to rest himself, and to eat a piece of bread and cheese out of his hand; but such conduct would not be at all becoming in a senator or a courtier. It is a becoming and decent thing in a house-maid to take a broom in her hand and sweep away the dust from the door step, but not in a lady. A venerable old man cannot now with decency engage in the sports with which he

often passed the time with his companions in his young days; those things suited him in his youth, but they would be unbecoming in him now, that he is advanced in life. And why so? Why should things that are becoming in themselves, be suited to one person, and not to another? And why should they not be as suitable at one time, as at another? Reason itself suggests the answer to this question. And therefore the same rule must hold good with regard to the amusements that are in vogue now, during the season of Shrove-tide. To judge whether these amusements are becoming or not, we must consider who the persons are that engage in them; for there is no doubt that not every amusement is becoming to every one, even at Shrove-tide.

I will try to make the matter clearer by an imaginary example, on which I will pronounce judgment. There is a poor religious who has for many years led a poor, mortified and penitential life, living from one year's end to the other on bread given him in charity, sleeping on a hard bed, and chastising his flesh by frequent vigils, by fasting, prayer, and other works of penance. He is told it is now Shrove-tide, and he wishes to enjoy himself a little. Would you think it wrong of him to do so? Would you grudge the poor man a little amusement? By no means, you would all cry out; why should he not have some pleasure too? The bow cannot be kept always bent, as the saying is; one must have a little relaxation now and then, so as to refresh the mind, and gain new vigor. You hear this, my dear brother? You can enjoy yourself now. Change your habit at once for another dress; put a wig on your head; stick a feather in your hat; put a sword at your side, and be off with you at once to the ale-house; there you will find a lot of merry companions, and you can enjoy yourself to your heart's content during these three days, in singing and playing, and eating and drinking! No, no, you say, we do not mean that. That would be a most scandalous proceeding! But why so? It is Shrove-tide and he has a right to enjoy himself! Let him enjoy himself, you answer; but he must not go beyond the bounds of his holy profession; those amusements are not for a religious; if he wishes to indulge in them, it would have been better for him to have remained in the world; then they would have suited him well enough.

Shown by a simile.

I must ask your opinion of another case, my dear brethren. There in a convent is a pious nun, who was born of rich and noble parents, and brought up from her childhood in comfort and luxury; but through love of Jesus Christ, whom she has

Confirmed by another

chosen as her Spouse, and in order to make surer of gaining the kingdom of Heaven, she has hidden herself between the four walls of a cell, in which for some years she has seen and heard nothing of the world. She frequently wears a hair-shirt under her habit, and interrupts her night's rest even in the depth of winter, in order to sing the praises of God in choir. She too wishes to enjoy herself a little at Shrove-tide; may she not do so? By all means, you say, let her enjoy herself; but how? I will tell you. She must take off her veil, curl her hair, paint her face, and put on an immense hooped dress, and then she can go in for a drinking frolic; but of course everything will be conducted with the greatest propriety. Oh, nonsense, you say, the thing is impossible! It would be a fearful scandal, and such an amusement would be most unbecoming such a person! But why? It is decent and becoming enough in the opinion of most of you, and it is the way in which people amuse themselves at this season. Oh, you say, it is not at all proper for a nun. Yet nuns are human beings as well as you, and they have just as much, if not more right to enjoy themselves. Yes, you answer, that is right enough, but they must enjoy themselves in a manner suited to their position. Your judgment is rather severe, but it is quite correct. Thus you yourselves acknowledge (I will not say anything now as to whether the dress I have mentioned is becoming even for lay-people) that not every kind of amusement, even if it be not unlawful in itself, is suited to every person, but that the circumstances of the individual must be taken into consideration, even during Shrove-tide.

We are  
Christians,  
and there-  
fore amuse-  
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us.

But now seriously to our subject. No matter what state, condition, or profession we are of, whether lay or clerical, we are at all events Catholics. More than that I need not say. We are Catholics, that is believing Christians; and therefore we should have nothing to do with the abuses bequeathed to us by the blind heathens. We are Catholics, that is children of light; and therefore we must fly the works of darkness. We are Catholics, that is soldiers of Jesus Christ, or, as the holy Fathers say, as I have often reminded you already, we have publicly professed and sworn in baptism to obey the law and the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to renounce forever the devil and his works, the flesh and its desires, the world and its pomps; everything, then, that does not agree with this profession of ours, is unbecoming to us. We are Catholic Christians, that is, according to St. Paul, members and followers of Jesus Christ, who must put on Christ, and endeavor

as far as possible to imitate the life of our humble and thorn-crowned Head; we are relatives and friends of Jesus Christ, who often feeds us with His sacred flesh and blood, so that, as He expressly says, He may abide in us, and we in Him; therefore nothing which is not in harmony with that life, with that dignity, can be becoming in us. Therefore, if we wish to enjoy ourselves during Shrove-tide in a becoming manner, our enjoyments must be such that every one can say of them: Yes, that is the way in which one should enjoy himself, who is enlightened with the grace of faith, a child of supernatural light, one who makes profession of the gospel of Christ, a sworn enemy of the devil, the flesh, and the vain world, a member, a follower, a relative and friend of the humble, crucified Jesus.

Now you may decide for yourselves. Go and consider the nature of the amusements that are commonly indulged in by many Christians during Shrove-tide, and see how they harmonize with the dignities and obligations of a Christian. Spending hours before the glass decking one's self out in the height of fashion, in order to appear in mixed assemblies, to glut one's own dangerous curiosity and to serve as a snare to others; men disguising themselves as women and women as men, in all kinds of ridiculous manners, so that all modesty is laid aside; appearing in the streets masked and dressed as mountebanks, shouting and roaring and acting like fools, even on Sundays and holy days consecrated to the service of God; (but, thank God, I have heard on good authority, that this latter excess is now forbidden; and may God grant that the prohibition be extended throughout the Catholic world!) spending whole nights in dancing and in unlawful and dangerous amusements, in eating to excess and drinking until perfect ebriety ensues, offending against virginal and conjugal purity by desires, words and acts, which during these days are hardly considered sinful; can these and similar excesses be looked on as amusements befitting one who professes to be a Christian? Are they suited to one who has to imitate the life of Jesus Christ? If so, what then are we to consider as worldly, as carnal, as heathenish, nay, as devilish?

Heathens, Turks, Jews, heretics, do you find any great difference between these amusements of ours, and your festivities in honor of Bacchus? Nay, could you with truth be accused of the same dissipations that many Christians indulge in during these days? There is of course no doubt that the abuse derives its origin from heathen times, as I have already explained, and that therefore the

Such are the amusements generally indulged in at Shrove-tide.

Heathens, Turks, and Jews are not worse than modern Christians in this respect.

devil lays claim to these days, as if they belonged to him by right, and should be devoted to his service. But, I ask again, is it right for a Christian practically to acknowledge that claim? We laugh at the Jews because they act in such a ridiculous manner in their synagogues, shouting out their prayers at the top of their voices, sometimes springing up in the air, and again throwing themselves flat on the ground. What foolish people they are, we say! And yet they profess by those ceremonies to honor and adore their God in a manner prescribed by Him in the Old Law. We consider the Turks as foolish, when we hear or read how they pray in their mosques with outstretched arms, or twirling themselves round with their heads thrown backwards, until they fall down exhausted and foaming at the mouth. Are they not madmen? we say. But what would Turks and Jews think of us, if they were to see how we go on during Shrove-tide? If they were told that we act like that in honor of God and for His sake, as Jews and Turks maintain that their antics are religious ceremonies; what would they think? If a confessor were to order his penitent to put on a fool's dress, and to jump and caper about the streets, and spend the night in drinking and carousing in honor of God, and as satisfaction for his sins, would not that priest be looked on as out of his mind? And yet, so foolish and inconsistent are we, that we deliberately commit those follies without being at all forced to do so! Is that an amusement befitting a true Christian and imitator of Jesus Christ?

Who scandalize and put our holy religion to shame.

O first born children of the Catholic Church, how far different it was in your days! The heathens could not find anything more grievous to reproach you with, than that you refused to assist at their public shows and dances, that you abhorred all revelry, and that you observed the greatest humility, modesty and temperance at your meals. These were the vices they had to reproach you with. It was this modesty and self-restraint which excited the admiration of so many heathens, and brought them to the knowledge of the true faith, so that they abjured idolatry, and, following your edifying example, made public profession of the gospel of Jesus Christ, being compelled to acknowledge that it was not at all likely that the darkness of error could have any influence where so much modesty and humility were displayed. O Christians, what have we come to? With our Shrove-tide buffooneries, we are a source of scandal to heathens, Turks, Jews, and heretics, who can point to our excesses as an excuse for not belonging to the true Church, in as much as, with some show of reason, they

can maintain that they are utterly incompatible with a knowledge of the truth. How many heretics there are who have been confirmed in error by consideration of the excesses of Catholics, and have perhaps thanked God that they had not the misfortune of being born in such a degraded system of Christianity! To Turks and Mahomedans we are a laughing-stock and a mockery; and many of them, who had an opportunity of witnessing our Shrove-tide festivities, were firmly convinced that all Christians are fools. What sort of law-givers, they thought, must these people have, what kind of a God do they adore, since such conduct is either prescribed, or allowed to them? And this thought they actually gave expression to. You see then, how not only the Christian law, but Jesus Christ Himself, our Legislator and Master, is exposed to the laughter and ridicule of heathens and Jews; so that He has just reason to complain now, as the Patriarch Jacob did formerly, when his sons Simeon and Levi cruelly slaughtered the Sichemites: "You have troubled me, and made me hateful to the Chanaanites and Pherezites, the inhabitants of this land."<sup>1</sup> St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians of the early Christians, says: "We are the good odor of Christ unto God;"<sup>2</sup> that is, by our modest and edifying lives, we make all nations and peoples think highly of Christ and the Christian name, so that many of them are induced to submit to His law. But nowadays all pious Christians may cry out against the excesses of Shrove-tide, in the same terms in which the Hebrews complained of Moses and Aaron in Egypt: "The Lord see and judge, because you have made oursavor to stink before Pharao and his servants."<sup>3</sup> You, by your dissipations, are the cause why so many infidels and apostate heretics turn away in disgust from a religion in which such abuses are practised. And there is just reason for that complaint, my dear brethren. Can you, then, still maintain that such amusements are becoming the children and imitators of Jesus Christ?

Finally, if there is nothing to be said against the festivities of Shrove-tide, if they are in no way unbecoming a Christian; then, of course, you need never accuse yourselves of them in confession, even before receiving Holy Communion, nay, not even on your death-bed, when the priest is repeating over you the words, "Depart Christian soul," etc. For a harmless amusement is not

An evident proof that those amusements are unlawful.

<sup>1</sup> Turbastis me, et odiosum fecistis me Chanaanæis, et Pherezæis habitatoribus terræ hujus.—Gen. xxxiv. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Christi bonus odor sumus Deo.—II. Cor. ii. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Videat Dominus et judicet, quoniam foetere fecistis odorem nostrum coram Pharaone et servis ejus.—Exod. v. 21.

matter for confession and absolution. Will you all be satisfied to leave it at that? Still more; every good work of a just man, that is performed with a good intention, is a meritorious and holy work, which deserves Heaven as its reward, as I have often told you before; and therefore the Apostle warns us: "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do; do all to the glory of God."<sup>1</sup> If then these amusements are lawful, you can enjoy them in the Lord, and thank Him for allowing you to do so. And you, O holy angels, write them down in the book of merits and good works! Write down all the movements of hands and feet that are made in dancing-houses, all the gestures and glances of the eye that are made in mixed companies, all the thoughts and desires of the heart that are thereby aroused! Write down all the improper language that is heard in the drinking-houses, all the drunkenness that is indulged in! Write down all the impure touches and other misdeeds that are committed; unite them with the prayers and merits of the saints, and offer them to God as a sweet-smelling incense! They are all good works, and of course it will be a great consolation to you to remember them on your death-bed! What do you think would become of you, if you were to die, while actually indulging in such amusements? You certainly would not be the first who died suddenly during a Shrove-tide masquerade. There are cases on record of people dying a sudden death on Ash Wednesday, after having spent the whole of the preceding night in dancing; so that they were hurried from the dancing-house into their coffins, and, if I may thus express myself, had to appear before the judgment-seat of Christ in the garb of a Shrove-tide buffoon. O my God, you say with horror, what a fearful death for a Christian to die! But why? Is it not a beautiful, precious and holy death, to die in the very act of performing a good and meritorious work that one can take with him into eternity? For cannot such a soul say to its Judge: there is the work that I have just been engaged in for your honor and glory; if you ask me what good I have done, I will point to that, and say, I have spent the night dancing, and running about the streets dressed like a fool; I have publicly associated and taken liberties with a person of the opposite sex; I have drunk to excess; in a word, I have kept Shrove-tide in a Christian manner and according to the precepts of the gospel, and the example of

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

your holy and humble life. Give me therefore the eternal reward you have promised me in Heaven. What do you say to that, my dear brethren? Would you venture to speak in that way to your Judge? Do you think you would be likely thus to save yourselves from hell, or to gain a higher place in Heaven? Yet you might easily do so, if your Shrove-tide amusements are really such as become Christians, and you are otherwise free from sin. Ah, my dear brethren, "God is not mocked. For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap."<sup>1</sup> I do not believe that any of you would be so blind as to consider such amusements lawful; and therefore you must acknowledge that you cannot have a good intention when indulging in them, that they are unchristian, and utterly unbecoming you.

Therefore we should be ashamed to do what is indecent and unbecoming. Many a time, when we are urged to keep the commandments of God exactly, to forgive our enemies from our hearts, not to seek revenge for injuries, to return good for evil, and so on, we try to excuse ourselves by saying that our honor will suffer if we do not avenge that insult, etc. Why do we not now show the same determination when there is question of the glory of God and of the dignity and honor of our holy religion? "Let us cast off the works of darkness," as St. Paul exhorts us, "and put on the armor of light. 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."<sup>2</sup> Imitate in your actions and behavior Jesus Christ, who has taught you none of these excesses. Let us enjoy ourselves, but in a manner becoming a child of God, a member, brother, follower, relative and bosom-friend of Christ; and that is what we cannot do by indulging in the pleasures of Shrove-tide. Yet, why do I say pleasures? They are not even deserving of that name; for there is no real enjoyment in them, and therefore we are blind and ignorant when we indulge in such pleasures; as I shall briefly show in the

Therefore we should have nothing to do with them.

### Second Part.

"A tale out of time is like music in mourning,"<sup>3</sup> says the wise Ecclesiasticus. And therefore sorrow during music is a

The pleasures of

<sup>1</sup> Deus non irridetur. Quæ enim seminaverit homo, hæc et metet.—Galat. vi. 7-8.

<sup>2</sup> Abjiciamus opera tenebrarum, et induamur arma lucis. Sicut in die honeste ambulamus, non in comessationibus et ebrietatibus, non in cubilibus et impudicitis; sed induamini Dominum Jesum Christum.—Rom. xiii. 12-14.

<sup>3</sup> Musica in luctu importuna narratio.—Eccles. xxii. 6.

Shrove-tide  
are spoiled  
by the un-  
easiness  
they cause.

spoiled pleasure. No matter how fine the music may be, if a child happens to cry, or a dog to bark, or a single note to sound discordantly, it becomes a torture for delicate ears. Such, O dissipated worldlings, are the pleasures you indulge in during Shrove-tide! They are a music that is spoiled by discordant voices and howling dogs; a pleasure that is so merely in outward appearance, while inwardly it fills the heart with bitterness, and tortures the conscience by the unavoidable stings of remorse, like the howling of a dog. For these pleasures are either actually sinful and displeasing to God, or else they are the occasion, a danger, or a temptation to sin; and in neither case is real enjoyment possible.

On account  
of the dan-  
ger of sin  
which  
troubles the  
conscience.

And as far as dangerous pleasures are concerned, I will explain my meaning by the aid of a simile. What properties are most frequently the occasion of lawsuits, of disturbing peace, and of creating strife? Generally speaking, they are properties that border on each other. For instance, that garden, or field, or vineyard borders on yours; that house is next door to you; there you have a fruitful cause of strife and quarreling. Your neighbor insists on your having your window higher, as you can see everything he does in his house or garden; another complains that your roof throws off all the rain-water that falls on it, into his yard; a third says that your wall shuts him out from the light; your vine, says a fourth, has its roots in my ground, and therefore it belongs to me; you have extended the bounds of your field too far into mine. And so it goes on. The mere fact of two pieces of property touching each other can be a fruitful source of litigation and disputes. It is not at all likely that quarrels should arise between people whose properties are situated at a distance from each other. Now, do you know what I mean by this, my dear brethren? What is it that causes the greatest doubts and difficulties to the soul, and fills it with uneasiness, scruples and anxieties, so that its peace and contentment are interfered with and disturbed? It is the neighborhood, the occasion, the danger of sin.

As all the  
circum-  
stances of  
those a-  
musements  
prove.

For instance, in that company, that Shrove-tide amusement, young people of both sexes take certain liberties with each other; they are on the borders of sin, and either immediately or in a very short time, when the pleasure is past, the strife begins in the uneasy conscience, and it begins to ask, what did I mean by that touch? Was there nothing sinful in it? Perhaps it may have been an occasion of sin to others. The eyes are

allowed to roam at will on persons of the opposite sex; there again is the neighborhood of sin, and the strife of conscience must be the consequence of it. Were those looks, was that pleasure mere idle curiosity, or carnal lust, of which the Gospel says: "Whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart."<sup>1</sup> All kinds of conversation is carried on; the good name of others is not spared, and certain expressions with a double-meaning are used; every one takes part in such conversation, or laughs at it; it is the neighborhood and occasion of sin, and at the same time of great anxiety to the conscience. Have I inflicted a grievous injury on my neighbor's honor? Have I spoken of impure things with secret pleasure and morose delectation? Such are the questions that naturally suggest themselves on such occasions. Friendly looks, expressions and actions are freely indulged in, and all sorts of thoughts and desires occur to the mind; there you have again the border-land of sin, the source of uneasiness to the conscience. How was I disposed when those thoughts occurred to me? Did I dwell on them too long? Did I deliberately entertain that desire? Did I think of it afterwards wilfully? Perhaps the friendliness of my manner was only a means of exciting an unlawful affection in others? Perhaps, and perhaps not! In any case, there is matter enough to keep the conscience on the rack, until the whole thing is explained in confession, and even then one cannot get beyond the *perhaps*. In such a case, a tender conscience is hardly ever satisfied after confession; for it has reason enough to suspect that sin has been committed; since on the one hand the danger of sin that would have been far better avoided, was wilfully incurred; and on the other, God Himself has said, "He that loveth danger shall perish in it;"<sup>2</sup> so that He generally abandons those who are guilty of such rashness, and leaves them without the special help of His grace. See now, what discord there is in the music. What trouble and uneasiness of conscience in, or at all events immediately after, such pleasures. Therefore, if you wish to preserve your peace and contentment, fly the occasions and dangers of sin; if you wish to remain true to God, avoid the border-land of evil. "Give not place to the devil,"<sup>3</sup> if you wish to enjoy real pleasure and to spend a happy Shrove-tide.

<sup>1</sup> Quia omnis, qui viderit mulierem ad concupiscendum eam, jam mœchatus est eam in corde suo.—Matth. v. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Qui amat periculum, in illo peribit.—Eccles. III. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Nolite locum dare diabolo.—Ephes. iv. 27

On account  
of the sins  
committed  
in them,  
they torture  
the con-  
science  
still more.

But if the mere neighborhood and danger of sin can occasion such anxiety and uneasiness to the conscience, what a fearful tempest will be excited therein by sin itself, when one is certain of having committed it, and of having offended God grievously during the dissipations of Shrove-tide; and indeed humanly speaking, one can hardly avoid doing so? Alas, unhappy mortal that you are! Not all the pleasures and delights on earth could induce me to share in the wretchedness that Shrove-tide will cause you! “Do thou also bear thy confusion;”<sup>1</sup> the Lord says to you by the Prophet Ezechiel; or as the Septuagint has it, “Do thou also bear thy torment;” you have managed matters so well that you must now bear the shame and the torment that you have brought on yourself, as a just punishment for the sin you have so wantonly committed. This sin, unless you are quite callous, will torment you day and night like a fury, and will make you pay dearly for the short and miserable pleasure you enjoyed. Go and bear the torment you have brought on yourself; take it with you to the dancing-house, the ale-house, the nightly-meeting; it will accompany you as you walk about the streets; you will take it to bed with you; it will be the first thing that occurs to you in the morning, nor will you be freed from it until you have got rid of the guilt of your sin. Even in the midst of your pleasures it will poison them for you, because your conscience will keep on crying out to you: Unhappy wretch, what are you doing here? You are offending God, selling your soul, and forfeiting the eternal joys of Heaven! The night after it will commence again: Unfortunate man, the pleasure is at an end, and what has it left you? You are a slave of the devil, a child of eternal death! If you were to die now, what would become of you? You would be amongst the demons in hell! And when Shrove-tide is over the torment will be just as bad; what have I gained, you will think; I must go to confession now, and make known my shame; I must detest and abhor from my heart what I have done, and do penance for it; otherwise I am lost forever. Can that be called a pleasure, which fills the heart with bitterness in the very moment of enjoyment?

Conclusion  
and reso-  
lution to  
rejoice in  
the Lord  
with the  
just.

No; away with those Shrove-tide amusements! I am not so foolish as to pay so dearly for a momentary enjoyment. I will keep Shrove-tide, and enjoy myself, but in the Lord; I will make merry, but in a manner becoming a Christian, a child of

<sup>1</sup> Et tu porta confusionem tuam.—Ezech. xvi. 52.

God, a brother of Jesus Christ; my amusements shall be to the honor of God, and such as can give me real joy without making my conscience uneasy, so that hereafter I shall be able to present them to my Judge without hesitation, and demand a reward for them. Make that resolution now with me, pious Christians; think and say with the Prophet David: "But it is good for me to stick close to my God,"<sup>1</sup> even during Shrove-tide; far better are the joys that come from God and from a pure conscience, than all the pleasures that the foolish world can give. "Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice ye just, and glory all ye right of heart."<sup>2</sup> Let the worldly-minded run after their deeds of darkness; as for us, we shall walk, "as children of the light"<sup>3</sup> who have nothing to do with the darkness of heathenism. Let them make of the present time a time of wickedness and vanity; we will make of it, as we ought, a time of modesty and devotion, during which we will visit our God more frequently than usual, praise Him better, and love Him more heartily. And thus we shall have real pleasure during Shrove-tide, while the others will have only a false and deceitful one; and during Lent, while they are full of the bitterness of sorrow and have to do penance for their misdeeds, we shall be able to rejoice in the Lord. Such is our resolution. Amen.

*For another sermon, on the same subject, see the foregoing First Part.*

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**FIFTY-FOURTH SERMON.**

**ON NIGHTLY PROMISCUOUS GATHERINGS OF YOUNG PEOPLE.**

**Subject.**

Nightly promiscuous gatherings are very dangerous occasions of sin; therefore all who wish to save their souls must avoid them.—*Preached on the first Sunday after Easter.*

**Text.**

*Venit Jesus et stetit in medio.*—John xx. 19.

"Jesus came and stood in the midst."

<sup>1</sup> *Mihi autem adherere Deo bonum est.*—Ps. lxxii. 28.

<sup>2</sup> *Lætamini in Domino, et exultate justi, et gloriamini omnes recti corde.*—Ps. xxxi. 11.

<sup>3</sup> *Ut illi lucis ambulate.*—Ephes. v. 8.

**Introduction.**

When and where did Jesus stand in the midst of His Apostles? In Jerusalem, in the room in which they had shut themselves up for fear of the Jews, and in which they were talking of Christ, "Jesus came and stood in the midst." For Jesus is seldom to be found in the company of those who, without fear or shame, place themselves in the danger of sin; because he who without necessity runs into such danger, will not long preserve the grace of God, partly on account of the weakness and frailty of our nature, which are increased on occasions of the kind, and partly on account of the withdrawal of the special help of God, which we deserve as a punishment of our imprudence and presumption. I allude to-day particularly, my dear brethren, to a certain kind of company that seems to many not at all dangerous, although in my opinion it is amongst the most dangerous of all. And what sort of company is that? One in which young people of both sexes meet at night to amuse themselves; call it what you please, ball or party, or anything else; I call it, in plain language, a nightly promiscuous gathering of young people for the purpose of amusement. If what I have to say offends any of you, I hope you will forgive me; the danger that threatens your precious souls, which fills me with anxiety, the fear of drawing down the divine anger, and the duty of my office force me to speak of this matter in order to satisfy my conscience. I mean no harm, nor do I envy or grudge you your enjoyments; but rather wish you from my heart all kinds of joy in abundance, provided there is no danger to your souls. Nor do I now address myself particularly to those who are little concerned about their eternal salvation, and who try to live in all things according to the vain usages of the world; for, instead of doing them any good, I could only expect to embitter them still more. In any case, such people are not in the habit of going to sermons in which their consciences are likely to be touched. I speak to those who mean well towards God, and who wish to be instructed in divine truths; to those who, through innocence and inexperience, allow themselves to be brought into such company, and that, I think, is the case with most; to those who have never yet gone to those gatherings, that they may carefully avoid them; but especially do I speak to pious parents, that, if they are really concerned for their children's salvation and desire to do their duty to them, they may keep

them away from such dangerous occasions. And, to present the matter in as mild a light as possible; I say:

**Plan of Discourse.**

*These nightly gatherings are very dangerous occasions of sin; therefore all who wish to save their souls must avoid them. Such is the whole subject.*

May the good God, through the intercession of Mary and the holy angels, enlighten our understanding, that we may see the danger, and avoid it with all possible care! Those of you who are not included in any of the classes of persons to whom this sermon is specially addressed, may apply what you will hear to every occasion which experience has taught you to be likely to lead you into sin.

“To present the matter in as mild a light as possible,” I said in the Introduction; for there are many who would accuse me of dealing far too roughly with consciences, if I were to quote the opinions of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church about these nightly gatherings. Tertullian and St. Cyprian, who lived near the time of the Apostles, have written whole books on the subject, in which they condemn these gatherings as unchristian and heathenish. St. John Chrysostom, having once heard that some of his hearers frequented them, began his sermon by declaring that if he knew who they were, he would turn them out of the Church, and would not allow them to assist at the holy sacrifice of the Mass. St. Augustine’s language is quite as vehement; he says that it is a far less grievous sin to work on a Sunday or holy day until one is tired than to be present at a dance. I dare not quote what St. Ambrose, writing of the death of St. John the Baptist, calls the young woman who goes to a dance. St. Charles Borromeo shows clearly how such gatherings are condemned as unlawful by the Holy Scripture, the Councils of the Church, and the teaching of the holy Fathers, and that many things which take place therein are mortal sins. Gerson says that “all sins and vices are to be found in dancing.”<sup>1</sup> I venerate most humbly the opinions of those great and holy men, who received special lights from God, and therefore knew better than others what was lawful for a Christian or not; for they were appointed by God Himself to interpret and explain His law, and to teach Christian morality.

The holy Fathers condemn those parties as sinful abuses.

<sup>1</sup> Omnia peccata chorizant in chorea.

All the circumstances of them show that they are very dangerous.

Still for the present I adhere to what I said in the beginning, and I maintain that such gatherings are at least very dangerous and should be most carefully avoided; nor can any one dispute this proposition with me; for, if I wished to refer to the authority of the Fathers, I could use far stronger language, that no one could reasonably find fault with. But in what does the danger to souls consist? There is nothing sinful done in those gatherings, and only respectable people are admitted to them, so that the strictest decorum has to be observed. Such is the general excuse brought forward. How? Nothing sinful in them? If there was nothing else but the wasting of the precious time that God has given us to save our souls; nothing else but the profanation of Sundays and holy days; nothing else but the useless expenditure thereby entailed, of which the tenth or twentieth part could relieve many a poor man, who, with his starving children, cries out with the Prodigal Son: "I here perish with hunger," while there they are enjoying themselves, and spending hundreds on a single night's amusement; if there was nothing else in them but the scandal they give to the weak and the little ones, would not that be evil enough?

Their apparent respectability is very dangerous.

You say there are none but respectable people admitted, and that decorum is strictly observed. I quite believe it; nor do I imagine for a moment that those gatherings are composed simply of vulgar boors, who meet together to carouse and indulge in all sorts of improper conduct. So far then, you are right; but I am not quite certain that your parties are not all the more dangerous, precisely because they have an external air of propriety; and that they do not do even more harm than a mere vulgar carouse. Why so? Because if there was a manifest breach of the laws of decorum committed, all good, conscientious, and sensible people would have nothing to do with such parties; ecclesiastical and civil authority would have to condemn them as scandalous, and prohibit them altogether; and so there would soon be an end of the evil. But since no evil can be proved where there is the outward appearance of decency and decorum, these parties are tolerated, approved, and frequented by numbers of people without the least scruple; and meanwhile, as Tertullian says, the poison thus concealed as it were in a sweet wine, is taken unawares into the soul.

Because it enables the devil to deceive souls.

And this is the snare that the evil spirit makes use of to deceive souls, and lead them astray. He acts like the Roman General Pompey, who once came with his army before the walls of a

town that he was desirous to take with as little expense as possible; to this end he asked the commandant to allow him to march through the town with his troops, pretending that he wished to go elsewhere; and when this request was refused, he begged that at least some sick soldiers, from whom there was nothing to fear, might be allowed to take up their quarters in the town, until their recovery. This latter request was granted; but as no one paid any attention to the sick soldiers, they were enabled to overpower the guard, and to open the gates to Pompey, who at once entered with his army and took possession of the town. That is the way in which the devil acts; he comes openly with his temptations, as with an army, before the gates of the soul; but if the latter resists him, and is firmly resolved never, on any account, to offend God by mortal sin, he is satisfied then if only a little dangerous pleasure is admitted. It is not a sin, he suggests, to go here or there. What harm is there in going to that party? There is nothing to fear; there are none but respectable people there, and there is no danger of any impropriety being committed. But trust him not, Christian soul; these parties are like the sick soldiers of Pompey; fear them; for there is no enemy, no matter how harmless he seems, whom you can afford to despise in the warfare of virtue. If you are careless of those sick soldiers, they will soon get strong through enjoyment, and their strength will increase by evil desires, until at last they will overpower you by making you consent to sin.

You say there is no harm in those parties. But what do you mean by that? Do you think there is no harm done, unless some sinful act or dissipation is outwardly indulged in? You are right in saying that nothing of the kind occurs during those parties; but what are we to think of what occurs after them? However, I will not speak of that now. In any case, you cannot say there is no harm in dangerous imaginations, thoughts, desires and pleasures. Does not Our Lord Himself expressly tell us: "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."<sup>1</sup> Now, is it possible, humanly speaking, for every one who frequents such gatherings, to avoid all sinful thoughts and desires? The Holy Scripture, whose words we dare not doubt, for they are the words of God Himself, admonishes us over and

And at least  
excites bad  
thoughts  
and desires.

<sup>1</sup> Ego autem dico vobis: Quia omnis, qui viderit mulierem ad concupiscendum eam, jam mœchatus est eam in corde suo.—Matth. v. 28.

over again to turn away our eyes from persons of the opposite sex, that we may not sully our minds. "Gaze not upon a maiden," says the wise Ecclesiasticus, "lest her beauty be a stumbling block to Thee."<sup>1</sup> "Turn away thy face from a woman dressed up, and gaze not about upon another's beauty; for hereby lust is enkindled as a fire."<sup>2</sup> Job teaches us the same by his example: "I made a covenant with my eyes, that I would not so much as think upon a virgin."<sup>3</sup> David prays to God: "Turn away my eyes that they may not behold vanity."<sup>4</sup> The Prophet Jeremias complains bitterly: "My eye hath wasted my soul because of all the daughters of my city."<sup>5</sup> All the holy Fathers say that the best and most necessary means of preserving purity of heart, is to turn away the eyes from dangerous objects. Many have experienced in the past, and many experience nowadays, that their eyes are the windows by which death enters into their souls, as Jeremias says: "Death is come up through our windows."<sup>6</sup> How then can you possibly keep your hearts and minds pure and your thoughts unsullied in the midst of the most dangerous familiarities, where young people see each other not merely by chance and for a moment, but, since it is not expected that they should keep their eyes closed all the time, for six, seven, or eight hours at a time, which they spend in talking, laughing, dancing, and amusing themselves? Where not only the eyes, but all the senses find something to delight and captivate them, and where all the surroundings are such as to foster sensual thoughts and desires?

The circumstances of time and persons help to this.

Let us consider those surroundings. The time chosen is the night, when the artificial light cast on surrounding objects makes them appear more beautiful than they really are, and thus excites the imagination. Those who are invited are people who by their amiable manners can contribute to the general amusement; for individuals of a melancholy temperament are not welcome guests on such occasions. Those who come to such gatherings do all they can to appear beautiful in the eyes of others; half the day is spent in dressing and adorning themselves, as if they were preparing to take a part in a theatrical

<sup>1</sup> *Virginem ne conspicias, ne forte scandalizeris in decore illius.*—Eccles. ix. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Averte faciem tuam a muliere compta, et ne circumspicias speciem alienam; ex hoc concupiscentia quasi ignis exardescit.*—*Ibid.* 8-9.

<sup>3</sup> *Pepergi fœdus cum oculis meis, ut ne cogitarem quidem de virgine.*—Job. xxxi. 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Averte oculos meos, ne videant vanitatem.*—Ps. cxviii. 37.

<sup>5</sup> *Oculus meus depredatus est animam meam in cunctis filiabus urbis mee.*—Lament. iii. 51.

<sup>6</sup> *Ascendit mors per fenestras nostras.*—Jer. ix. 21.

representation. Their talk and conversation are full of honied words and winning flatteries; they assume a gay and cheerful expression of countenance; their very gestures and the postures they take express their willingness to be of service to one another. And the reason of all this is that they are bent on amusement. But if, according to the word of God, even a single look is dangerous, how can it be reasonably supposed that the devil does not make use of such occasions to lay many a snare? If the passions of young people are so easily excited, what can be expected when there are so many things tending to flatter the passions? What vain complacency in their own appearance and in that of others those young hearts must feel! What dangerous joy, hope, desire, and pride must be awakened in those who find that they are most admired and praised. What envy, fear and suspicion in those who think they are neglected or slighted! What thoughts and imaginations that remain even till the following day! What wishes and longings to see the person whom one is especially anxious to please! These and similar things, which it does not become me to mention here, are the evils that those gatherings give rise to, almost as a matter of necessity. If there is only one soul which has consented to an unlawful thought or desire (and such consent can hardly be wanting, on account of the presumption of which one is guilty in thus going into the occasion of sin, and forfeiting all right to the special help of God's grace,) that sin has been occasioned by those who have given the party, by parents who send their children to it, and by all who are present at it. "O my God," cries out St. Ambrose, "see how many are thus made partakers in the guilt of a single sin!"

But, some will say, you are talking to us now of things we never heard of before. We never experienced any of those effects you speak of; we amuse and divert ourselves at those gatherings with the greatest peace of soul and conscience; nor are we troubled by the least bad thought. Is that really the case? Then God be praised and thanked, that in one part of the world at all events, there are souls of a hitherto unexampled holiness and perfection! We must treat you then, not as mortals imprisoned in a corruptible body, but as pure angels who are above all the attacks of sensuality. Hear this, O holy St. Simeon, who here in Treves caused yourself to be walled in, so that you might be cut off from all communication with others, and thus avoid the danger of being led into sin by them! Hear it, O holy hermits,

The caution and fear of the saints in this respect, show us the danger of those gatherings.

who through the same fear fled into the desert, and hid yourselves in caverns and holes in the rocks; and in spite of all your fasting, watching and praying, complained that you could not save yourselves from the temptations and suggestions of the flesh! Ah! ye poor mortals, you have plagued yourselves to no purpose, or you have not known what you were about, or else you must have had a very perverse nature! In our days people are far better; they can allow their senses all kinds of liberty, and spend whole nights together dancing, laughing and amusing themselves, without being troubled even with a bad thought! If you had been as wise as they, might you not have had an easier time of it? Hear this too, you religious, who bury yourselves in convents, and lead such austere lives, that you become your own most cruel torturers, in your efforts to resist the temptations and desires of the flesh! What is the good of all your austerities? Leave off treating your bodies so harshly; go back from your lonesome cells into the world; frequent the society of men; go to dances and nightly gatherings, for that is the best way to keep yourselves free from all temptations to impurity; thus you will best preserve your innocence and virtue and your fear of the Lord, and will be most secure from the danger of consenting to an evil thought. Is it not the greatest folly to seek with so much trouble, what one can find so easily? Come on then boldly and join in those parties, and you will preserve far better than in your solitudes that purity which is so violently assailed in the midst of your austerities. But these servants of God only laugh at this fancied security, and at the same time they deplore the blindness and presumption of the children of the world, who expose their purity and their eternal salvation to the worst of dangers.

Especially  
St. August-  
tine and St.  
Jerome.

I am terrified when I read that the great St. Augustine, after his conversion, was so careful in this respect, that he was afraid even when speaking to his own sister, and never did speak to her alone and without witnesses. I tremble, and have a sincere compassion for St. Jerome, a man of such great learning, who spent a great part of his life among wild beasts and used to beat his breast with a stone; who had reduced himself to mere skin and bone by continual fasting, so that he almost lost the appearance of a human being, and who yet complains bitterly of all he had to suffer from impure temptations in spite of his austere life, so that in one ear he heard the angel's trumpet sounding for judgment, and in the other the sound of music and dancing,

which he had seen during his youth in Rome, and which came before his imagination in such lively forms that he felt impure desires arising in his mind. When Vigilantius asked him why he did not live amongst men like a human being, and why he spent his life in the desert; "I am afraid," he said. And what, O great Saint, wert thou afraid of? "I am afraid that my eyes may behold some object that may cause me to lose my soul."<sup>1</sup> But, answered Vigilantius, it is a shame for such a celebrated man as you to be so afraid. "I acknowledge my weakness," answered the Saint, "and my fear of losing the victory."<sup>2</sup>

Vain children of the world, that learned and holy man, St. Jerome, was afraid of losing his soul through an incautious glance at a person of the opposite sex; and you, in the fire of youth and in the midst of attractions and seductions, maintain that you have nothing of the kind to fear, that you are free from all temptations, and that you are not troubled even with an impure thought! Is your nature then different from that of other men? Is your flesh better tamed and brought under subjection by fasting and other penitential works, than that of a St. Jerome, or of so many other holy hermits, who were afraid of dangers that were far less to be dreaded than those you expose yourselves to, without, as you say, being in the least afraid? What are we to think then, of you, O holy Fathers, who decry dances and promiscuous gatherings as dangerous, and condemn them as sinful and scandalous? You must know that there is no longer any danger in them; the times have changed, and human nature with them. The latter is not so weak and frail as it was in your days. If you experienced the assaults of temptation, it must have been on account of your weakness; we are much stronger and better than you were. In vain do you warn us, O holy prophets, apostles and evangelists, to avoid looking wantonly at persons of the opposite sex! Your warning is no longer necessary. It is true that he that loveth the danger shall perish therein; but there is no danger for us! You declare on the authority of God Himself that such gatherings are very dangerous to the soul; but you are mistaken, as far as we are concerned. They may have been dangerous to young people in your time; but they are not so now, for the young people of our time know by experience that such gatherings do not even occasion them a bad thought.

To no purpose do worldlings maintain that they experience no temptations in such gatherings.

<sup>1</sup> *Timeo ne me captat oculus meretricis, etc.*—S. Hieron. l. adversus Vigilant.

<sup>2</sup> *Fator imbecillitatem, ne perdam aliquando victoriam.*—Ibid.

For that  
cannot be  
true.

For my part, I must confess that I do not understand this at all; it is quite beyond me. I am lost in admiration of your angelical purity, and I can only wish that I were half as perfect as you are. Still, you may say as often as you will, and confirm it with an oath too, that you never experience even a bad thought on those occasions; and if you find any one to believe you, well and good. I am certain you do not believe it yourselves, at least if you wish to judge of the matter according to your own consciences. And even if one or other of you is not aware of any bad thoughts in such gatherings, you have still reason to fear that the dissipation of mind, which distracts your thoughts to all kinds of different objects, and prevents you from keeping the necessary guard over them, or your own self-love, may blind you to the fact that you really have entertained such thoughts, so that you do not confess them afterwards. And granting that there is absolutely no danger for you, can you say as much for others? Can you see their hearts? Can you be sure that they are free from impure temptations, and that they have not consented to them? But is it right for you wilfully to give occasion to, and to participate in the sin of another? Nay, granting that no one experiences the least temptation in those gatherings (what am I saying now? Temptation? In ten or more years' time, when those young people are settled in life, and when they set about examining their consciences in earnest, they will find that there was a good deal more besides temptation!) are they not at least very dangerous? But is it lawful thus to drag temptation on ourselves, as it were by the hair of the head, and deliberately give occasion to it?

Refutation  
of the com-  
mon objec-  
tion: we  
are not  
monks or  
nuns.

But, they object again, we are not monks or nuns, that we should be found fault with for attending such gatherings. We lay people must be allowed a little liberty in this particular; otherwise how are we to amuse ourselves? Quite right; you are not monks or nuns; and if you were it would ill become you to appear at such parties. But do you know what I should conclude from that? In the first place, that you yourselves must look upon those parties, to which you dare not invite the clergy or religious, and at which they could not appear without giving scandal and disgracing themselves in the eyes of all decent people,—that you yourselves must look on such parties as neither edifying, nor Christian, nor holy, since Jesus Christ with His grace cannot be expected to be present thereat.

Therefore  
they must

Again, if you are not monks or nuns, you have all the more

reason to abstain from such gatherings. Nor must you be astonished at this. For, if you were really in the religious state, these parties would not be so dangerous to you. Religious, as you know, are shut up in a convent, and are far more removed from temptations and occasions of sin than if they were in the world; yet they spend their time in prayer, in meditating on the divine mysteries, and in considering the eternal truths, that they may thus better arm themselves against temptation, be more able to guard their senses, more courageous in mortifying the flesh as if it were a disobedient servant, and be constant in the use of other salutary means of avoiding sin. If you, I say, were thus armed for the spiritual combat, I should not be so anxious to keep you away from those gatherings. But religious, in spite of their austere lives and constant union with God, would be afraid to go to such parties, so well are they acquainted with human weakness; and if obedience or charity sometimes requires them to speak with persons of an opposite sex, although they have good reason to be assured of a special help from God in such circumstances, yet they never undertake a duty of that kind unless in presence of witnesses, and they are secretly afraid all the time that they may commit some fault or other. But you who live in the world, in the midst of daily recurring temptations and dangers of all kinds, both at home and abroad, and who moreover are not very careful or diligent in combating them, you have still less reason to thrust yourselves wantonly into such dangers. On the contrary, if you really wish to preserve the grace and friendship of God, you must be exceedingly careful in avoiding every occasion of sin. Every sensible person will acknowledge the truth of this.

all the more carefully avoid such gatherings.

But, you say, we must live according to the general custom of people in the world. If I were always to refuse to go to those parties, what would people think of me? They would look on me as a hypocrite. Eh? What custom are you talking about? You are laboring under a great mistake! There are many large and wealthy cities where such a custom is unknown; and everywhere you will find many people of respectability and common sense, who refuse to have anything to do with those parties, and who prevent those under their charge from going to them. Why do you not follow the custom of those people? Why should bad customs have more influence over you, than good ones? If you were invited to go to early morning devotions, to hear the Word of God, or to go to Confession and Communion

We must conform to the general custom.

every week, which are all good and pious Christian customs, O dear me, you would say, I cannot manage it; it is too early; I should not have time to dress, etc. But you can spend whole nights together at those parties dancing and amusing yourselves, without ever complaining that it is too early or too late; and the day before you always manage to find time enough to do your work. This is an evident sign of a vain mind, that is not influenced or directed by the spirit of God.

The custom  
is not good.

It is the custom, you insist. So much the worse! There are many customs in the world, that are not good; and if you wish to go to Heaven, you must not live according to them. Not without reason does Our Lord warn us by His Apostles not to live according to the customs of the world. "Love not the world" says St. John, "nor the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him."<sup>1</sup> "Be not conformed to this world,"<sup>2</sup> says St. Paul. "Know you not," asks St. James, "that the friendship of this world is the enemy of God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of this world, becometh an enemy of God."<sup>3</sup> If then you think that because such parties are in vogue nearly everywhere, you must have your share in them too; why do you not also think that you must go to hell, since it is the fashion in every town in the world for many people to go there? One conclusion is just as good as the other. God tells us that, "We must not be conformed to this world," and you maintain that we must live according to the customs of the world. Who is right? God, or you? You yourselves have renounced the world in Baptism; why should you live according to it now? Who introduced those abuses among Christians? St. Ephraim, speaking of those gatherings, asks us: "Who taught such things to us Christians?" Certainly, no holy man enlightened by the spirit of God; "but the old hellish serpent taught us them out of his books."<sup>4</sup> Oh, holy city of Treves, as we read in golden letters on thy gate; "Sancta Trevis;" and holy thou art in truth! If thou too must participate in those abuses, dost thou think thou canst long preserve thy holy name and thy purity of morals? Dost thou look on such abuses as be-

<sup>1</sup> Nolite diligere mundum, neque ea, quæ in mundo sunt. Si quis diligit mundum, non est caritas Patris in eo.—1. John ii. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Nolite confirmari huic sæculo.—Rom. xii. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Nescitis, quia amicitia hujus mundi inimica est Dei? Quicumque ergo voluerit amicus esse sæculi hujus, inimicus Dei constituitur.—James iv. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Quis talia nos Christianos docuit? Verum ille draco antiquus suis voluminibus edocuit.

fitting the descendants of the holy martyrs who shed their blood on this very ground in testimony to their faith and religion? What would the bones of those champions of the faith say, if they could come out of their graves and speak? Is that the way, they would ask, to secure thy prosperity after the troublous times thou hast passed through? Art thou not rather placing the rod in the hands of the Almighty, and compelling Him to punish thee and the whole land still more severely? If you do not believe me, my dear brethren, go and ask any experienced and prudent confessor, whether, if you were suddenly called out of the world while assisting at one of those parties, he would wish to be your companion during eternity. Ask theologians, who have to study cases of conscience, what they think of those gatherings. Many would condemn them as mortally sinful, on account of their evident danger; most of them would maintain that they are not to be tolerated, because at all events they are frequently the cause of sin; and all without exception, if they wished to give an impartial opinion of the matter, would say that those parties are exceedingly dangerous, and therefore that one can hardly be present at them without sin. And if that is not the case, then the Fathers and Doctors of the Church were mistaken, and they have misled us too by the books and treatises they wrote against such gatherings; and in fact if it is not the case, we cannot any longer believe even the words of Holy Scripture, which warns us against far lesser dangers. Now, what do you think, my dear brethren, will be the result of all that I have said? No doubt this, that many will go to balls and parties precisely because a sermon has been preached against them. I am sorry for that, and it is not at all what I intend; but what can I do to prevent it? I would only ask those people to consider that what they do amounts to this in reality, they go to balls and parties precisely because God exhorts and warns them not to go. Let them disprove that if they can.

I turn now to you, Christian parents, whose duty it is to look after your children, especially in what concerns their souls. Consider, I beg of you for God's sake, the great and important obligation that binds you to bring them up for Heaven, and not for vanity. Consider what it is for an immortal soul, and that too, the soul of your dear child, which must be either in Heaven or hell forever, consider what it is for that soul to be robbed of Heaven, and to be condemned to hell. Consider what even one sin is, if committed only in thought, and if you have to share

**C. Nelson**  
and exhortation to  
parents.

in the guilt of it. Therefore do all you can to keep your children out of dangerous company. They may complain that you are too strict with them; but that is nothing; one day they will be grateful to you for that strictness. If they beg and entreat you to allow them to go to those parties, tell them that God has given you charge of their souls, which are far more precious than their bodies, that you will one day have to give a strict account of how you have fulfilled this charge, and that if you allow them to go into the danger of sin, the guilt of that sin will be attributed to you more than to any one else. At least, as St. John Chrysostom says, be as careful of the souls of your children, as you are of your houses and properties; if you see a servant-maid going about at night with a lighted candle, how often and how impressively do you not warn her to be careful with it, and not to go into any place where there is straw, lest the least spark should set fire to the house. The same, nay, much greater care you are bound to take of the precious souls of your children, so that you must keep them away from all places, companies and occasions, in which the least spark, the slightest glance might be the cause of a great fire, and of irreparable injury to their still tender minds.

To children. Finally, I beg of you, Christian children, and all others here present, to fly the occasion of sin. You have but one soul, and if you lose that, it will not hurt nor benefit me. You have but one soul, and if you lose it, you have lost everything for all eternity. What good will the pleasure of half a day, or a night be to you, nay, what good would the whole world be to you with all its pleasures, if your soul suffers the least harm? If you wish to enjoy yourselves, do so in God's name; but do not risk your soul for the sake of enjoyment. Parents, assemble your children and friends during the day time, and make merry in a manner becoming pious Christians. Do not follow the teachings of the perverse world; but strive to imitate the example that Jesus Christ our dear Saviour, gives you in the parable of the good shepherd seeking his lost sheep, and in that of the woman who lost the groat and having found it, called together her friends and neighbors to rejoice with her. Mark the words of Our Lord, my dear brethren. He says of the shepherd: "He calls together his friends and neighbors;"<sup>1</sup> and of the woman: "She calls together her friends and neighbors."<sup>2</sup> In neither case, according

<sup>1</sup> Convocat amicos et vicinos.—Luke xv. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Convocat amicos et vicinos.—Ibid. 9.

to the meaning of the original text, are persons of the opposite sex invited. That is the example you ought to follow, unless courtesy or necessity compel you sometimes to do the contrary. And if the pleasure or enjoyment is not so great, then remember that we are here in a vale of tears, in a place where we have to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. "Blessed are they that mourn," says Our Lord, "for they shall be comforted;"<sup>1</sup> "Woe to you that now laugh; for you shall mourn;"<sup>2</sup> "The kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence."<sup>3</sup> "Strive to enter by the narrow gate;"<sup>4</sup> "For many are called but few chosen."<sup>5</sup> Heaven is the place for enjoyment; there the Lord invites you to a feast which will last forever amid unspeakable joys, which you will share with the holy angels. Ah, do not act so as to be excluded from that gathering, or so that you will go unprepared into eternity, that you may not meet with the fate of the foolish virgins, to whom the Bridegroom said, "I know you not."<sup>6</sup> Prepare your souls now for this heavenly Bridegroom, and endeavor to please Him alone, so that you may merit to be invited to the nuptials of the spotless Lamb. That joy I wish to you, and to myself with all my heart. Amen.

*Another Introduction to the same sermon for 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."

Marriage-feasts, parties and festivities of modern times, are you always such that Jesus, His Mother, His Apostles and disciples need not hesitate to take part? Ah, I am afraid not! How many festivities there are at certain seasons, such as those which after the manner of the blind heathens, disgrace the season of Shrove-tide, in which God and His grace are driven out of the conscience! But why do I speak of these things now? It is not yet Shrove-tide, and there is no talk yet of Shrove-tide amusements. In this respect, my dear brethren, I am like careful parents who are troubled and alarmed, not only when their children

<sup>1</sup> Beati, qui lugent, quoniam ipsi consolabuntur.—Matth. v. 5-

<sup>2</sup> Væ qui ridetis nunc, quia lugebitis.—Luke vi. 25.

<sup>3</sup> Regnum cœlorum vim patitur.—Matth. xi. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Contendite intrare per angustam portam.—Luke xlii. 24.

<sup>5</sup> Multi enim sunt vocati, pauci vero electi. Matth. xx. 16.

<sup>6</sup> Nescio vos.—Ibid. xxv. 12.

are actually in danger, but when they foresee that some danger is likely to befall them. As the saying goes, it is too late to shut the stable door, when the steed is stolen. It is too late to warn souls of their danger during the days of Shrove-tide, when they are actually in the midst of it and have probably committed sin already. Therefore I wish to anticipate the dangerous time, in the hope that I may thus, by God's help, be the means of saving even one soul from harm. What do I mean then by parties and festivities? Those gatherings in which young persons of both sexes, etc.—*continues as before.*

*On avoiding the proximate and dangerous occasion of sin, as well as dangerous company, see different sermons in the following Third Part.*

# ON HUMAN RESPECT.

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## FIFTY-FIFTH SERMON.

### ON THE DEFORMITY OF HUMAN RESPECT.

#### Subject.

To do evil, or to refrain from doing good through human respect, is an exceedingly shameful and disgraceful thing; therefore he who wishes to act honorably must steadfastly contemn human respect.—*Preached on the twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost.*

#### Text.

*Non enim respicis personam hominum.*—Matth. xxii. 16.  
“For thou dost not regard the person of men.”

#### Introduction.

Certainly that was a beautiful encomium that the Scribes and Pharisees passed on Our Lord, although their motive in doing so was a crafty and treacherous one; for, as St. John Chrysostom remarks, speaking of to-day's Gospel, they thought they would be able to lead Our Lord astray, so that to please them He would say that taxes should not be paid to the emperor, and then they could have cried Him down as a disturber of the people and a rebel. That was their object in flattering Him; “Master,” they said, “we know that Thou art a true speaker, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest Thou for any man;” Thou fearest neither the enmity of Herod, nor the power of the emperor; “for Thou dost not regard the person of men.” The poor man in Thy eyes is as good as the rich man; the peasant as good as the king. Respect for persons will never prevent Thee from speaking and acting according to truth and justice. Therefore we are certain that fear of the emperor's authority will not pre-

vent Thee from deciding in favor of the Jews, God's favored people, and absolving them from the obligation of paying taxes to Cæsar. But with all their cunning they did not succeed, and they had to retire in confusion. Would to God, my dear brethren, that this praise, which undeniably belongs to our divine Lord, could be given with truth to all men nowadays; so that we could say of every one, "thou dost not regard the person of men!" How many sins that are now committed would then be banished from the world! How much good would be done, that is now omitted! What great evils arise merely from the fact that too much regard is had for the person of men! How often is not God neglected for the purpose of pleasing men; how often are not virtue and piety laid aside, and the soul and its happiness sacrificed through human love, or fear, or respect! In this and the following sermon I mean to attack this human respect, which is so disgraceful in man, so unjust to God, and so injurious to the soul. And to-day I shall take only the first of these heads, and I say:

#### Plan of Discourse.

*To do evil, or to refrain from doing good through human respect is an exceedingly shameful and disgraceful thing; therefore let us act honorably and steadfastly condemn human respect. Such is the whole subject of this discourse.*

O bounteous Saviour, who dost not regard the person of men, but teachest the way to Heaven in truth, we beg of Thee, through the merits of Thy dearest Mother Mary and the intercession of the holy angels guardian, to teach me and all here present this truth, that we may never in future allow any love, fear, or respect of creatures to keep us from serving Thee zealously as we ought.

An honorable man looks on slavery as a disgrace.

What greater affliction and disgrace could there be for a brave and honorable man, than to lose his freedom and be reduced to slavery, so that he can no longer do as he himself wishes, but is bound to obey the behests of another? For freedom is always looked on as the best and most excellent of all the temporal goods we can possess in this life; and even wild beasts will not part with their freedom unless they are compelled to do so. Place the best of food and drink before a caged bird, whistle and chirp to it as coaxingly as you please, but if you open the door only for a moment, it will fly away at once, and regain its liberty even at the expense of suffering hunger and thirst. How many men are

there not nowadays, and they too the bravest and most honorable, who would rather suffer a painful death, than be reduced to slavery? So intolerable is it, I repeat, to an honorable man to have to live and to act according to another's good will and pleasure.

And yet, O freedom, precious as thou art, there are many who forfeit thee most wretchedly! O slavery, how hated thou art, and yet there are many who deliberately seek thee! It is of you I am speaking, vain children of the world, who live according to the fashions, the manners and the usages of the world, and who do evil or omit doing good through human love, or fear, or respect. You, I say, although you could not and should not be compelled thereto by any power on earth, deliberately barter away your most precious freedom, and deliver yourselves up to a shameful slavery; for you reduce yourselves to such a state, that you have to depend on the good will and pleasure of others for the manner in which you have to do your duty to God and to look after the all-important business of the soul. Thus you must interpret the divine commands, not according to right reason, or to conscience, but according to the will of another, and even against your own judgment, while you have to keep those commandments as others keep them, and to transgress as others transgress them, or according to their advice, or command, or example; you have to choose that wrong and circuitous road to eternity which men will point out to you, and to abandon the right road marked out for you by God; you must live a pious or a wicked life, as others prescribe; in a word, you dare not be a Christian, a Catholic, or be looked on as such, unless by permission of others. Is not that making a vile servant and slave of one's self? Is not that deliberately reducing one's self to a bondage which all men must look on as the most pitiful and degrading?

He who does evil or omits to do good through human respect, deliberately makes himself a slave.

There are circumstances, says St. Augustine, in which slavery cannot be avoided; some men become slaves through sheer misfortune, such as is the case with those Christians who are carried off into captivity by the Turks and Saracens, and they who are thus enslaved deserve the greatest pity and commiseration. Many are compelled, through poverty and lowly birth, to wait upon others as domestic servants; a servitude of this kind is reasonable enough, and is not disgraceful in the sight of men; nay it is in accordance with the all-wise arrangement of divine Providence for the common good. Others again are servants of emperors, kings, and princes, a servitude which the world looks on as

And a slave of the most degraded kind.

honorable and glorious. But to make servants and slaves of ourselves to others, and to do their bidding in things in which we most of all require freedom, namely in leading a Christian life, in practising supernatural virtues, in attending to the most necessary business of our souls, and in working for our eternal salvation; to give up our freedom in things of that kind, is an unnecessary and voluntary degradation which does not deserve pity, and can bring nothing but disgrace and execration on us, since it offends God, injures the soul, and is directly opposed to the dictates of conscience, nay to those of right reason. St. Augustine, speaking of the philosophers of old, pities heartily their miserable condition, because, although they knew by the sole light of reason that there could be only one true God, yet they were compelled to conform to the general custom of their time, and adore false gods; "They honored," says the Saint, "what they condemned; they adored what they knew to be false."<sup>1</sup> And this they did because they were afraid of being singular, and of exciting the hatred and displeasure of others; so that, wise and learned as they were, they were only blind and miserable idolaters. Ah, far more deserving of pity are we who, illumined as we are by the unerring light of the true faith, yet, for the sake of pleasing others, often reverence, venerate, and love what our consciences tell us to be unlawful and reprehensible; while we omit and neglect what we know and must acknowledge to be good, praiseworthy, and even obligatory in us; for which perversity we are far more inexcusable than the blind heathens, because they honored their false gods only in outward show, whereas our wickedness is not merely outward, but inward also.

For, endowed as he is with the liberty of the children of God, he subjects himself to some perverse mortal

And who are we, who thus make servants and slaves of ourselves through human respect? We are Christians purchased by the precious blood of the Son of God, who in Baptism are made children of God, brethren of Jesus Christ, temples of the Holy Ghost and heirs of the kingdom of Heaven, who have publicly sworn to devote ourselves to the service of the divine Majesty, and who have thus acquired that freedom of which St. Paul writes to the Romans: "Because the creature also itself shall be delivered from the servitude of corruption, into the liberty of the glory of the children of God."<sup>2</sup> And although God is the Lord of Heaven and earth, and has reserved to Himself the sovereignty

<sup>1</sup> Colabant quod reprehendebant; quod culpabant, adorabant.

<sup>2</sup> Qui et ipsa creatura liberabitur a servitute corruptionis in libertatem gloriæ filiorum Dei.—Rom. viii. 21.

over all things, so that he can dispose of them as He pleases; yet, as far as the freedom of our will is concerned, He does not interfere with it in the least, but even allows us to use it against Himself. We are bound to serve Him; but we are free to do so or not; we can offend Him when and as often as we please; we may gain the eternal joys of Heaven, if we wish; we can condemn ourselves forever to hell, if such is our choice. And this freedom, which God Himself respects, we—shame that I should have to say it!—barter so miserably. And to whom? To some wretched mortal like ourselves; to some one for whom we care little, and for whom we have even a natural dislike; to some one whose advice in other things we would not follow, nor even ask; to some one for whom we would not wish to make the least sacrifice, whose inconstancy and wickedness are well known to us, who looks on good as bad, and bad as good, who follows no rule in his actions but his own inordinate appetites, and whose displeasure would be excited by our efforts to practise virtue, as the Wise Man says: “The wicked loathe them that are in the right way.”<sup>1</sup> Such is the person for whose sake we almost do violence to ourselves, and act against our consciences, and to whose yoke we blindly submit in matters that concern the most important business of our eternal salvation.

And why do we do so? Because we are weak and silly, and afraid of ridicule, and cowardly, so that we often openly confess that we lack courage to do anything to displease another; or else we have a vain fear of giving pain, or a groundless hope of deriving some benefit from the person whom we are unwilling to offend; or otherwise we are influenced by a childish dread of incurring dislike, or by a foolish desire to gain the esteem of others, or to avoid being laughed at, or spoken to in a harsh tone. For some such reason we do what we should not do, and omit what we are in conscience bound to do; we do not serve our sovereign God as we ought; we cease leading a pious and Christian life; we offend God, lose our souls, forfeit Heaven, and incur the eternal pains of hell. Oh what a vain fear! Or rather, what a foolish cowardice!

And that through sheer cowardice.

A mother sends her child on a message; while the child is running down the street, a little dog comes out and barks at it. The child is frightened and runs back home, crying. “What is the matter with you,” asks the mother; “did you go where I sent you?” “Oh no,” answers the child, “I was afraid; there

What a disgrace! Shown by a simile.

<sup>1</sup> Abominantur impii eos, qui in recta sunt via.—Prov. xxix. 27.

was a dog in the street that tried to bite me." Or else, when the child goes on a message, it meets some of its playmates and joins them in a game, forgets all about what it was sent for, and gets beaten when it comes home. "The same foolish fear," says St. Vincent Ferrer, "is shown by many Christians, who otherwise wish to be looked on as brave and valiant, when they allow themselves to be turned aside from the way of salvation by human respect, love or fear." "Our Father Christ," he says, "and our Mother the Church, send us to the city of Paradise;"<sup>1</sup> and behold, a little dog comes out and barks at us, some miserable mortal, who has succeeded in captivating our affection, makes us halt, and turn back, and run on the road to hell! Our heavenly Father sends us to assist at public devotions, and to hear His word in sermons, and we are even willing to go; but the dog barks at us, some one ridicules our piety, we are ashamed, and we remain at home. Our heavenly Father sends us to church to adore the Blessed Sacrament with down-cast eyes, folded hands, and bended knees, and with all modesty and reverence; at morning, noon, and evening, He wishes us to honor Him and His holy Mother by the usual prayer, when the bell gives the signal; when He is carried to the sick, He wishes us to accompany Him; but the dog barks; our companions laugh at and call us hypocrites, and we are afraid, we dare not act differently from other people. Our heavenly Father sends us to ask pardon of our neighbor whom we have offended, or to be reconciled to one with whom we have hitherto lived at enmity; but the dog barks; one thinks we are afraid, another will say that we have no spirit, a third will ask us if we mean to put up with such an insult. Alas, we are frightened and run back like little children; we are in dread of losing the good opinion of men, and so we try to avenge ourselves. Our heavenly Father orders us to change our lives, to avoid that house, that company, that gathering, that occasion; but the dog barks, or a child invites us to play with him; our companions insist on our joining in the usual amusements; their invitations are more pressing than ever; we yield, for we dare not resist them. Our heavenly Father expects us to fulfil exactly the duties of our office or employment, to practice justice, to protect innocence, to punish guilt, to reward merit, to abolish abuses, and to do away with public scandals; but the dog barks; we are afraid of making enemies for ourselves, of giving cause of displeasure to others, of arousing the

<sup>1</sup> Pater noster Christus et mater Ecclesia mittit, ut vadamus ad civitatem Paradisi.

hatred of our opponents, or else we have received a bribe to act unjustly, and we wish to earn it: therefore we make up our minds not to do what is right, to tolerate what should not be tolerated, to approve of what we should condemn, and to remain silent when we should speak the truth boldly. Our heavenly Father bids us observe modesty and humility, according to the Gospel of His poor and humble Son, in our actions, gestures, conversation, dress and outward behaviour; we are ready to do so; but we happen to see other children at play; the law of the world requires us to act otherwise, and we dare not disobey it; we do as we see others doing. Our heavenly Father has sent us into the world to lead chaste and pure lives according to our state; but we cannot always do as he wishes; other children lead us astray; people flatter and tempt us, and we must blindly obey them. In a word, our heavenly Father sends us here that we may follow the path of virtue that leads to Heaven; but a barking dog, a playing child, human respect, the fear or love of a creature makes us leave the path of virtue and enter on the broad road of vice, that leads to eternal ruin. What a disgrace! We are ashamed to be looked on as cowardly; and we forget that a vain fear of displeasing men is the most disgraceful form of cowardice. The same fear makes us ashamed of appearing pious and devout, and we do not see that it is of that very fear we should be most ashamed. In other things we wish to have the name of being brave and courageous, we will not yield a hair's-breadth to any one, we cannot bear the least word of contradiction, nor allow the most trivial insult to go unavenged; but in things that concern God and the services we owe Him we are more timid than a hare, more weak and inconstant than the reed that is shaken by the wind; the least word, a laugh, a sour look, a smile is enough to deprive us of all our strength, to overcome us completely, and to deliver us over to a mere mortal as his most obsequious slave.

And what do we expect to gain by thus selling our freedom so shamefully, and allowing others to keep us from doing good or to lead us into evil? We hope to please men. But we are sure to be disappointed. For, in the first place, all good and pious Christians will lose all respect for one whom they see perjuring himself to God for the sake of a creature; and in the second place, even those for whose sake he does evil, or omits doing good, will despise him; because, if they saw that he was steadfast and constant in obeying the law of God, without fear or

He disgraces himself, even before those whom he expects to please.

shame, they would be compelled at least in their hearts to admire his virtue, and to acknowledge that he is really a good and pious Christian. But since he makes himself like to them, although they outwardly appear to approve his conduct, yet in reality, when they consider the matter calmly, they must perforce look on him as a weak-minded fool, easily led astray, who thinks very little of God or his soul. That is the honor and glory that one gains by forgetting his duty to God and acting against his conscience, in order to please men, or to avoid displeasing them.

Pious men  
act in quite  
the opposite  
way.

Christians, oh if we only had that holy pride, that bravery and courage which the Christian law requires of us, we could always boast in the words of St. Paul to the Romans: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel!"<sup>1</sup> I am not ashamed of virtue, nor of true devotion, nor of justice, nor of God; neither the fear nor the love of any creature can induce me to transgress in the least the duties that the Christian law, my state of life, and my sovereign Lord impose on me. We should imitate the courage of those heroes of old, who looked on it as their greatest honor to live piously in the midst of wicked people; we should be like Tobias, of whom the Scripture records, to his undying praise, that, "When all went to the golden calves, which Jeroboam, King of Israel, had made, he alone fled the company of all, and went to Jerusalem to the Temple of the Lord, and there adored the Lord God of Israel,"<sup>2</sup> without fear, or shame, or paying any attention to what the others were doing. In the same way, even if all those with whom we associate every day were to abandon the service of God, and lead lives of idleness, vanity, sloth, and vindictiveness; if they were to hate and ridicule us as singular, obstinate and self-willed monsters; we should consider it the greatest joy and happiness that true Christianity, that is the exact observance of the commandments of God and of the maxims of the Gospel, is to be found in us alone. Nor should the influence of the greater number of men, nor the caresses and flatteries of our dearest friends, nor any earthly authority, dignity, or power make us depart from this holy obstinacy, or swerve from our steadfast resolution to serve our God and Our Lord, openly, boldly and courageously, as He ought to be served; nor should we ever be brought to bend the knee, in sub-

<sup>1</sup> Non erubescio evangelium.—Rom. i. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Cum irent 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.—Tob. i. 5, 6.

jection to any mortal, against the dictates of conscience. We should imitate the obedience of Abraham, who, according to the divine command, was on the point of sacrificing his beloved and only son Isaac, although he had good reason for believing that, in consequence of this act, he would be looked on as a barbarous murderer of his own child. "He was not afraid," says the learned Zeno, "of being accused of murdering his son; but rather rejoiced at having received this command from God."<sup>1</sup> We should imitate the zeal of Moses, who did not hesitate to reproach the Israelites daily for their want of union, to condemn their vices and to exhort them to serve God zealously, although he thus burthened himself to such an extent, that his father-in-law Jethro looked on him as a fool. "Thou art spent with foolish labor," said Jethro to him, "both thou and this people that is with thee."<sup>2</sup> We should imitate Anna, the mother of Samuel, who poured out her soul in fervent prayer, with sighs and tears before the Lord in the Temple, and was not at all disconcerted when the High Priest Heli, thinking her to be drunk, gave her a sharp reproof. "And he said to her; How long wilt thou be drunk? digest a little the wine of which thou hast taken too much."<sup>3</sup> We should imitate Queen Vasthi, who, through love of modesty and purity, refused to show herself at the banquet of the king her husband, as we read in the first chapter of the Book of Esther; the innocent Joseph, who allowed himself to be cast into prison, rather than obey his wicked mistress and offend God; the holy penitent Magdalen who was not ashamed to intrude uninvited into a public banquet, and to throw herself at the feet of her Lord, in spite of the jeers of the Pharisees.

These and countless other examples, should encourage us, my dear brethren, to despise human respect and the way of the perverse world with a holy fearlessness, and to resolve firmly to bear whatever we may have to suffer from men for the sake of virtue, and to be servants of God, rather than slaves of men. I know well, pious souls, and experience teaches us, that you cannot escape wicked tongues; your just strictness will be looked on as extreme severity; your constancy, as obstinacy; your solitary lives, and your care in avoiding dangerous company, as evidences of ignorance or of a melancholy disposition; your frequent reception of the sacraments, as hypocrisy; your reserve, your temperance, your modesty in dress, as miserly economy; your

All should imitate them, in spite of the opposition of the wicked.

<sup>1</sup> Non timuit ne ei parricidium imputaretur; sed potius lætabatur hoc Deum jussisse.

<sup>2</sup> Stulto labore consumeris et tu, et populus iste qui tecum est.—Exod. xviii. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Dixitque ei: Usquequo ebria eris? digere paulisper vinum, quo mades.—I. Kings i. 14

humility, as fear; your love of peace, as cowardice; your pious holy lives, as a proof of weak-mindedness. You will draw down on yourselves, by your open and honest service of God, the dislike, hatred, and persecution of men; for, according to the words of the Wise Man already quoted, "The wicked loathe them that are in the right way" to Heaven. They are like camels which, when they see clear water, at once commence to stir up the mud with their fore-feet, so as to make it quite dirty; and this they do lest they should see their ugly shape mirrored in the clear water. In the same way the Christian virtues are an abomination in the eyes of the wicked, because they condemn and reprove their sinful and vicious lives. Hence they endeavor by flattery, ridicule, or fault-finding to hinder others from being pious, and to make them like themselves. But, pious Christians, do not let yourselves be disturbed! Let the world talk, laugh, or ridicule as much as it pleases, it cannot and should not deprive you of the liberty of the children of God. Is an artist troubled if his painting is found fault with by an ignorant peasant? Why then should we be disturbed if a foolish and presumptuous mortal condemns our just mode of action? It ought to suffice us to know that good men on earth, who are anxious to save their souls, the angels and elect in Heaven, and God Himself approve of and praise it. "It is a small thing for me," says St. Francis, "to be praised by men, if I am condemned by God; and it is a small thing to be condemned by men, if I am praised by God."<sup>1</sup> "Think what you will of Augustine," so says that Saint, "as long as my conscience does not accuse me before God."<sup>2</sup> "I do not fear the judgments of men, since God will be my judge,"<sup>3</sup> says St. Jerome.

As the holy  
martyrs did.

Look at the numbers of martyrs, amongst whom were our ancestors here in Treves in goodly number. If they had been afraid of men, if a cross look, or a threatening word had made them tremble, if they had allowed themselves to be led astray by gifts or favors, neither this city nor the world would have had so many champions of the faith to venerate. No; of their own accord they appeared before the tyrants, and made open confession of Jesus Christ and His holy Gospel; they willingly sacrificed themselves, and heroically sealed with their blood the law

<sup>1</sup> Parum est laudari ab homine, si a Deo vituperer; parum est vituperari ab homine, si Deus me laudat.

<sup>2</sup> Senti de Augustino quidquid libet, dummodo conscientia mea in oculis Dei me non accuset.—S. Aug. l. unico contra manich. c. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Non timebo iudicium hominum, habiturus Deum iudicem.—S. Hier. ad Julian.

of our faith. Were they perhaps bound by commandments different to those which bind us? Was the God they acknowledged and adored different from our God? Do we nowadays owe less respect and homage to that God than they did? What a shame then it is for us, what an undeniable proof of our pusillanimity and vile cowardice, to allow ourselves to be deterred from the exact observance of the law, the practice of the Christian virtues, and the love we owe to God, by the fear of displeasing others or the hope of pleasing them, although we have not to dread either the wheel or the gallows, or the sword or the spear, or torments or death!

Therefore let us resolve unanimously, my dear brethren, to despise all vain human respect, and to preserve and defend against all opposition that freedom which we received in Baptism as children of God. God is certainly worthy of such a resolution on our part, for His holy will and pleasure must be preferred to all creatures on earth. If we cannot serve Him freely and according to our obligation, if men try to prevent us from doing our duty in this respect, let us heroically cry out, as the Hebrews did to Pharaoh during the Egyptian slavery, "Let us go and sacrifice to our God;"<sup>1</sup> that is, as St. Jerome interprets the passage, let us go and hide ourselves in the desert, because, as long as we are here under thy grievous yoke, we cannot sacrifice to our God properly; in other things we are ready to obey thee; lay still more burdensome tasks upon us, we will perform them; scourge us still more severely than hitherto, we will bear it; but thou must give us perfect freedom in all that concerns the service of God. In the same way every true Christian should think and say: "Let us go and sacrifice to our God," and serve Him as we ought. In other things I will try to conform to the usages of the world as far as may be, and as the laws of God allow; I will follow all the fashions and customs of the place where I live, and will be courteous and helpful to all as far as I can; I will even do violence to myself, if necessary, in order to be friendly to all, and to avoid causing trouble or displeasure, and I will obey my superiors in all things lawful. But when there is question of God's honor, of acting according to or against my conscience, of observing or transgressing the Gospel law, of advancing on the way of salvation or receding from it, and of following the example of my humble Saviour; then no one must interfere with me; no custom, nor

Conclusion  
and resolution  
to despise human  
respect.

<sup>1</sup> Famus, et sacrificemus Deo nostro.—Exod. v. 8.

fashion, nor authority, nor power, nor any love, whether conjugal or fraternal, shall have any influence on me. In all these things I must have perfect freedom, and no one can find fault with me for that. If violence is used to deprive me of this freedom, I will rather, like the Israelites, leave my employment and seek another home, in which I shall be able to attend to the interests of my soul and to serve God without hinderance. Such is my unalterable resolution.

If others wish to go along the broad road that leads to hell, I cannot help them; they are free to do so. But as for me, I am determined to go to Heaven, and therefore to seek out and enter on the narrow way which alone leads thither; and I am free to do that. Let others look after their temporal welfare, and try to gain the favor of men; I will do so too; but my greatest care shall be the welfare of my soul, and to gain the friendship and grace of God. Let others talk, and flatter, and ridicule, and threaten as they will; I will do, and omit, and say whatever my conscience tells me. Let others be servants and slaves of the world and its fashions; I will faithfully serve Him who alone is worthy of my service, namely, my sovereign God. "I will give great thanks to the Lord with my mouth," I will say with David, "and in the midst of many I will praise Him."<sup>1</sup> In thee, O my God, I put my trust; let me not be ashamed."<sup>2</sup> Others may laugh and jeer at me, but I will not heed them. "They will curse, and Thou wilt bless;"<sup>3</sup> my consolation shall be that I have pleased Thee. They will say that I am rude and ignorant, "and Thou wilt bless;" that I am obstinate and ill-mannered, and know not how to behave to people, "and Thou wilt bless." I shall have to bear many a cross and unfriendly look, to hear many a hard word, to endure much ill humor from others; I will lose the affection or favor of that person; but no matter, "Thou wilt bless," and that is enough for me. A time will come when they who now laugh at me for my piety will have to stand in my presence covered with confusion, and to confess publicly that I acted justly and prudently, while they were guilty of the greatest folly; and when that day comes, they will cry out in despair, like those in the Book of Wisdom: "We fools esteemed their life madness, and their end without honor."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Confitebor Domino nimis in ore meo, et in medio multorum laudabo eum.—Ps. cviii. 30.*

<sup>2</sup> *Deus meus, in te confido, non erubescam.—Ibid. xxiv. 2.*

<sup>3</sup> *Maledicent illi, et tu benedices.—Ibid. cviii. 28.*

<sup>4</sup> *Nos insensati vitam illorum æstimabamus insaniam, et finem illorum sine honore.—Wis. v. 4.*

We saw them behaving with such modesty and humility, and, we looked on them as fools; we saw them going frequently to church and behaving in it with reverence, and we looked on them as fools; we noticed that they led temperate, just, and conscientious lives, and we thought they were acting unreasonably. O fools that we are, would that we had imitated them! "Behold how they are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints;"<sup>1</sup> while we are condemned to hell with the reprobate. Then I will laugh and rejoice in the eternal freedom of the children of God. Therefore I renew my resolution to serve Thee, O God, faithfully and constantly; neither love, nor fear, nor respect for persons shall keep me from Thee, or induce me to do anything which Thou, my sovereign Lord, hast forbidden, or to omit anything which Thou hast laid on me as a duty. Give to me and all here present Thy powerful grace, O God, that we may keep this resolution. Amen.

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FIFTY-SIXTH SERMON.

ON THE INJUSTICE OF HUMAN RESPECT.

Subject.

To do evil or to omit doing good through human respect is a great injustice to God; therefore we ought always to condemn human respect.—*Preached on the twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

*Ecce princeps unus accessit, et adorabat eum.*—Matth. ix. 18.  
"Behold a certain ruler came up and adored Him."

Introduction.

And it was right that he should do so. A beggar must speak submissively to his rich benefactor, a servant must honor his master, a vassal must bow down before his lord, a creature must reverence his Creator, man must adore his God. Princes, kings, emperors, and monarchs of earth, those over whom you are placed, humbly bend the knee before you; your subjects owe you great honor, respect, obedience and love; but when you have to

<sup>1</sup> *Ecce, quomodo computati sunt inter filios Dei, et inter sanctos sortis illorum est.*—Wis. v. 15.

do with the great God, you are only poor mortals, weak creatures, subjects and vassals, wretched beggars and servants, and you must bow down in humble reverence and adore Him! That you yourselves acknowledge; that we all, my dear brethren, consider most just. But how unjust it must be to honor a servant more than his master, to respect a beggar more than a king, to love a creature more than the Creator, to adore a man rather than the great and infinite God! And yet that is done by many reasoning beings, who forget God and His law through fear, love, or respect for persons; so that they do what God has forbidden, and neglect what He has commanded. Certainly a disgraceful, shameful thing for a man to do, as I proved in the last sermon. I now say further:

#### Plan of Discourse.

*That it is a great injustice to God. Such is the whole subject of this sermon.*

Therefore, like the ruler in to-day's Gospel, let us put aside all human respect, and adore God alone, and love and honor Him above all things. Give us Thy powerful grace to this end, O God, through the merits of Mary and the holy angels guardian.

It is foolish and unjust to compare reality to nothingness.

It is unjust even to hesitate as to which of the two we ought to honor and respect the more, a mighty prince or a poor peasant. It is folly to hesitate as to which of the two we should more readily believe, an experienced, wise, and learned man, or an ignorant half-witted idiot. It would be a mark of great stupidity indeed for you to hesitate as to whether you should lean against a stone pillar, or a weak straw. It would be gross ingratitude to hesitate as to which you ought to love most, your father to whom, after God, you owe your existence, and who has fed and looked after you so carefully up to the present, or a savage barbarian from whom you have nothing to hope or fear. It would be childish folly to reflect as to which of the two you ought most to fear, a little dog that can bark at, but not bite you, or a fierce lion that can not only growl at, but also tear you to pieces. It is intolerable stupidity to compare truth to vanity, and all to nothing. Reason alone is sufficient to teach us this without further study.

He does this who commits sin out of human respect.

From this alone, you, who, after the manner of the world, do evil or omit good, through human respect, can see how unjust and unbecoming your conduct is. For what things do you weigh in the scales against each other? What things do you

compare with each other? On the one side is the Almighty God, on the other a miserable mortal; here is the all-powerful Creator, there a weak creature; here is the Master of all, there a poor slave. God has given you the command: "The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and Him only shalt thou serve;"<sup>1</sup> men, the world, say that you must live according to their ideas and customs. If you hearken to your God, and, laying aside all human respect, resolve to serve Him faithfully, as you ought, you will lose the favor and friendship of the world, and draw down on you its hatred and ridicule; for, generally speaking, they who please God displease the world. "Because you are not of the world," says Our Lord to His Apostles in the Gospel of St. John, "but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."<sup>2</sup> But if you follow the fashion of the world, and please men, you will make God your enemy; for, generally speaking, they who please men displease God; as St. Paul writes to the Galatians: "If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ."<sup>3</sup> The question for you then to decide is whether you will please God or the world; whether you prefer to have God as your friend, and man as your enemy; or man as your friend, and God as your enemy. But what an unjust thing it is even to hesitate in a matter of this kind! An injustice of which God with reason complains by the Prophet Isaias: "To whom have you likened Me, and made Me equal, and compared Me, and made Me like?"<sup>4</sup> You have weighed Me against a mere mortal. Is that just? "Can man be compared with God?"<sup>5</sup> One of the greatest insults that Pilate offered the Son of God was, doubtless, when he compared Him to Barabbas, and gave the people their choice as to which of the two should be spared. "Whom will you that I release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus?"<sup>6</sup> Consider the full meaning of this my dear brethren. Which of the two shall I release; Barabbas a disturber, or Jesus a benefactor of the people? Barabbas a murderer, or Jesus the Saviour? Barabbas, who took away the lives of others, or Jesus who gives life to all? Barabbas, the robber, or Christ, who went about doing good and healing the sick? Barabbas, a wicked and impious malefactor, or Christ, who is innocence and holiness

<sup>1</sup> Dominum Deum tuum adorabis, et illi soli servies.—Matth. iv. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Quia de mundo non estis, sed ego elegi vos de mundo, propterea odit vos mundus.—John. xv. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Si adhuc hominibus placerem, Christi servus non essem.—Gal. i. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Cui assimilastis me, et adæquastis, et comparastis me, et fecistis similem?—Isa. xlvi. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Numquid Deo potest comparari homo?—Job xxii. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Quem vultis dimittam vobis; Barabbam, aut Jesum.—Matth. xxvii. 17.

itself? "Whom will you that I release to you?" Choose whichever you please. O cruel insult! You execrate it, my dear brethren, even more than you wonder at it.

For he compares the Almighty God.

But if you allow yourselves to be influenced by human respect, you may turn this just anger against yourselves; for you are not a whit better than Pilate, in as much as you propose to your minds the choice between God and man. "Whom will you?" What shall I do? Shall I offend God, or men? Shall I retain the friendship of God, or that of men? Shall I reject God, or men?—There is no end to the greatness of God.<sup>1</sup> If anything in the world is precious, it is so because God has made it; if anything beautiful, it is because God has adorned it; if anything worthy of love, it is because God has loved it. Why is Heaven so full of joys? Because God rules there visibly. Why is the earth so fruitful? Because it is the foot-stool of God. Why is the air so healthy? Because God has given it that virtue. If any one can be called happy in this life, he is so because he loves God. Is any one free and in safety: it is because he trusts in God. Is any one cheerful and joyous: it is because he serves God. Is any one wise and prudent: it is because God has enlightened him. Is any one good: if so, he has received his goodness from God. It is the greatest honor to be the servant of God, the greatest glory to suffer for Him, the highest life to die for Him, and endless joy to behold Him. By a mere act of His will He can do all things; "God, whose wrath no man can resist, and under whom they stoop that bear up the world."<sup>2</sup> Under His feet is everything that is high in Heaven and great on earth; the mightiest sovereigns of earth must bow down and kiss His feet in humble adoration, and all princes, kings, and emperors must honor Him; before Him all that is beautiful among the angels, and terrible among the demons, trembles. Do you not yet know who and what God is? Neither do I. But my faith tells me that He is the incomprehensible, infinite, all-perfect Good, worthy of all love. Bring together all the might, dignity, glory, riches, treasures, joys, beauty, and wisdom of all men that have ever lived on earth, all the choirs of angels who rule with Him in Heaven, all the creatures He has made or can make without end, and what will it all be when compared to God? Let Isaias answer: "All nations are before Him

<sup>1</sup> Magnitudinis ejus non est finis.—Ps. cxliv. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Deus, cujus iræ nemo resistere potest, et sub quo curvantur, qui portant orbem.—Job ix. 13.

as if they had no being at all, and are counted to Him as nothing and vanity. To whom then have you likened God?"<sup>1</sup>

Do you wish to know? This ineffably great God is compared by you to a mortal, that is, to a creature whose origin is nothing as far as his soul is concerned, while his body comes from the slime of the earth. "Remember, I beseech Thee," sighs holy Job, "that Thou hast made me as the clay, and Thou wilt bring me into dust again."<sup>2</sup> A mortal who during life is no better than dust and ashes, than dried straw, than a withered leaf that is blown about by the wind; a mortal who of himself is nothing, has nothing, knows nothing, can do nothing, save and except sin alone which owes its origin to Him; who passes away like a shadow, or like the grass of the field, that is green in the morning and withers away before evening; who after this life will be turned to dust in the earth; whose father after death will be rottenness and corruption, whose mother, brothers and sisters will be worms; "I have said to rottenness: Thou art my father, to worms, you are my mother, and my sister."<sup>3</sup> Such is man, as he is described by Isaias, Job and David. Whom now will you choose? Whom will you retain as your friend? The infinite God, or the miserable mortal? What a grievous injustice, I repeat, even to hesitate between these two, or to place them in the scales against each other!

To a miserable mortal.

But would that the evil went no farther than the mere deliberation! For what choice do we often make? What determination do we come to? Like the wicked Jews, we cry out: "Not this man, but Barabbas."<sup>4</sup> I will not please God, but men; I will not have the friendship of God, but that of men! We are like the Jews when they cried out to Pilate: "If thou release this man, thou art not Caesar's friend."<sup>5</sup> These few words were like a sharp arrow that pierced the heart of Pilate, "thou art not Caesar's friend;" they deprived the judge who, knowing the innocence of Jesus, had hitherto done all he could to save Him, of all courage, filled him with mortal terror, and made him deaf to all the claims of justice. Must I no longer be the friend of Caesar? he thought. If so, then let Christ suffer, so that I may retain Caesar's friendship. Let innocence be crucified, that

And even prefers the latter.

<sup>1</sup> Omnes gentes, quasi non sint, sic sunt coram eo, et quasi nihilum et inane reputatæ sunt ei. Cui ergo similem fecistis Deum?—Isa. xl. 17-18.

<sup>2</sup> Memento, quæso, quod sicut lutum feceris me, et in pulverem reduces me.—Job x. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Putredini dixi: Pater meus es; mater mea, et soror mea, vermibus.—Ibid. xvii. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Non hunc, sed Barabbam.—John xviii. 40.

<sup>5</sup> Si hunc dimittis, non es amicus Cæsaris.—Ibid. xix. 12.

I, although unjustly, may still be in favor with the emperor. Let the Son of God die, that I may please my sovereign. Human respect, what wonderful power thou hast! What the Scribes and Pharisees could not do with their calumnies, nor the high priests with their law, nor the elders of the people with their false testimony, nor the people themselves with all their clamor, that was at last accomplished by the few words, "thou art not Caesar's friend." At once, when he heard them, Pilate, against his own judgment and conscience, pronounced the unjust sentence; "Then therefore he delivered Him to them for to be crucified." 1

And  
through  
fear of men

What happens in the world nowadays, my dear brethren? How many there are who, from childhood, are inclined to virtue and the fear of the Lord! How many who would willingly lead a true Christian, devout, zealous, chaste and just life, because they know that such is the end for which God has created them! How many who would wish to serve God alone, and to love Him above all things, because they know that true happiness on this earth is to be found only in His service and love! How many, whom no other temptations and seductions have been able to lead astray from the path of virtue and innocence, but who, like Pilate, have yielded to the force of those few words, "If thou release this man, thou art not Caesar's friend," and have become so unnerved by them, that they have pronounced a similar unjust sentence! If I do this, I shall forfeit that man's friendship; if I lead a Christian life, and try to please God, what will people say? That I am not a friend of men. If I prefer works of devotion to joining in the parties usual among people of my class, although I know well that I should be right in making a choice of that kind, yet I shall be looked on as one who is "not a friend of men." What would people say of me? They would consider me as a sort of monster. If I prefer to remain at home in modest seclusion when I am invited out to some party that may be an occasion of sin to me, my choice would be prudent, but "I should not act as a friend of men." What would people say of me? They would call me a recluse, and ridicule me. If I allow this insult to go unavenged, meet my opponent with Christian meekness, bear wrongs patiently and return good for evil, I know that I should act according to the express command of Christ, but I would not be a friend of men." What would people say of me? They would laugh at me as a fool and a

1 Tunc ergo tradidit eis illum, ut crucifigeretur.—John xix. 16.

coward. If in company, or during meal-times, when the honor of the absent is attacked, or impure conversation indulged in, or the faults of others discussed, I refrain from laughing or taking part in such sinful talk, and show how displeased I am at it by my downcast eyes and my obstinate silence, as the law of God requires me to do, "I am not a friend of men." And what will people think of me? They will all condemn me, and accuse me of being conceited. If I perform the duties of my office or employment conscientiously, and always do, omit, speak, remain silent, grant, refuse, advise and oppose according to the requirements of justice, then I should act as a good Christian, but "I should not be the friend of men." What would people think of me? I should forfeit the friendship of one, and draw down on myself the enmity of another. If a person boasts to me of his sins, and I, knowing them to be sins, instead of approving of them, were to condemn them, and try to persuade him not to be guilty of them again, I should fulfil the law of fraternal correction, but "I should not be the friend of men." If one to whom I am attached endeavors to persuade me to act against my conscience, and I refuse to do so, and express my determination rather to die than offend God, I should act right indeed, but "I should not be the friend of men," and I should lose that person's esteem and affection. If, as a good father of a family should, I am very attentive to keep away all occasions of sin from those under my care, and to correct their faults, I should only do my bounden duty, but "I should not be the friend of men;" I should be cried down in the place as a cruel master, whom no one could live with. If I were to abandon the dangerous company I have begun to frequent, and to amend my mode of life, an amendment that is only too necessary, what would people think of me? They would be very much astonished indeed, and would not be sparing in unfriendly comments. In a word, if, when others sin, I refuse to sin with them, if I am ashamed, where they are shameless, if I serve God when it is displeasing to them, "I am not their friend." Therefore, away with God, that I may be a friend of men! I renounce the virtues of a Christian life, that I may not displease men! Let then the innocent give way to the guilty, the poor to the rich, justice to injustice, modesty to impudence, chastity to impurity, devotion to impiety, and the service of God to that of men, provided only that I can be the friend of men.

But my uneasy conscience cries out to me, what are you doing?

Gives up  
God alto-  
gether.

of which the  
Almighty  
complains.

You are offending God. No matter, as long as I succeed in pleasing men! You are losing the inestimable friendship of God. No matter, as long as I can retain the favor of men! You are ruining your soul. I care not, as long as I can please men thereby! What will Heaven think of me, and my holy angel guardian, and Mary the Queen of angels, and Jesus Christ my Saviour, and God my heavenly Father, and all the just in Heaven and on earth? Let them think or say what they will; if only men are satisfied with me, if I can only please the common herd, if I can keep the friendship of this or that person, that is all I require. Is not that a far more unjust and wicked sentence\* and resolution than that of Pilate? The Almighty God, to show how bitterly He complains of it, orders His Prophet Jeremias to call all the heavens to witness His astonishment: "Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and ye gates thereof be very desolate. For my people have done two evils. They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living water, and have digged to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water."<sup>1</sup> They have chosen friends whose friendship is founded on sand, and is full of inconstancy, treachery, and falsehood, as they themselves know by daily experience, and My true constant and sincere friendship they have despised; they have selected as friends those who seek nothing but their own advantage, and they have rejected Me, who seek nothing but their temporal and eternal prosperity. "Be astonished, O ye heavens at this." O tyrannical human respect, to what a degree of madness thou violently impellest those, whom thou hast once brought under thy yoke!

How odious  
and unjust  
this to act  
towards  
God, one's  
greatest  
benefactor.

Yes, they say; but that man can do me a great deal of good; I have already received many benefits from him. Who knows whether I may not be in need of his help again? The mountains, as the saying goes, remain always in the same place, but men can meet each other; therefore I must connive now and then at certain things, so as not to make that man an enemy. Is that so? (Hear this, O great God!) Has then your God done less for you than that man? Have you less to expect from God than from him? Do you require his help more than that of your God? Tell me; did that man create you, and call you forth out of nothing? Did he give you your soul and body and everything

<sup>1</sup> *Obstupescite cœli super hoc, et portæ ejus desolamini vehementer. Duo enim mala fecit populus meus: me dereliquerunt fontem aquæ vivæ, et foderunt sibi cisternas, cisternas dissipatas, quæ continere non valent aquas. — Jer. ii. 12-13.*

you have? No; God has done all that for you. When you were condemned to hell, did that man redeem you? No; but God redeemed you, and shed His blood for that purpose. Did that man allow even one of his fingers to be cut off for your sake? The Son of God gave up His whole body to the most cruel tortures for you. His sun gives you light during the day; His moon shines on you during the night. You are warmed by His fire, refreshed by His air, nourished by His bread, and by His help you have been hitherto saved from many dangers, and kept in health and strength. Did that man do anything of the kind for you? Do you hope for anything good? In and through God alone you can find all the good of nature and grace in the present and the future life. He has given you a right to endless joys, if you only serve Him for a short time; can you hope that that man will give you anything of the kind? Nay, can you expect the least thing from him? If he gives you anything, must he not first beg it from God? And after all, what do you imagine he can give you? The outward show of affection, a friendly word that he does not mean in reality, an empty praise which he uses only to conceal the contempt he has for you, for he knows well that it is through cowardice that you fail in doing your duty; or even if his esteem for you is sincere, it is nothing but a mere idea of the mind, a mere fancy of the imagination, and the most you can expect from him on account of it is that he will put in a good word for you here and there, and in so doing, will act probably against justice, through human respect, as you did yourself. This is all you have to hope for from him, and when you get that you must be satisfied. And is it for that, that you pay so dearly? Must you therefore give yourself so much trouble and anxiety, and connive at so many things? Must you therefore refrain from saying what you think, from doing what you would wish to do? Must you therefore so miserably barter the grace and favor of God, and the salvation of your soul? Is it worth while for the sake of that, to come to the terrible resolution of giving up God, so as to retain that man's friendship? O God of infinite liberality, Thy servant David, surprised at the manifold benefits bestowed on him by Thee, cries out: "What shall I render to the Lord, for all the things that He hath rendered to me?"<sup>1</sup> And now a man dares to cry out: What shall I not venture to do against God, what wickedness shall I not attempt, so that I may seek, gain, or at least hope for some slight advantage from men?

<sup>1</sup> *Quid retribuam Domino, pro omnibus, quæ retribuit mihi?*—Ps. cxv. 12.

I would willingly love and serve Thee, O my God, as I ought; but the mortal whom I love must have the preference! If I could love Thee without displeasing him, I should do so; but as it is, I must forfeit Thy friendship! What odious and black ingratitude!

Who alone  
can injure,  
and there-  
fore is alone  
to be feared.

But, you say again, if that man cannot do me any good, he can at least do me harm, unless I make a friend of him. We must, as the proverb says, howl with the wolves, that they may not tear us to pieces; we must even burn a candle in honor of the devil, that he may not injure us; he who does not know how to humor the world will fare but badly nowadays. This objection is that insult, of which Eliphaz, in the person of God, complains in the Book of Job: "Who looked upon the Almighty as if He could do nothing;"<sup>1</sup> and of which David says, bewailing our folly: "They have not called upon the Lord, there have they trembled for fear where there was no fear."<sup>2</sup> We fear one who cannot hurt a hair of our heads unless God permits him, and we do not fear God, whose all-seeing eye and almighty hand no one can escape, who in all places, at all times, has us fully in His power, so that He can annihilate us if He wishes. Where, in God's name, asks St. Bernard, is our Christianity? Nay, where is our reason, since we fear the eyes of men more than the eyes of God? Does not Christ our Saviour say plainly enough in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "Fear ye not them that kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul?"<sup>3</sup> But O Lord, have I not reason to fear and tremble when a cruel tyrant threatens to persecute me, to kill me, to hang me on a gallows, to break me on the wheel, or to burn me alive? "Fear ye not;" not even tyrants should cause you to tremble; for if I allow them to carry out their threats, they can injure only your temporal goods or your mortal body, which in any case must rot away in the earth. "But rather fear Him that can destroy both soul and body into hell."<sup>4</sup> Fear Him from whose mouth proceeds a two-edged sword, who at this moment can make you a poor beggar, and hurl you, body and soul, into eternal flames. Him should you fear, and Him alone. And now we have no sword, no want, nor illness, nor pain, nor death held forth to terrify us; the only thing we have to fear is a cross look, a hard word, a mocking laugh, or a refusal to assist us in some necessity

<sup>1</sup> Quasi nihil posset facere Ommipotens æstimabant eum.—Job xxi. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Dominum non invocaverunt, illie trepidaverunt timore, ubi non erat timor.—Ps. xli. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Nolite timere eos, qui occidunt corpus, animam autem non possunt occidere.—Matth. x.

28.

<sup>4</sup> Sed potius timete eum, qui potest et animam et corpus perdere in gehennam. Ibid.

that has not yet occurred; and through this fear we lay aside the fear of the Almighty God, and, as the saying goes, burn a candle in honor of men, and adore and pray to them as idols, that they may not harm us; while the honor due to the one true God, and the service He has a right to expect from us, are neglected altogether. In a word, God is disregarded and despised for the sake of pleasing men. "Who looked on the Almighty as if He could do nothing."

But wait; He will tell you Himself bye-and-bye, what He can do; He will let you see how He can injure and benefit you! For a time will come when you will be in extreme necessity, abandoned by all creatures, and then you will call in vain on the friends you have chosen. "And He shall come even to the top thereof, and none shall help him."<sup>1</sup> No one can possibly help him unless God alone; and Him you have despised and neglected through human respect. You will call upon Him of course: O my God, help me, take pity on me in my extremity! But He will mock at your sufferings and reject your prayers. "And He shall say: "Where are their gods in whom they trusted? Of whose victims they ate the fat, and drank the wine of their drink-offerings; let them arise and help you, and protect you in your distress."<sup>2</sup> Where are those whom you honored on earth as gods? "Let them arise and help you." Where are those men whom you have so long fawned on, and served most humbly, while I had to stand aside neglected and despised? Let them come and help you. Where are those whose cross looks you so dreaded, whose unfriendly words filled you with fear? Let them arise and help you. Where is the man on whose favor and protection you relied? The person for whose sake you have so often neglected Me? Where are those from whom you thought you had so much good to hope, so much evil to dread? Where are those whom you so much wished to resemble, that you conformed to all their fashions and usages most exactly? Let them now arise and help you. Go to them; let them, if they can, snatch you out of My hands, and save you from My inexorable justice. You have not wished to know Me; go to those whom you labored so hard to please, perhaps they will recognize you. "Let them arise and help you," for I know you not! You were ashamed of My service; go to those whom you considered it an honor to serve;

Such a one will at last be mocked at and abandoned by God.

<sup>1</sup> Veniet ad usque summitatem ejus, et nemo auxiliabitur ei.—Dan. xi. 45.

<sup>2</sup> Et dicet: Ubi sunt dii eorum, in quibus habebant fiduciam, de quorum victimis comedebant adipem, et bibebant vinum libanium? surgant, et opitulentur vobis, et in necessitate vos protegant.—Deut. xxxii. 37-39.

for I am now ashamed of you; away with you into hell fire! Let your friends come and help you when you are lying there in eternal darkness, and save you from it, if they can! When you are suffering among the demons, let them arise and help you, whom you feared more than Me, so that, to secure their friendship, you made Me your enemy many times. Where are they? "See ye that I alone am, and there is no other God besides Me; I will kill, and I will make to live; I will strike, and I will heal, and there is none that can deliver out of My hand."<sup>1</sup> This you have not tried to consider or to understand during your life: you were constantly saying: What will people say? What will they think? But when you are in extreme distress, what will the angels and saints in Heaven say of you? "The just shall see, and shall laugh at him, and say: behold the man that made not God his helper;"<sup>2</sup> who relied on men, and refused to acknowledge that God alone is the Master whom he should try to serve and please. Behold what a foolish man he is!

Therefore  
we must try  
to please  
God alone.

O Christians, God is infinitely greater than man, infinitely wiser, infinitely more powerful, and an infinitely better and more faithful friend than man! It is from God alone, and not from man, that we have all good to hope, every advantage to expect. It is God alone who can do us real harm, in this life, as well as in the next; no man can hurt a hair of our heads without the divine permission. How unjust then, how foolish it is, to abandon God through human respect, through fear or love of a mere mortal, and to transgress His commands, and renounce His service! Let us then serve Him alone, freely and openly, as we ought; for we are in this world for the sole purpose of acknowledging Him as our God, of loving Him with our whole hearts, and of doing His holy will in all things. "Let us therefore displease those to whom Christ is displeasing,"<sup>3</sup> to whom God is displeasing, and who advise, command, or try to persuade us to do the least thing against God.

Sorrow for  
past faults  
in this  
respect.

O great God, worthy of infinite love, would that I had thought of this before, and had made this resolution long ago; I should not then have treated Thee with such shameful injustice! O how much evil I have done, how much good left undone, through human respect! How often have I been ashamed of

<sup>1</sup> Videte, quod ego sim solus, et non sit alius Deus præter me: ego occidam, et ego vivere faciam: percutiam et ego sanabo, et non est qui de manu mea possit eruere.—Deut. xxxiii. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Videbunt iusti, et timebunt, et super eum ridebunt, et dicent: Ecce homo qui non posuit Deum adiutorem suum.—Ps. li. 8-9.

<sup>3</sup> Displacemus ergo his, quibus Christus displicet.

Thy public service, of Christian humility and modesty, on account of some mere mortal! How many shameful things I have done to please men! I have preferred a miserable creature to Thee, the King of Heaven; although Thou hast placed me, a poor worm of the earth, above Thy most excellent creatures. Amongst the blessed spirits there are none greater than the Cherubim and Seraphim; Thou hast preferred me to those when for my sake Thou didst come down from Thy throne in Heaven, and becamest, not an angel, but a man like to me. Amongst men on earth there are many thousand infidels, Turks, Jews, and heretics, and amongst them there are many nobles, princes, and kings; to all these Thou hast preferred me, for Thou hast left them in the darkness of error, but hast called me to the light of the one, true, Catholic faith. Thou hast preferred me and my welfare to Thy own most precious blood; for Thou hast shed the last drop of it for me; to Thy body, for Thou hast allowed it for my sake to be torn to pieces and to die on a Cross; to Thy soul, which Thou hast permitted to sorrow unto death for me. Thus, O God, Thou hast preferred me to Heaven, to earth, to all the angels, to countless numbers of men, and even to Thyself; and I, monster of wickedness that I am, have neglected Thee, my sovereign God, for a miserable mortal, who, like myself, is always in need of Thy protection; I have thought more of that mortal's favor, than of Thy friendship, and feared his anger more than Thy infinite justice! A friendly look, a word of praise or blame, has had more influence with me than Thy endless goodness. I have often turned my back on Thee that I might please a mortal man. I have despised Thee and Thy holy commandments, and renounced Thee forever, that I might not cause displeasure to a mortal man. This I have done, and I cannot deny it. O fool that I was! How far I have allowed myself to be led astray by human respect, by vain fear and love. I am sorry for it, O my God, from the bottom of my heart, and I execrate and detest my wickedness and ingratitude!

Henceforth I will honor Thee better. No man on earth, whatever be his dignity or wealth, or power, however useful or friendly he may be to me, shall ever bring me a hair's breadth away from Thee and Thy service. I will always remain faithful to Thee, let people think what they will, or say of me, or do to me what they will. As long as I have Thy favor and friendship, I have all that I can desire on earth; "They (men) shall perish, but thou remainest; and all of them shall

*Resolution  
to amend.*

grow old like a garment.”<sup>1</sup> I can easily escape the threats, attacks and persecutions of men; but I cannot hide myself from Thy all-seeing eye. The friendship of men is, generally-speaking, disturbed by a thoughtless word, a sour look, a mere suspicion; Thy friendship, O God, no one can take from me but myself. I can be Thy friend when I will, and as long as I will, and I can rely on the word Thou hast said to comfort me and all men; “You are my friends, if you do the things that I command you.”<sup>2</sup> Yes, O my God, I will do them as long as I live; I will no longer try to please men, but please Thee! They may laugh at, and ridicule me, I will do as Thou commandest; they may flatter and fawn on me, I will do as Thou commandest; they may threaten and try to harm me as much as they can, I will say with the Prophet Jonas: “I fear the Lord, the God of Heaven.”<sup>3</sup> What He commands I will always do, and allow neither human respect, nor vain fear, nor love, to prevent me from doing it; so that I may always be Thy friend, O God, here in time and afterwards in eternity. Amen.

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*FIFTY-SEVENTH SERMON.*

**ON UNLAWFUL FASHIONS AND CUSTOMS.**

Subject.

To follow the ordinary fashions and customs in things that are opposed to the law of God, or to the teaching of the Gospel, is, 1. a most grievous insult to God; and 2. a still more grievous wickedness, which embitters the anger of God to the highest extent.—*Preached on the twelfth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

*Vade, et tu fac similiter.*—Luke x. 37.

“Go, and do thou in like manner.”

Introduction.

Oh, that need not be said twice to most people nowadays, “go, and do thou in like manner!” But if one were to propose to them, as Christ did to the Scribes in the Gospel, to follow the example

<sup>1</sup> *Ipsi peribunt, tu autem permanes; et omnes sicut vestimentum veterascent.*—Pa. cl. 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Vos amici mei estis, si feceritis, quæ ego præcipio vobis.*—John xv. 13.

<sup>3</sup> *Dominum Deum cœli ego timeo.*—Jonas i. 9.

of the saints, and were to explain how they loved God with their whole hearts, how charitable they were and how humble, and how self-denying in all things, and then to say: "go, and do thou in like manner;" oh, that would be another matter altogether; few would be found inclined to follow advice of that kind. Otherwise there is nothing more common in the world than for men to imitate each other in their lives and actions. Even children very soon learn the influence of fashion or custom; and it is a common thing to hear people say: oh, I must do so and so, because others like me do it, and I do not wish to be made an exception of, etc. Blind worldlings, who thus sell their freedom, and bind themselves to such a thralldom, that they must imitate others in everything they do! And worst of all, this spirit of imitation is observed in those fashions and customs of the world that are opposed to the law of God and to the teaching of the Gospel; a law and a teaching that are utterly disregarded when there is question of doing as the world does. Thus God is most grievously and wickedly insulted, and His anger is aroused. There you have, my dear brethren, the subject of to-day's sermon, which is directed against all the bad customs and fashions in vogue in the world.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*To follow the ordinary fashions and customs in things that are opposed to the law of God, or to the teaching of the Gospel, is a most grievous insult to God; this I shall prove in the first and longer part. It is a still more grievous wickedness, which embitters the anger of God to the highest extent; this I shall prove in the second part. Act and live according to the fashions and customs which Jesus Christ has prescribed to His saints; such will be the conclusion.*

Do Thou, O God, help us thereto by Thy grace, which we beg of Thee through the merits of Thy Mother Mary and the holy angels guardian.

The chief honor and service which subjects are bound to render their prince or king, is to observe his laws and commands at all times, with all respect and obedience. This is the crown that kings wear, the sceptre they hold; namely, the possession of such irresponsible authority, and such an absolute right to command and forbid what they please, that none of all their subjects dare oppose or transgress their orders. If even one individual were to say, I will not observe that law, in this or that particular my

A conspiracy of subjects against the law of their king is a great act of contempt towards him.

sovereign deserves neither respect nor obedience: that alone would constitute an act of contempt, an insult to the supreme authority, which is punished with death. But if many were to participate in an act of that kind, they would be guilty of conspiracy, revolt, and rebellion against their sovereign, and of trying to deprive him violently of crown and sceptre. If it were ever lawful under any circumstances for subjects to refuse obedience to their legitimate sovereign, and to violate the laws of the land with impunity, then the sovereign would be a mere puppet, set up on a throne as a laughing-stock of the people.

A similar insult is offered to God by those who follow the fashions of the world against the divine law.

Such, my dear brethren, is the terrible insult offered to the great Monarch of Heaven by all those who in any way act against the divine law and the Gospel teaching, in order to follow the customs of the world, and who try to excuse themselves by thinking and saying: "It is the custom, the fashion, to do so." For what do they mean if not this: I know that this thing is forbidden by the commandments of God; but I do not care for that; I will do as others do; it is the fashion now to transgress the law of God in this particular. Jesus Christ our Saviour has taught all men in His holy Gospel, and by His example, how they are to act in this or that particular; but His teaching deserves neither respect nor obedience, for the teaching of the world is quite opposed to His, and I must do as others do; the Gospel law and the will and command of Christ cannot prescribe any rule of conduct to me in this matter; custom goes before law; the example of men has more influence on me than the example and teaching of Christ; the world and its fashions deserve more respect and obedience than the great God and His holy will. That is, says St. Gregory, a conspiracy against God, a rebellion and revolt against the Monarch of Heaven, a public contemning of His absolute authority, an effort to dethrone Him, "to take the crown from His head,"<sup>1</sup> the sceptre out of His hand.

There are many who follow those fashions by neglecting their prayers and not doing good works.

Nevertheless, is it not the case that most men nowadays dare thus grievously to insult God, and to rebel without fear or shame against His sovereign Majesty? And no matter what you say to them about the wickedness of their conduct, they always return to the old excuse: "It is the fashion, the custom; the world will have it so," etc. And this is supposed to make lawful what is forbidden, to justify what is wicked and reprehensible, and on the other hand, to render contemptible what is good and obligatory in the sight of God and His saints. Is not that the case, my

<sup>1</sup> Hoc est Deo præripere coronam.

dear brethren? In many a house, there is little or no sign of Christian piety and the fear of the Lord, there is no morning-prayer, or good intention, or sign of the Cross; the members of the family never think of hearing Mass on the week-mornings, they retire at night without thanking God, or examining their consciences, or repenting of the sins they committed during the day; they never say a litany or the Rosary with the servants, nor do they read a spiritual book on Sundays and holy days; the only prayers they are heard to say consist of cursing, swearing, and profane language. If I were to speak to those people about the divine law and the Gospel teaching, and to say to them in the words of St. Paul: Is that the way to lead a Christian life? "Know you not, that railers shall not possess the kingdom of God?"<sup>1</sup> or in the words of St. James: "Pray for one another that you may be saved; for the continual prayer of a just man availeth much;"<sup>2</sup> pray together that you may go to Heaven together; or in the words of Christ Himself: "Watch ye and pray that ye enter not into temptation."<sup>3</sup> Ah, Father, they would answer, that is not the custom in our house; we have not been brought up to it; it is a common thing for men to curse and swear; in fact they cannot get on without it, etc. And so I should have to be satisfied with this appeal to custom.

I go into another house and I find the expenses much greater than the income; the rooms are beautifully furnished, there are silver tea and coffee services, the members of the family are dressed in the height of fashion, they spend the day in idleness, in paying and receiving visits, in drinking and gambling; but meanwhile they are over head and ears in debt, and there is no prospect of their ever being able to pay; and of course they cannot give alms according to their condition. I remind them of the law of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ: "But yet that which remaineth, give alms."<sup>4</sup> Give to Christ in the person of His poor, and you will purchase for yourselves the kingdom of Heaven; "Render therefore to all men their dues,"<sup>5</sup> as St. Paul warns you; and that you may be able to give alms and to pay your debts, you are bound in conscience under pain of sin to reduce your expenditure and to give up that idle, luxurious life

By living  
expensively  
and not  
paying their  
debts.

<sup>1</sup> Neque maledicti regnum Dei possidebunt.—I. Cor. vi. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Orate pro invicem, ut salvemini; multum enim valet deprecatio justis assidua.—James v. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Vigilate, et orate, ut non intretis in tentationem.—Matt. xxvi. 41

<sup>4</sup> Quod superest, date eleemosynam.—Luke xi. 41.

<sup>5</sup> Reddite ergo omnibus debita.—Rom. xiii. 7.

you are leading; such is the law of God. Oh, there would be little use in my telling them that! They would be ready with their answer at once. Others like us live in that way, they would say, and we must keep up appearances as well as they. And that is all the satisfaction I should get from them.

By injus-  
tice.

I go into a third house, and find the people busied from morning till night in their usual avocations, in buying and selling, or working at their trade, or in studying, giving legal advice, or writing. Their only thought is to make money, and they commit all sorts of injustice without scruple; whether the case they have undertaken to defend is just or not, or the contract they have drawn up is valid or invalid; whether God has forbidden them to take bribes from the opposite party, or not; whether the wares they sell are good or damaged, their weights and measures fair or not; whether it is right or wrong for them to keep the material that remains over after they have finished the work they had to do for others; they never even think of those things, and they look on everything as lawful, as long as it brings them in a profit. I speak to them of the law of God: "Thou shalt not steal;" I explain to them the teaching of theologians on this subject: namely, that every time one steals a little in that way with the intention of continuing such thefts and of becoming richer thereby, he is guilty of a mortal sin. I say to them: "Pay what thou owest;" you are bound under pain of eternal damnation to make restitution for all such acts of injustice, and to give back what you have stolen to the lawful owner, or else to the whole community, according to circumstances. Ah, poor mortals, I say to them, in the words of our Saviour: "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?"<sup>1</sup> Of what use are all the riches and treasures of earth, if the poor soul has to spend eternity with the demons in hell? Ah, I beg you in the words of Our Lord: "Seek ye, therefore, first the kingdom of God, and His justice; and all these things shall be added unto you."<sup>2</sup> Whatever you require for your support will be given you by your heavenly Father in the measure that He knows to be good for you. Such is the law, such are the exhortations, warnings and promises of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. But what do those people care about Christ or His law? They

<sup>1</sup> Quid enim prodest homini si mundum universum lucretur, animæ vero suæ detrimentum patietur? Aut quam dabit homo commutationem pro anima sua?—Matth. xvi. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Querite ergo primum regnum Dei, et justitiam ejus, et hæc omnia adjicientur vobis. -- Matth. vi. 33.

bring forward another law; it is the custom, they say, to act in this way in our employment; most people who are engaged in business do as we do; if we made an exception of ourselves, we should have small profits, and in time should be obliged to give up our business or occupation. In a word, it is the custom. And thus, O divine law, thou art abrogated!

I go on farther, and I find Christians who look on it as an honor to be able to drink more than another, and as a great glory to be able to persuade their guests to get drunk. My God, I say, what sort of a life is that for a Christian to lead? Have you not heard or read that drunkenness is never lawful, that it is a brutal vice, and that, as St. Paul says, they who are addicted to it cannot enter the kingdom of Heaven? "Nor drunkards shall possess the kingdom of God."<sup>1</sup> Have you not heard what St. Peter says: "Be sober and watch," do not deprive yourselves of reason, "because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour?"<sup>2</sup> Yes, they would say, we have heard all that; but that law is not binding any longer; it is abrogated; we have custom on our side; we must do honor to our guests, or else they will be offended, or think that we do not know how to live according to the way of the world.

By intemperance and drunkenness.

I go to another house, and there I find a young girl, who, after having slept till late in the day, and spent a whole hour before the looking-glass, passes the day in idleness at the window, or the door, or amuses herself with tea or coffee parties, or with playing cards, or reading romances and love tales. She appears at every ball and party; she is not at all shy of talking to and being in the company of persons of the opposite sex; she goes out walking with them, and takes their arm going to and from church; in fact it is by doing so that she distinguishes herself from the common herd; bye-and-bye she will be sent to a foreign country, to learn and understand thoroughly the maxims of the perverse world. Ah parents, I say, is that the training that God has told you by His Apostle, St. Paul, to give your children? "You fathers bring up your children in the discipline and correction of the Lord."<sup>3</sup> You must know that you will one day have to give a strict account of their souls at the judgment-seat of God. Do you not believe the

By not bringing up their children properly.

<sup>1</sup> Neque ebriosi regnum Dei possidebunt.—I. Cor. vi. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Sobrii estote et vigilate, quia adversarius vester diabolus tamquam leo rugiens circuit, quaerens quem devoret.—I. Pet. v. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Patres educate illos in disciplina et correptione Domini.—Ephes. vi. 4.

Holy Ghost, who says expressly: "Idleness hath taught much evil."<sup>1</sup> Christian children, is that the way in which you are to love God with your whole hearts, from youth upwards? Is that the way to walk in the narrow path of penance and the Cross, which alone leads to Heaven, and which, as Jesus Christ says, but few enter on? But what is the use of my talking? The same answer is ready again: "It is the fashion, the custom;" others like us bring up their children in the same way; our children must keep up as good an appearance as theirs, or else people will look on us as miserly. O holy Apostle St. Paul, Jesus Christ our Saviour, you have to be satisfied with that: "It is the fashion;" you need not bring forward any more your law, your exhortations; they do not deserve to be heeded; the fashion has superseded them!

By immodest  
in dress.

I have often seen a vain child of the world, dressed in a gaudy and scandalous style, who comes out to show herself and to be admired. I know well the law that God lays down by the Apostle St. Paul: "Women in decent apparel, adorning themselves with modesty and sobriety, not with plaited hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly attire; but as it becometh women professing godliness, with good works."<sup>2</sup> Mark the words, "not with plaited hair;" much less then with hair dressed by a person of the opposite sex; much less with painted faces; much less with scandalously short dresses, or bare necks and shoulders. I know well the threat of Our Lord in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "Woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh;"<sup>3</sup> woe to him who gives occasion for bad thoughts and desires! But I dare not mention this law, or I should be laughed at, and derided as an ignorant simpleton who knows nothing of the ways of the world. "It is the fashion," and there is no use in talking against it; others are dressed in this way, why should I not imitate them? It would be absurd for me alone to depart from the usual fashions. It is the common custom that is tolerated by ecclesiastical and civil authority, and even by confessors too; it is a custom that has obtained the force of prescription against the law of God; what St. Paul preached is too antiquated to be observed nowadays. "It is the fashion," and that is enough.

By irreverence  
in church.

I do not wish to go any farther, or even to enter the church

<sup>1</sup> Multam malitiam docuit otiositas.—Ecc. xxxii. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Mulieres in habitu ornato, cum verecundia et sobrietate ornantes se, et non in tortis criminibus, aut auro, aut margaritis, vel veste pretiosa; sed quod deceat mulieres, promittentes pietatem per opera bona.—I. Tim. ii. 9-10.

<sup>3</sup> Vae homini illi, per quem scandalum venit.—Matth. xviii. 7.

of God; for there, before Jesus Christ, the Judge of the living and the dead, who is really present before the altar, the throne of the divine majesty, I should find acts of irreverence and disrespect committed, such as Christ punished in His anger, when He scourged the buyers and sellers out of the temple. Even here, too, custom has gained the upper hand. It is no longer fashionable for those who know the world to pray on bended knees, with downcast eyes and folded hands, to the great God who is present on the altar; (and, due allowance being made, I say the same of the ordinary prayers before and after meals; for it is no longer the fashion to make the sign of the Cross and fold the hands to say grace;) the proper thing to do nowadays is to stand in the church and look around, and laugh and joke with one's neighbors; and that is a custom that has been imported from foreign countries.

Great God! is that the way in which men, Thy own believing Christians, treat Thee? What others do has more authority and influence with them, than what Thou hast commanded them to do in Thy most holy law. They fear and dread the loss of Heaven, and the eternal pains of hell, with which Thou hast threatened them, less than the imaginary displeasure of other mortals, whose example they wish to follow in conforming to the unlawful customs of the world. They conspire together publicly to despise Thy doctrine and Thy holy law, and they show thereby that there are things in which Thou hast no authority over them. Thus they snatch the sceptre out of Thy hand, the crown off Thy head, and they laugh at Thee as a puppet-god, whom they are not bound to obey, unless when and how the prevailing fashions allow! "It is the fashion; it is the custom." Hear this, O Lord Jesus! Is it not the same cry that the infuriated Jews raised when Pilate was trying to set Thee free, and when they cried out unanimously: "We have a law; and according to the law He ought to die."<sup>1</sup> The same cry is still raised by a vast number of Christians, redeemed by Thy bitter Passion and Death, when Thy doctrine and Thy law are proposed to them. What law? what doctrine? they say. "We have a law," one which the world prescribes to us, and the divine law must yield to it. "It is the custom," and this custom rules everything; under its influence people go to confession and do not accuse themselves of following these unlawful customs; they appear afterwards at the Table of the Lord, and receive

Such is the disrespect with which the law of God is treated.

<sup>1</sup> *Nos legem habemus, et secundum legem debet mori.*—John xix. 7.

His Flesh and Blood; in this way they live and die and go into eternity! Ah, dear Christians, do you really believe that God is less offended by an insult, simply because it has become a prevailing fashion to which most people conform? Do you think that it is no sin, or that it is a less grievous sin to transgress the divine law, because most men are guilty of transgressing it? I shall now show that the contrary is the case, and that a sin committed in accordance with a general custom is much more grievous than it otherwise would be, because it embitters all the more the anger of God. This I shall now briefly show in the

### Second Part.

To follow an unlawful custom is a greater sin, because it is a more general one.

To sin openly, to sin boldly, without shame or scruple, to praise and approve of sin, to encourage others to sin, to allure or entice others to sin, and thus to spread sin throughout the world, and, as it were, to proclaim by sound of trumpet a general law, everywhere abrogating the law of God, etc., do you think, my dear brethren, that there is less malice and wickedness in that, than in transgressing privately and secretly a commandment of God? Must not the divine anger be greatly increased by such audacity? And mark this, all those are guilty of it, who follow the customs of the world in things that are opposed to the law of God and to the teaching of His gospel. For there is no doubt that they sin, because sin is nothing else but a contempt and transgression of the law of God, against which law no prescription of fashion or custom can ever avail, so that it can never be lawful to transgress it; they sin publicly, because the customs and fashions they follow are public; they sin without shame or scruple, because they imagine that the common custom makes sin lawful and honorable; they praise and approve of sin, because they think they must conform to the fashion, or else they will have reason to be ashamed of themselves; they encourage each other to sin, because no one wishes to be the first to act against the unlawful custom; they entice others to sin, because their bad example draws many to imitate them, and thus sin is spread from one country to another, from one town to another, and is propagated freely throughout the world. This is the way of wickedness from which the pious David begged God so earnestly to keep him: "Remove from me the way of iniquity; and out of Thy law have mercy on me." You know,

<sup>1</sup> *Viam iniquitatis amove a me, et de lege tua miserere mei.*—Ps. cxviii. 29.

my dear brethren, what happens when a crowd of people are hurrying along a road, each one trying to be first. The one pushes the other, and he pushes whoever is in front of him, and so it goes on through the whole crowd. Now, if there is a deep hole in the way, which they who are behind cannot see, what happens? Those who are in front are pushed on by the others until they fall into the hole; the second, third, and fourth ranks follow after them, and at last they all fall in and break their necks. An unlawful fashion is a way of that kind; one pushes the other into sin; those who are behind follow where they see others going, and they are too blind to notice the infernal abyss to which they are hurrying.

And thus the vice, that the good and merciful God bears patiently with, to some extent, in a single individual, becomes intolerable in His sight; and since it is collected into a greater mass, it cries out louder and more piercingly in the ears of the divine justice. Hear what St. Augustine says of the excuse alleged for an unlawful custom, "It is the fashion; we must do as others do." "That," he says, "is called a cry in the Holy Scripture, such as an angry God heard from Sodom and Gomorrha:" "And the Lord said: The cry of Sodom and Gomorrha is multiplied, and their sin is become exceedingly grievous; I will go down and see whether they have done according to the cry that is come to me."<sup>1</sup> But why so? what had those people done? "Their sins cried to Heaven," answers St. Augustine, "not only because they committed them with impunity, but because they had become a general law and custom."<sup>2</sup> And therefore God was so angry that he sent down fire from Heaven, and destroyed those cities and all the surrounding country. "And the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrha brimstone and fire from the Lord out of Heaven. And he destroyed these cities, and all the country about, all the inhabitants of the cities, and all things that spring from the earth."<sup>3</sup>

It embitters  
all the more  
the divine  
anger.

Ah, my dear brethren, let us be careful never in any way to join in a cry of that kind, and let us not act so foolishly as to condemn ourselves to hell with and for the sake of others! You

Warning  
not to fol-  
low an un-  
lawful  
custom.

<sup>1</sup> Dixit itaque Dominus: Clamor Sodomorum et Gomorrhæ multiplicatus est, et peccatum eorum aggravatum est nimis. Descendam, et videbo utrum clamorem qui venit ad me, opere compleverint.—Gen. xviii. 20, 21.

<sup>2</sup> Non solum quia apud illos non puniebantur flagitia; verum etiam publice et de lege frequentabantur.—S. Aug. Euchirid. Tom. 3. c. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Igitur Dominus pluit super Sodomam et Gomorrhæ sulphur et ignem a Domino de cælo; et subvertit civitates has, et omnem circa regionem universos habitatores urbium, et sancta terræ virentia.—Gen. xix. 24, 25.

know how stupidly sheep act; if one of them leaps out of a boat into the water, the others follow suit, and all are drowned, nor is their destruction less certain because a number of them leap in together. Suppose that the last sheep left in the boat could understand you, and that you cried out to it, as it is on the point of springing overboard: unfortunate animal what are you about to do? Remain where you are, or you will lose your life; but that the sheep said to you in turn: all the rest of the flock have leaped into the water; why should I not join them? Must I be more clever than all the others? Ah, stupid, foolish animal that you are, you would reply, do you then wish to lose your life with the rest of the flock, rather than remain where you are in safety? Why should you concern yourself about the others? If they wish to be drowned, let them drown; but that is no reason why you should not save your life; remain therefore where you are. Can we not apply this to ourselves, my dear brethren? A great multitude of men conform to the customs of the world, and most of them leap into the abyss of hell. "Wide is the gate," says Our Lord in the Gospel of St. Matthew, "and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat."<sup>1</sup> Will you too go to destruction, because there are many to accompany you? Alas, poor soul, whither art thou going? Come back, or thou art lost forever! Such is the cry sent forth by your own uneasy conscience; the cry that God causes to resound in your ears by the law he has given you, by His interior inspirations, by the inward admonitions of your holy angel guardian, by the public warnings of preachers and confessors. Come back! Remain with the few who have found the right way that leads to Heaven. "How narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life; and few there are that find it."<sup>2</sup> What answer do you make to this? "It is the fashion, the custom;" most people do so, and I must follow their example. O foolish soul, who can thus forget thyself and thy salvation, so that thou comest to the same determination as Radbodus, Prince of Friesland, as Baronius relates. This Radbodus was about to receive Baptism, when he asked the bishop where he thought the souls of most of his ancestors were. Doubtless, answered the bishop, since they were heathens, and did not know nor love the true God, they are in

<sup>1</sup> *Lata porta, et spatiosa via est, quæ ducit ad perditionem, et multi sunt, qui intrant per eam.*—Matth. vii. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Quam angusta porta, et arcta via est, quæ ducit ad vitam: et pauci sunt, qui inveniunt eam.*—Ibid. 14.

hell. In that case, said the foolish prince, I do not wish to be baptized; I prefer to burn in hell with the most of my people, than to be in Heaven with the smaller number. Christians, do we not act in the same way, when we think and say: most people follow that unlawful custom; I would rather imitate them and share their fate, than choose the surest way to Heaven with the smaller number? Do we not come to the same determination when we say: others do so, why should not I imitate them?

No, my dear Christians, we must not be so foolish. The only rule of our conduct should be the law of God. "What is written in the law?" asked Christ of that lawyer, who wished to know what he had to do to gain eternal life, "how readest thou?" He answering said: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself."<sup>1</sup> Then Christ said to him: "Thou hast answered right; this do and thou shalt live."<sup>2</sup> In the same way I ask you: what is written in the law of God? Do that, regulate your conduct according to that; what is opposed to this law cannot be legitimized by any custom or fashion. "Though we, or an angel from Heaven," writes St. Paul to the Galatians, "preach a Gospel to you, besides that which you have received, let him be anathema;"<sup>3</sup> let him be separated from the communion of the faithful. Is this observed by those who excuse the evil customs they follow, by appealing to the example of apparently pious people? Why, they say, should I not do so and so? It is done by people who are looked upon in the whole town as leading pious and edifying lives, who go to confession every fortnight, and receive Holy Communion with the greatest devotion. Surely, they must know what is lawful or not. They certainly wish to go to Heaven. Can I not therefore imitate them? Otherwise it would seem as if I wished to accuse them of sin. Pious, holy people follow the fashion, so it cannot be bad. No, my dear brethren, that argument will not do. There can be no doubt of the fundamental truth, that we must have no other rule for our conduct but the teaching of the Gospel, the commandments of God and of the Church; and no other pattern of a holy life but the ex-

The only guide of our conduct should be the law of God.

<sup>1</sup> In lege quid scriptum est? quomodo legis? Ille respondens dixit: Dilige Dominum Deum tuum ex toto corde tuo, et ex tota anima tua, et ex omnibus viribus tuis, et ex omni mente tua: et proximum tuum sicut teipsum.—Luke x. 26-27.

<sup>2</sup> Recte respondisti; hoc fac, et vives.—Ibid. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Licet nos, aut angelus de cœlo evangelizet vobis præterquam quod evangelizavimus vobis, anathema sit.—Gal. i. 8.

ample of Jesus Christ, and of the elect who follow in his footsteps. Now, if an angel were to come down from Heaven, and to teach us, either by word or example, something that is opposed to the life of Christ and to His holy doctrine, we should be very careful not to imitate or follow him. People who seem to lead holy lives can sin as well as others; therefore, no matter how pious and devout they appear, if you see them following the custom of the world in unlawful things, you can at once come to the conclusion that, in that particular at least, they are neither good nor holy. Hence they who have the name of being pious give a hundred times more scandal in a community, by following unlawful fashions, than others who do the same, but have not as great a name for piety; since the example of the former is much more powerful than that of the latter in inducing people to imitate it. And it is quite a false argument to say, that, because people who are considered pious conform to the fashions, therefore it is right and lawful to conform to them. If those fashions are against the law of God, or the teaching of the Gospel, I must have nothing to do with them, or else I commit a sin. I have but one soul which I must try to save; this should be my greatest care, and I have not to trouble myself about the actions or the conduct of others, no matter who or what they are. I will not be asked on the day of judgment what others did, but how I tried to live according to the law of God.

We must imitate others in doing good.

“Be zealous for the better gifts;”<sup>1</sup> is my conclusion, in the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians. If you, my dear brethren, wish to imitate others, then imitate them in things that are good and holy. Think to yourselves: it is the custom of pious Christians to be upright, honest, merciful, charitable, meek, and humble of heart; I will endeavor to imitate them to the best of my ability; for I know that in those things their conduct is praiseworthy and conformable to the example and teaching of Jesus Christ. It is the custom of pious people to receive the Sacraments frequently after proper preparation; to hear holy Mass daily with due devotion; to assemble all the members of the household every evening before retiring to rest, in order to make the examen of conscience and to say their evening prayers together; to spend the day in union with God, and to offer up all their actions to Him by a supernatural intention. It is their custom to keep their senses in check, to go modestly

<sup>1</sup> *Æmulamini autem charismata mellora.*—I. Cor. xii. 31.

dressed, to keep away from dangerous company, to fear and avoid even the shadow of sin, to attend with all possible care to the duties of their state, to bear crosses and trials with patience for God's sake, and to endeavor to do His holy will in all things. I am quite certain that all this is good and conformable to the teaching of Christ and His Apostles; and therefore I will imitate them therein. Never shall I lose sight of the warning of my Redeemer: "How narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life; and few there are that find it." "Strive to enter by the narrow gate;" "do violence to yourselves that you may enter thereat. "The kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away." "Many are called, but few chosen." Therefore I will follow the advice of St. Augustine: "Live with the few," not with the greater number, "that you may be found with the few elect in the kingdom of God." "May it be so with us, my dear brethren. Amen.

*Another Introduction to the same sermon for the Feast of the holy Apostles SS. Simon and Jude.*

#### Text.

*Non est servus major domino suo.* John xv. 20.

"The servant is not greater than his master."

Even if the eternal truth had not told us, we should know that the servant is not greater than his master; all know that the servant must yield to his master in dignity, and that more honor and respect are due to the master, than to the servant who has to wait on him. Yet, although all acknowledge this, there are many who practically deny it, inasmuch as they honor the servant more than his master, and love, and fear him more. The reason of this is found in that wretched human respect, which makes people unduly attentive to the manner in which others live, so that they may conform to it. What is more common in the world nowadays, than this? Children even learn it from their tenderest years. "It is the custom," etc. *Continues as before.*

*On the wickedness of sins against God in general, see the following Third Part. On venial sin, see the Fourth Part.*

<sup>1</sup> Contendite intrare per angustam portam.—Luke xlii. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Regnum cœlorum vim patitur, et violenti rapiunt illud.—Matth. xi. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Multi enim sunt vocati, pauci vero electi.—Ibid. xx. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Vive cum paucis, ut cum paucis inveniri merearis in regno Dei.

# ON SINS AGAINST OUR NEIGHBOR.

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## FIFTY-EIGHTH SERMON.

### ON THE SMALL NUMBER OF THOSE WHO LOVE THEIR NEIGHBOR.

#### Subject.

1. Very few love their neighbor. 2. Very few love their neighbor as themselves.—*Preached on the seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

#### Text.

*Diliges proximum tuum sicut teipsum.* Matth. xxii. 39.  
“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”

#### Introduction.

There we have the great law of that Christian charity which one man owes another: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” “Thy neighbor;” these words teach us whom we are to love. “As thyself;” these, how and in what manner we are to love. It is a law, my dear brethren, which, well known though it is, is yet understood by very few; for most people show by their conduct that they know little of what is meant by that law. I imagine that there are many nowadays, who ask the same question as the lawyer asked Our Lord in the Gospel of St. Luke: “And who is my neighbor?”<sup>1</sup> So rare is the true love of one’s neighbor, that people neither know, nor care to know who their neighbor is; still less do they know what it means to love him as themselves. Since so much depends on the fulfilment of this law, that without it, according to the testimony of the holy Apostle St. John, it is impossible to love God, I shall endeavor to explain it to-day.

<sup>1</sup> Et quis est meus proximus?—Luke x. 29.

Plan of Discourse.

*Who is my neighbor? The first question, which I shall answer in the first part. What does it mean, to love one's neighbor as one's self? the second question, to be answered in the second part. In both parts we shall have to acknowledge that the love of one's neighbor is very rare. The conclusion will be to amend our principal faults in this particular, when we have learned what they are.*

O Mary, mother of beautiful love, and you, holy angels, obtain this grace from God for us.

“And who is my neighbor?” Is it only he who sits, stands, walks, or lives next to me? If that were the case, no one else in the world would have any claim on my love. “Who is my neighbor?” Is it only he who lives on the same street with me, and in the next house to mine? If so, I have nothing to do with those who live two, three, or four doors off. “Who is my neighbor?” Is it only my fellow-countryman, who was born and bred in the same country, town, or community as myself? If so, I owe no love to you, people of Treves, you are nothing to me. “Who is my neighbor?” asks St. Augustine still further. Is it only my father, and mother, my brothers and sisters, my friends and relatives? No, he answers: although all these are closely related to you, there is still another who is a near connection of yours, and who has a valid claim on your love. “There is no relationship so close, as that which exists between man and man!”<sup>1</sup> Whoever, therefore, in the whole wide world has human nature, is a neighbor of all of us, no matter who or what he is, whether he is great or small, rich or poor, learned or ignorant, beautiful or ugly, related or unknown to us, friend or enemy; as long as he is a human being he is amongst the number of those whom we must love, according to the command and the law of God.

Our neighbor, whom we must love, is man.

“Thou shalt love thy neighbor;” this is a general law binding all men, which admits of no exception. Its meaning is not merely: parents, love your children; children, love your parents; husbands, love your wives; wives, love your husbands; friends, love your friends; servants, love and honor your masters; masters and mistresses, love and care for your servants; not merely, love those who do you good, those whose help you require, those who are placed in a high position; but it says to you, and to me,

And every man, no matter who he is.

<sup>1</sup> Nihil tam proximum quam homo et homo.

and to us all: "Thou shalt love:" whom? "Thy neighbor." And who is he? Every human being, without exception; because we all belong to the same race; we have all the same origin, the nothingness of which we are created; the same Creator, who is the Almighty God; the same nature, which is the likeness of God; the same Father, who is in Heaven; the same Mother, the true Church, to which all men are called; the same spiritual food and drink, which is prepared for all, the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ; the same hope, the same end, the same inheritance, the same Heaven. As St. John Chrysostom remarks, God, in order to preserve this fellowship amongst men, and thereby to foster mutual charity amongst them, did not create the great and the rich out of one material, and the poor and needy of another; but He caused us all, without exception, to descend from the one father, Adam, and our first mother, Eve. He did not create her independently, but took the material of which He made her from Adam, so that no one can treat another as a stranger, and no difference of nationality, family, condition, or manners, which generally is a cause of misunderstandings and difficulties, can excuse us from the obligation of loving all human beings, and looking on them as our brothers and sisters.

Very rare is  
this love,  
because we  
love only a  
very small  
number.

But alas, my dear brethren, we see already how rare true charity is amongst us; for what is more difficult to find, than this general love? What a circumscribed meaning is given nowadays to the word neighbor! Into what small parts we divide, and how miserly we are in doling out, our love and friendship! I find only three classes of men who receive any share of it. The first class founds its claim on blood-relationship, and consists of those who belong to the same family as we do, and even they must be careful what they do, if they wish us to love them truly and constantly; the second relies on our own interest, and consists of those who have done us good, or are likely to do us good; the third and principal class consists of those who suit our natural inclination, because they are beautiful or amiable in our eyes, or are endowed with great natural gifts and talents, or have a pleasing manner, or a sympathetic disposition, or because we have a special pleasure in the society of those of whose favor and friendship we are assured. These, I say, are the people who generally monopolize our hearts and affections; and you, my dear brethren, will acknowledge that what I say is true, and all the others are excluded; no one thinks of them. Hence, as there are few in the world who are related to us, fewer still from whom we

*Small Number of those Loving their Neighbor. 267*

have received, or expect to receive benefits, and fewest of all who, without any fault or failing, are perfectly suited to our inclination, it follows clearly that the number of human beings in the world whom we love properly is very small indeed.

A clear example of our conduct in this particular, I find in the First Book of Kings, in Nabal. The Holy Scripture says of him, that he was a wealthy man, but very hard-hearted, unmerciful, and wicked. David, who with his followers happened to be in his neighborhood, sent to him to ask him in a friendly manner for provisions; but the churlish and foolish Nabal answered: "Who is David? and what is the son of Isai?" I know him not; what have I to do with him? "Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and the flesh of my cattle, which I have killed for my shearers, and give to men whom I know not whence they are?"<sup>1</sup> That is generally the way in which we talk, when there is question of showing charity, according to the Christian law, to the poor, the lowly, and the unknown. And when we are bound by that law to speak and act in a friendly manner to them, to do them a kindness, and to help them in their necessities, what, we say, who are they? They are nothing to me; I know not where they come from; I have never had anything to do with them; why should I do them a kindness? What! You do not know where they come from? Do you know where you come from yourself? As to your soul, you come from nothing, and so do they; as to your body, you are made of a handful of earth, so are they; you come from the hand of God your Creator, and so do they; you know not where they come from? Do you know where you and they are going to? Every day you are going to death, and so are they; you are hurrying on to eternity, nor have they any other end; you hope to get to Heaven, so do they, and perhaps they will succeed, and you will be disappointed; you are all in the same danger; you have all the same hope, and therefore, you are in the same condition, and you owe them the Christian and brotherly love of charity, as well as you owe it to your friends and relatives.

We generally exclude strangers and unknown people from our love.

What have I to do with that man? He is not of the same standing as I am. He is a low, common, poor and abject wretch; must I love him, and associate with him? Is it true that that man is nothing to you, because he is poor and lowly? Must he therefore be excluded from your love and friendship? Is he not

The poor and needy

<sup>1</sup> Quis est David? et quis est filius Isai? Tollam ergo panes meos et carnes pecorum, quae occidi tonsoribus meis, et dabo viris quos nescio unde sint?—1. Kings xxv. 10-11.

a child of God, a friend of God, an heir of God, as well as you, if both of you are in the state of grace? He may be poor and abject in the eyes of the world; perhaps he is great and noble, even greater and nobler than you, in the eyes of God. It is not his fault that he is lowly of birth, and poor of condition; he is so in accordance with the will of God, who has been pleased to humble him here below. If you are rich and great in the eyes of the world, whom have you to thank for that? Certainly not yourself, for you are not a whit better on that account; but you have to return humble thanks to the goodness of God, who has freely bestowed as an alms on you what you have. Oh, how soon God, if He wished, could reverse your positions completely and take away your wealth from you at once, and suddenly enrich your poor neighbor! If the Almighty were to do so, you would be poor and needy, while he who now is poor would be great and wealthy. And if God does not effect that change in this life, He can do it in the next, by calling the poor man to reign with him forever, while you, if you deserve that punishment, will be excluded from His kingdom; the poor man, like another Lazarus, He may receive into His Fatherly Bosom, while you, like the rich glutton, may be condemned to the flames of hell. You must know that you have no right to despise or undervalue any one, no matter how lowly he may be; for we are all brothers and sisters who have the same Father. Hear what St. John Chrysostom says: "do not talk to me about one man being a cobbler and another a tanner; all you have to consider is, that he is strong in the faith, and true to Christ, and that we are all disciples of fishermen."<sup>1</sup>

Those from whom we do not expect benefits.

That man is nothing to me, he never gave me anything. He has never done me a kindness; there is no use in expecting anything from him; why then should I love him, or be kind to him? One hand washes the other, according to the old saying; if I do a favor to any one, I must know why, etc. But listen a moment; if that man cannot, or will not do anything for you, is he therefore nothing to you? Are you therefore not bound to love him? Is your God nothing to you? Has he never done anything for you? Everything you have and are, is a benefit He has bestowed on you; but He commands you, under pain of eternal damnation, to love that man, even if he were to make an ill return for your kindness and to become your sworn enemy: "But I say to you; love your enemies; do good to them that

<sup>1</sup> Ne mihi dixeris illum sutorem esse, alterum coriarum; sed considera fidelem et fortem in Christo illum esse, et quod omnes discipuli sumus piscatorum.

hate you; and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you; that you may be the children of your Father, who is in Heaven." If then that man is unworthy your love, or your kindness, still God deserves that, for His sake, you should treat that man with charity and friendliness, and do good to him. A dear friend comes to visit you, and brings his servant with him; you treat not only your friend, but his servant also, with kindness. And why? The latter has never done anything for you, nor need you ever expect anything from him; and, as you said before, when you do a good turn for any one, you must know why. Well, you answer, I treat him well for his master's sake; my friend's servant, or even his dog, is always welcome in my house. You see now why you must love even the most wicked and ungrateful people; namely, for the sake of that Lord and God, whose servants and creatures they are.

I do not care for that man; I have not the least liking for him; he is not at all a nice person; how can I love him? He inspires me with such disgust, that I cannot even bear the sight of him; he is so rude, passionate and quarrelsome, that I cannot bear to have anything to do with him, much less to treat him as a friend. In a word, I utterly fail to see why I should love him. How? You find no reason for loving him? A bale of merchandise is offered for sale, you see the outside of it alone, and it seems to be nothing but a coarse, rough piece of sacking, that you would hardly condescend to touch; but wait till it is opened, and then you will see the silken stuffs, and the gold and silver plate it contains. If you consider only that man's exterior, you will find him deformed and ugly; but perhaps his soul is beautiful and lovely, and that is certainly reason enough for loving him, and a far better reason than mere corporal beauty, which is only the outside covering of a body that will be food for worms. But, you say, he is rude and uncultivated. Even if, along with that, he were the most wicked sinner in the world, yet, if you are a Christian, you can and must find cause to love him; and you would find cause enough, if you were to form your judgment, not according to what the senses tell you, but according to divine and Christian maxims. What has Jesus Christ seen in you, or in me, or in any one, to make Him deem us worthy of such great and unspeakable love? Were we not all covered with

Those for whom we have no liking.

<sup>1</sup> Ego autem dico vobis: Diligite inimicos vestros, benefacite his, qui oderunt vos; et orate pro persecutibus et calumniantibus vos, ut sitis filii Patris vestri, qui in caelis est. —Math. v. 44-45.

the filth of sin, children of eternal damnation, and therefore objects of His just hatred, anger and reprobation? And yet, "for us men, and for our salvation, He descended from Heaven;" and became a little child, was wrapped in swaddling-clothes and laid in a manger, underwent countless toils and labors for thirty-three years, and at last died on the shameful Cross in extreme agony. O great God, what a difference, an infinite difference, there is between Thee and me! And yet in me, wicked, deformed, and sinful creature that I am, Thou hast found something to please Thee! And I cannot find anything that I deem worthy of my love and friendship in that man, who is of the same nature as myself, and who is like me in all things! That very man who has gained Thy favor and love, and Thy whole heart, cannot win my affection and friendship! Thy image, which Thou hast seen in his soul, was sufficient reason for Thee to love Him; but it is not able to induce me to treat him with charity. Thou hast excluded none from Thy favor and love; but I find many undeserving of my love! I must be really blind then, if I find no reason for loving all men; or else I must be very wicked, if I do not wish to find a reason. If I were truly wise, I should see at once that I ought to love those whom Thou hast acknowledged to be worthy of Thy love! Alas, my dear brethren, our thoughts do not reach as far as that, and we judge our neighbor only by the bodily eyes, and according to outward appearances; and thus what I said at first is unfortunately true; namely, that we have true charity only for the very smallest number of our fellow-men.

Thus we  
love no one  
with a true,  
super-  
natural  
love.

Nay, I may say, that we love no one with that supernatural Christian charity, which Christ commands us all to have for our neighbor. For instance, you love one who is related to you, or one from whom you have received benefits, or who is so pleasing to you, that you like to be in his company; that is not a true, but a false love, says St. Bernardine of Siena. For it is in just the same way that you love the bread you eat, because it tastes well; the clothes you wear, because they keep you warm; the money you have, because it is useful to you: your horse, your cat, your dog, because you are fond of them.<sup>2</sup> A love of that kind is not the love of one's neighbor, but of one's self; for thus you love, not the person of another, but your own profit, sen-

<sup>1</sup> Propter nos homines, et propter nostram salutem, descendit de cœlis.

<sup>2</sup> Si diligit homo quia utiles sibi sunt, aut delectabiles, manifeste apparet, quod eos non vero amore diligit, sed sicut equum, panem, etc.

suavity, or pleasure; and consequently you love yourself, and not him whom God has commanded you to love, that is your neighbor, no matter who he is, and without any selfish interest in view. Such a selfish love as yours, even if it is not unlawful, is of no value in the sight of God, and deserves not the least reward from Him. "For if you love them that love you, what reward shall you have? And if you salute your brethren only, what do you more? Do not also the heathens this?"<sup>1</sup> If you love only those who are friendly and well-disposed towards you, if you do good only to those who do good to you, if you show friendship only to those who please you, "what reward shall you have?" Turks and the most savage barbarians do as much; idolaters and the greatest sinners in the world can love in that way; so that you can only expect the same reward as that given to Turks, barbarians and heathens.

On the last day, as St. Matthew tells us, Christ will reckon up all the works of Christian charity that have been performed in order to reward them duly. "Come ye blessed of my Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; naked, and you covered me; sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came to me."<sup>2</sup> And all this, "you did to me;"<sup>3</sup> and for my sake. Now come forward with that other love of yours, and hear judgment pronounced on it. You have done good to your neighbor; but why? Because you were in want of his help or assistance? But Christ will say to you, if you had no other object but that, you did it not to Me, but to yourself, and for your own end. You have visited a sick person; why? Through worldly courtesy, because he was an acquaintance of yours, or because you considered his friendship useful to you, or because you expected him to remember you in his will? If that was your only intention, you have not visited Me. You have given alms to a poor man; why? That he might work for you? You have not given it to Me. You have clothed one who was naked; why? Because he was your

As we shall see at the last day.

<sup>1</sup> Si enim diligitis eos, qui vos diligunt, quam mercedem habebitis? Et si salutaveritis fratres vestros tantum, quid amplius facitis? Nonne et publicani hoc faciunt.—Matth. v. 46-47.

<sup>2</sup> Venite, benedicti Patris mei, possidete paratum vobis regnum a constitutione mundi. Esurivi enim, et dedistis mihi manducare: sitivi, et dedistis mihi bibere: hospes eram, et collegistis me: nudus et co-operuistis me: infirmus, et visitastis me: in carcere eram, et visitastis ad me.—Ibid. xv. 34, 36.

<sup>3</sup> Mihi fecistis. Ibid. 40.

relative, or a country-man of yours? Then you have not clothed Me. You have borne an insult meekly and silently, or been patient with the troublesome faults of another, or repressed your anger when he contradicted or spoke harshly to you; why? Because he was stronger than you, or you were afraid of incurring his resentment? You did it not to Me; it was not for My sake that you were so patient. You helped one who was in need, by your interest, good advice, or consolation; why? Because you had a natural liking for him? You did it not to Me. You were good-humored, friendly and agreeable with that person; why? Because he pleased you? Then you have not sought to please Me by your conduct to him. In a word, if you have loved your neighbor because he pleased you, and loved you in return, you did it not for Me, not for My sake. If you had done all this on My account and in obedience to My command, you would have loved all men without exception, because I commanded you to love your neighbor, that is, all mankind. And how are we to love all mankind? That we shall see in the

### Second Part.

We must  
love all men  
as our-  
selves.

“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;” not with exactly the same affection that you have for yourself. No; for well-ordered charity begins with one’s self. To sacrifice one’s property, to shed one’s blood, to give one’s life for another, is often the effect of a heroic charity, but is seldom a duty or an obligation. I can love myself more than others in temporal things; and I must love myself more than all others in things that concern my eternal salvation. The law of charity, then, points to a certain likeness and similarity, so that the love I bear to myself should guide me as to the love I must have for my neighbor. The Holy Scripture, in order to guard us from error on this point, lays down two very clear rules, one of which shows us what we have to avoid; the other what we have to do. The first was given by the elder Tobias to his son: “See thou never do to another what thou wouldst hate to have done to thee by another.”<sup>1</sup> The second was given by Our Lord Jesus Christ to His Apostles: “All things therefore whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you also to them. For this is the law;”<sup>2</sup> that is the way to love your neighbor as yourself.

<sup>1</sup> Quod ab alio oderis fieri tibi, vide, ne tu aliquando alteri facias. Tob. iv. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Omnia ergo, quaecumque vultis, ut faciant vobis homines, et vos facite illis. Hæc est enim lex.—Matth. vii. 12.

But do we observe that? Ah! how many there are who often fail lamentably in this respect! I find two classes of people who err grievously in this matter; for some are too prodigal of their love, and others are too miserly with it; some do too much, others too little; some love their neighbor more, others less than themselves. For instance, you say or do something unlawful, to please another; you love your neighbor too much, more than yourself. To avoid displeasing another, you omit doing or saying what the duties of your state oblige you to do or say; you love that person too much, more than yourself. Through human respect you transgress the law of God; you love others too much, more than yourself. To avoid interrupting a conversation, you join in and approve of impure or uncharitable talk; you love others too much, more than yourself. A judge or a lawyer goes against his conscience and acts unjustly in order to help his friend or relative out of a difficulty. Unhappy man! You love your friend too much; you love him more than yourself. A father scrapes together all the money he can, and even tries to get possession of what he has no right to, that at his death he may leave his dear son well off. Father, you love your son too much, more than yourself! A mother, not wishing to displease her daughter, allows her to keep dangerous company, to be present at promiscuous nightly gatherings, and to go into other occasions of sin. Mother, you love your daughter too much, more than yourself! Neither father nor mother will punish their children when they do wrong, nor do they bring them up in the fear of God, or teach them how to work for the salvation of their souls, and thus they fail in performing the most important duty that God has imposed on those who enter the marriage state. Parents, you love your children too much, more than yourselves! A married couple will sometimes transgress the divine law to please each other; husband, you love your wife too well; wife, you love your husband too well! In a word, he who commits even a single sin, or omits one good action to please another, sins against the law of charity by prodigality. And why? Because he loves his neighbor, not as himself, but more than himself, more than his conscience, his soul, his salvation, his God; or, as the Gospel says, he hates himself mortally, that he may love another foolishly and unreasonably. And how many people of that kind there are in the world! I might look for a long time, and I should hardly find one in thousands, who would be willing to share his wealth with me through Christian charity; and there is many

We seldom do so, because some we love more than ourselves, and with a sinful love.

a one who would find hundreds ready to sacrifice their consciences, their souls, their salvation, for his sake. Nor am I alluding now to impure love, which should be called madness, rather than love; and yet, alas, how common it is, and how certainly the soul and its eternal salvation are sacrificed when the impure passion takes possession of the heart; so that, then, it is not so true to say that one sins for the sake of the other, as that one betrays the other into sin. "It is not a question then," says St. Augustine, "of loving as you love yourself, but of hating as you hate yourself."<sup>1</sup> All these people love others too much.

What it is to love our neighbor as ourselves.

But there are others who love their neighbor far too little, and the number is, I am afraid, amongst us Christians nowadays, beyond calculation; for they either do to their neighbor what they would not wish to be done to themselves; or else they refuse him what they would reasonably and justly wish to be done to themselves. I say, reasonably and justly; because, if I were bound to do at once for all men every service that I would wish to be rendered to myself, then, indeed, I should have my hands full! I wish that some one would give me a thousand dollars; am I therefore bound to give that sum to another? By no means; that is not the meaning of the law; for my wish is neither reasonable, nor just. On the other hand, if you are really in want, and you wish that some rich man would help you now and then according to his means, your wish is just and reasonable. You are lying in bed sick, and wish that some prince or count would visit and console you; your wish is not reasonable; but if you desired to see your neighbor, or some good friend, who has heard of your illness, you do not go beyond your right. The sins you have committed are public and known to all; if you wished to be looked on as pious and innocent, you would entertain an unreasonable desire; but if your wickedness is not certainly known, you have a right to desire that others should think well of you; and so under different circumstances. You can see now what you are bound to do to others by the law of Christian charity; if you neglect that obligation, then you do not love your neighbor as yourself; because your love for him is less than the law of Christian charity prescribes.

Most people fall in this point, because

Let each one now enter into himself and see whether he is not cold and niggardly in practising this charity. I think a great deal of myself, feel the least slight very keenly, have a vain com-

<sup>1</sup> Non quomodo teipsum diligis, sed quomodo teipsum odisti.

placency in all my undertakings, and am firmly persuaded that everything I do is well done; meanwhile I look down upon all that another does, I despise him in my heart, I criticise and find fault with him, and put a bad interpretation on all his actions; it is evident that I do not love my neighbor as myself. I am so sensitive, that I cannot bear the least word of contradiction, and yet I speak to another very bitterly and sarcastically; I do not love him as myself. I often complain that this or that person has refused to do me a kindness; yet I hardly ever do anything for another person, who asks me to help him; I do not love him as myself. I wish that people should bear everything from me, but I cannot bear the least thing from them; I do not love my neighbor as myself. I am often vexed during the day at the natural faults and awkwardness of another, and I have many great faults which others must overlook patiently and meekly; I do not love my neighbor as myself. I abhor and condemn many men, because they are wicked and sinful, but I do not hate and condemn the sins which I myself commit every day; I do not love my neighbor as myself. When others do wrong, I wish to see them severely punished, but I do not punish myself; I do not love my neighbor as myself. I am naturally kind to myself; why am I not so to others? I am naturally severe and harsh to others; why am I not so to myself? It is evident that I do not love my neighbor as myself. In everything that concerns myself I am careful, industrious, indefatigable; but I am very negligent in what concerns others; if things go well with me, I am satisfied, nor do I trouble myself about others; my only care is to make matters as easy as possible for myself; whether I thereby make trouble for others, or not, is a question I never think of asking; that is a certain sign that I do not love my neighbor as myself. And so you can go on, my dear brethren, examining yourselves, to see how you act in different circumstances.

they love others less than themselves.

Thus I am driven to the conclusion that we have very little love for our neighbor, although we are bound to love him; and that we are far from loving him as we ought. Yet Our Lord Jesus Christ has told us clearly, emphatically, and frequently, that we are bound to love our neighbor as ourselves. The Gospel and the Epistles of St. John are full of the laws of charity. "These things I command you, that you love one another."<sup>1</sup> "We should love one another, as he hath given com-

Consequently, the number of those who fulfil the law, and love God, is very small.

<sup>1</sup> Hæc mando vobis : Ut diligatis invicem.—John xv. 17.

mandment unto us.”<sup>1</sup> This was the last prayer of Our Lord to His heavenly Father when He was about to take leave of His Apostles: “Holy Father keep them in Thy name, whom Thou hast given me; that they may be one, as we also are.”<sup>2</sup> This was His last exhortation to His Apostles, and in their person, to all of us: “A new commandment I give unto you: That you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”<sup>3</sup> “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another.”<sup>4</sup> Alas, where is the fervor of the early Christians, who were so exact in fulfilling this law? The Christian faith was known in those days more by the brotherly love of charity it produced, than by the miracles it wrought; for, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, in spite of the differences of race and nationality, “the multitude of believers had but one heart and one soul; neither did any one say that aught of the things which he possessed was his own, but all things were common unto them.”<sup>5</sup> In fact, according to Tertullian, this fact alone convinced the heathens of the truth of the Christian religion, and they used to say to each other with astonishment: “See how those men love one another.”<sup>6</sup> O happy, golden, heavenly days, whither have ye gone? If the heathens were to come into many modern Christian towns, would they see the same proof of the truth of our religion? Could they say with truth: “See how those men love one another?” Would they not rather have reason to think and to say: see how those men hate each other! See what misunderstandings, quarrels, and disputes there are amongst them! See how they curse, and persecute, and try to ruin each other; what little patience they have with each others faults! What little charity and mercy they show to the poor and needy! They believe in Jesus Christ, as we see by their altars and churches; but they have not the true characteristic of His disciples; “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another.” And meanwhile people flatter themselves and imagine they are

<sup>1</sup> *Diligamus alterutrum, sicut dedit mandatum nobis.*—I. John iii. 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Pater sancte, serva eos in nomine tuo, quos dedisti mihi, ut sint unum, sicut et nos*—John xvii. 11.

<sup>3</sup> *Mandatum novum do vobis, ut diligatis invicem, sicut dilexi vos, ut et vos diligatis invicem.*—Ibid. xiii. 34.

<sup>4</sup> *In hoc cognoscent omnes, quia discipuli mei estis, si dilectionem habueritis ad invicem.*—Ibid. 35.

<sup>5</sup> *Multitudinis autem credentium erat cor unum et anima una; nec quisquam eorum, quæ possidebat, aliquid suum esse dicebat, sed erant illis omnia communia.*—Acts iv. 32.

<sup>6</sup> *Videte, ut se invicem diligant.*

good and pious, because they visit the churches, spend hours in prayer, lead chaste and mortified lives, observe the fasts of the Church, and keep the commandments of God. But how many there are who, almost unawares, incur eternal damnation, because they neglect the principal commandment, and in countless instances do not practise Christian charity! Let no one, says St. Cyril of Alexandria, depend on his fasting, or on his humble prayer, nor on his other good works, "unless he truly loves his brethren."<sup>1</sup> Do you think you love God, if you hate even one man? St. John will tell you, that, if you think so, you are a liar. "If any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar."<sup>2</sup> And do you think that God loves you? You are mistaken; for if a man loves not his brother, "how doth the charity of God abide in him?"<sup>3</sup> as the same St. John asks.

Alas, my God, of what use will all my devotions and good works be, if I do not love my neighbor? If I do not love him as myself? If I do not love all men as myself? "He that loveth not, abideth in death."<sup>4</sup> If I gave up all I have, in order to follow Thee my Saviour; if I scourged myself every day for Thy sake, so as to draw blood, what good would it all be to me, if I love not my neighbor? Not the least; I can save my soul and be loved by Thee without this poverty and all these extraordinary austerities and devotions. But unless I love my neighbor, I can hope neither to save my soul nor to gain Thy love. Why then have I hitherto paid such little attention to this, the most important law of my faith? I must acknowledge, O my God, that I have not loved my neighbor as Thou hast commanded me! How often and how grievously have I not sinned against this love by rash judgments, uncharitable thoughts, harsh and sarcastic words, back-biting, impatience, murmuring, and cruelty! And yet, if I have not true charity, I am not Thy disciple! Nor am I a true Christian, nor have I any right to that beautiful title which I have borne so long! Neither can I love Thee, my God, if I do not love my neighbor. Woe to me then, if I am not loved by Thee, O God, because I am wanting in charity towards others! For in that case I have no reward, no salvation to expect. Therefore I must and will endeavor earnestly to practise this

Conclusion  
and resolution  
of  
amendment.

<sup>1</sup> Nisi recte fratres diligat.

<sup>2</sup> Si quis dixerit: quoniam diligo Deum; et fratrem suum oderit, mendax est.—I. John iv.

20.

<sup>3</sup> Quomodo charitas Dei manet in eo?—Ibid. iii. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Qui non diligit, manet in morte.—Ibid. 14.

charity, in preference to all other good works; I will love my neighbor as myself; rejoice in his prosperity, as if it were my own; and, when occasion demands, help him as well as I can, and be as kind to him as I would be to myself. I will love all mankind without exception, rich and poor, great and small, those who cause me trouble and displeasure, as well as those who are agreeable and friendly to me. Thou, O my God, hast loved me, although I have often been an ungrateful, perjured, and wicked sinner; can there be any one then, in the whole world, who is unworthy of my love? Therefore I will love all mankind, as Thou desirest, in deed and in truth, by bearing their faults patiently, by meekness in word and action, by helping and comforting them whenever I can; I will love them as my brethren, as Thy disciples and children; I will love them with a supernatural love, that is, for Thy sake, because Thou desirest me so to love them. I will love them at all times, in all places, constantly, to the end of my life, yet so that I shall not transgress the least of Thy commandments for the sake of any of them. Thus I can be assured according to Thy promise, that I will one day love Thee, and be loved by Thee in eternity. Amen.

*On why and how we must love our neighbor see the following Fourth Part.*

# ON SCANDAL.

## FIFTY-NINTH SERMON.

### ON THE MANIFOLD WAYS AND THE WICKEDNESS OF GIVING SCANDAL.

#### Subject.

1. Scandal is not a human, but a diabolical vice. 2. Still scandal is a common vice amongst men.—*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.

This text supplies me with most important matter. To be scandalized is mostly an effect of human weakness; for we are easily betrayed into evil, when we see or hear of its being committed by others. But to give scandal is generally the result of sheer malice. Against the first vice Christ uses very gentle words: “These things have I spoken to you, that you may not be scandalized.” But against the second He inveighs in the strongest terms, in the Gospel of St. Matthew: “Woe to the world because of scandals;”<sup>1</sup> “woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh;”<sup>2</sup> “it were better for him that a mill-stone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depth of the sea.”<sup>3</sup> I will speak to-day, my

<sup>1</sup> Vae mundo a scandalis.—Matth. xviii. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Vae homini illi, per quem scandalum venit.—Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Expedit ei, ut suspendatur mola asinaria in collo ejus, et demergatur in profundum maris.—Ibid. 6.

dear brethren, of the latter vice, which, if it were removed from the world, both vices would cease at once; for if there were no one to give scandal, no one would be scandalized. With the object then, of removing these two vices, at least that is my wish and desire, I make my

#### Plan of Discourse.

*To give scandal is not a human, but a diabolical vice, as I shall prove in the first part. Yet it is a common vice amongst men, as I shall show in the second part.*

Christ Jesus, 'thou didst warn Thy Apostles not to be scandalized; speak to-day to our hearts with Thy powerful inspirations, that none of us may give scandal. This we ask of Thee through the merits of Thy mother Mary and our holy angels guardian.

Just as they who promote the glory of God and the salvation of souls are called men of God ;

It is true that every one who commits a mortal sin takes sides with the devil against God, for he despises and abandons God, and sells his soul to the devil for a little money, or for a short-lived pleasure. How blind and foolish a man must be to allow himself to be led so far astray for such a trifle! Still, the sinner gives only his own soul to the devil, as long as the sin is confined to himself. But he who by his actions gives scandal to others, joins with the devil in quite a special manner. In the Holy Scripture the Prophet Elias and other holy men are called "men of God," and St. Paul, writing to his disciple Timothy, calls him "man of God."<sup>1</sup> Why is that name given to them? The reason is evident; just as he who is employed by a king or prince, is called a servant, an agent, an ambassador, or a plenipotentiary of his sovereign, so he who is employed in doing the work of God, can be called a man, an agent of God. And what is the work of God amongst His creatures on earth? No other than to promote His own honor and glory, and to bring the souls of men to Heaven. Hence there is no work more divine than to co-operate in the salvation of souls, as the holy Fathers say.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, he who, by his good example, or salutary teaching, endeavors to gain over the souls of others, to lead them on to Heaven, and to keep them from evil, may really be called a man of God.

So he who gives scandal may be called a man of the devil.

From this it follows that, on the other hand, he who allows himself to be employed in doing the work of the devil, in furthering his interests, and carrying out his plans, must be called

<sup>1</sup> Homo Del.—I. Tim. vi. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Omnium operum divinatorum divinissimum.

a man of the devil, an ambassador and plenipotentiary, an agent and servant of the devil. Such in reality are they who give scandal. For what is the work of the devil? As the sworn, irreconcilable enemy of God, he labors day and night to upset all the plans of the Almighty, to thwart His designs, to draw souls away from His love and service, to lead them into sin and vice, and finally to drag them down to hell with himself. And therefore, in the Gospel of St. John, Jesus Christ calls him, "a murderer from the beginning;"<sup>1</sup> not, says St. John Chrysostom, because he slays the bodies of men; his object is to destroy something far more precious than that, namely, the immortal soul, by leading it into sin. To this end are directed all his plans and schemes, all his suggestions and temptations; and although, as theologians teach, his torments will be increased by every soul that goes to hell, yet, so great is his hatred of God and his envy of man, that he would rather increase his own torments, than allow a soul to serve God on earth, and love and praise Him in Heaven; therefore he tries in every possible way to prevent souls from serving God. Such are the malicious designs of the devil.

And what else do you do, O wicked men, when you give scandal to others in any way, and, as partisans of the devil, seek to further his interests, and help him to accomplish his designs? The devil, says St. Chrysostom, was a murderer from the beginning of the world in his own person, for by his cunning he deceived Eve, induced her to disobey the divine command, and thus brought death on all of us; but now it is by means of you that he murders souls; you are the dogs he sends out to drive other souls along with your own into his snares. What he cannot effect by his own temptations and evil suggestions, he works out by means of the scandalous manners, behavior, and language, by which you lead others into sin and bring them to their eternal ruin; for it is in that, that scandal really consists. The holy Apostle St. Paul, writing to the Romans about scandal, warns them not even to touch food or drink, if they thereby give occasion of sin to others. "Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died;"<sup>2</sup> "destroy not the work of God for meat."<sup>3</sup> Hear this, O scandal giver! you do what the devil tries to do, that is, to destroy and ruin the work of God. What work is that?

For, like the devil, he ruins souls.

<sup>1</sup> Homicida ab initio.—John viii. 44.

<sup>2</sup> Noli cibo tuo illum perdere, pro quo Christus mortuus est.—Rom. xiv. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Noli propter escam destruere opus Dei.—Ibid. 20.

The work of His hands, which He has created to the likeness of His own infinite Being. See, O Lord, says the Prophet David, "they have destroyed the things which Thou hast made."<sup>1</sup> But this is not enough; for they destroy a work which has cost Thee, O Lord, Thy life-blood! Can there be any greater malice than this?

Which it  
cost the Son  
of God so  
much labor  
to redeem.

Blessed Albert the Great, as Father Paul Segueri relates, once made a statue, and fitted it up so skilfully with wheels internally, that it could move itself to and fro, and now and then utter a sound like a living man. St. Thomas of Aquin, who was then his pupil, and who knew nothing of the statue, went once into his master's room, and seeing the wonderful movements of the figure, and hearing the sounds that issued from it, he thought it was an evil spirit that had come to tempt him, and raising his hand, he struck the statue with such force, that it fell to the ground in pieces. When Albert came in and saw what had been done, he cried out: "O my son, what have you done? In one hour you have ruined the work of thirty years!"<sup>2</sup> O man, if you give scandal only once, and are the occasion of even one soul committing a grievous sin, alas, what have you done? What precious work of art have you ruined and destroyed? Do you wish to know? Then look at Jesus Christ the Son of God, hanging on the Cross, with outstretched arms and opened side; He will say to you, that in one moment you have destroyed the work of thirty years! For during all that time, He will say, I have labored, and not only labored, but suffered, for the salvation of that soul. On its account I came down from Heaven, and became a poor servant, was laid in a manger as a little child, earned My bread by the sweat of My brow in a carpenter's workshop, and endured heat and cold in My journeys; for the sake of that soul I have wandered about over mountain and valley, and often suffered hunger and thirst; for the sake of that soul I have been vilified, and buffeted, and scourged; My head has been crowned with thorns, My whole body covered with wounds; for its sake I was nailed to the Cross, and gave up My spirit with the last drop of My blood. To keep this soul I have, after My death, employed so many means; I have fed it with My holy sacraments, and enlightened it by My inspirations; I have watched over it carefully by My holy angels, exhorted and instructed it in sermons preached by My servants,

<sup>1</sup> Quæ perfectisti destruxerunt.--Ps. x. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Fili, quid fecisti? Triginta annorum laborem una hora perdidisti.

so that I might deter it from vice, encourage it to practise virtue, and keep it faithful to Me. This soul you have ruined in a moment by the scandal you have given it, and you have delivered it over into the hands of My sworn enemy, the devil! This sheep, which I have sought over mountain and valley, you have snatched from off My shoulders, and thrown into the jaws of the hellish wolf! Ask God the Father, and He will say to you: What have you done? You have torn out the apple of My eye! "He that toucheth you," He says by the Prophet Zacharias," toucheth the apple of My eye."<sup>1</sup> Ask the Holy Ghost, and He will say to you: what have you done? You have ruined My temple and My dwelling place! "Know you not that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"<sup>2</sup> You have led astray My beloved bride, whom I had intended to espouse forever: "And I will betroth thee to Me forever."<sup>3</sup> Thus you have done in a short time for the devil, what he could not do with all his wiles and stratagems.

Oh certainly, scandal-giving is a diabolical vice! "Accursed be the man," cries out St. Chrysostom in just anger, "accursed be the man who acts as an agent of the devil!"<sup>4</sup> It is a sign of cowardice that deserves punishment, for a Christian to be afraid publicly to defend the honor of Jesus Christ, as was the case with some during the time of persecution, who concealed their faith through fear of death, and as many Christians do nowadays, who, through human respect, are afraid to open their mouth when there is a question of the glory of God, and whom Christ will be ashamed to acknowledge before His heavenly Father at the last day. But for a Christian to rise in open rebellion against Jesus Christ, to become a portion of the devil, and to enter into an alliance with him to destroy the souls that Christ redeemed at the cost of so much labor and suffering, that is indeed a most horrible depravity! O my God, we might well say, is it then possible that a man is more powerful to destroy souls, than Jesus Christ, Thy Almighty Son, is to save them? Certainly, answers St. Augustine; Christ has His sacraments, that, like so many fountains of grace, sanctify souls; but the devil has still more powerful sacraments, as instruments of reprobation, in order to damn souls; and these are they who give scandal to others. O just

Therefore to give scandal is a fearful and diabolical sin.

<sup>1</sup> Qui tetigerit vos, tangit pupillam oculi mei.—Zach. ii. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Nescitis, quia templum Dei estis, et Spiritus Dei habitat in vobis.—I. Cor. iii. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Et sponsabo te mihi in sempiternum.—Osee ii. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Maledictus sit homo diaboli advocatus.

God, how canst Thou bear with such people, and allow them to live? In the Old Law, which was not near so perfect and holy as the New, Thou gavest the command: "If a man open a pit, and dig one, and cover it not, and an ox or an ass fall into it, the owner of the pit shall pay the price of the beasts."<sup>1</sup> If a fire breaking out light upon thorns, and catch stacks of corn, or corn standing in the fields, he that kindled the fire shall make good the loss."<sup>2</sup> Behold now the fire of impurity, anger, and vindictiveness is often kindled by scandal, so that precious souls, created by Thee for Heaven, incur the eternal flames of hell; it is not oxen or asses, but immortal souls, that now fall into the pit dug for them by scandal-givers; and canst thou tolerate that? Dost Thou not require the loss to be made good?

Christ Him-  
self says  
that a  
scandal-  
giver is a  
devil.

O meekest Saviour, how gently thou hast always dealt with the greatest sinners, so that Thou hast seldom reproved their vices harshly! Yet Thou wert once so displeased with Thy Apostle Peter, whom Thou didst love dearly, and who was animated with the best intentions towards Thee, that Thou didst call him a devil and drive him away from Thee, when he tried to dissuade Thee from undergoing Thy bitter Passion, although it was impossible either to lead Thee astray, or to scandalize Thee. "Go behind me, satan," Thou saidst to him, "thou art a scandal unto Me."<sup>3</sup> When Judas actually betrayed Thee with a kiss, Thou saidst to him with the greatest gentleness: "Friend, whereto art thou come?"<sup>4</sup> And Peter, who thought no evil, was called a devil by Thee? Herod, the incestuous tyrant, the adulterer and murderer, Thou didst call by no worse a name than that of fox: "Go and tell that fox."<sup>5</sup> The wicked Pharisees, who were bursting with envy and hatred of Thee, Thou didst call simply "serpents, generation of vipers."<sup>6</sup> But no one didst Thou call satan, that is, the worst of the devils, except Thy own Apostle Peter, who, through sheer compassionate love, wished to avert from Thee the disgraceful death that was in store for Thee; "Lord, be it far from Thee; this shall not be unto Thee."<sup>7</sup> And no sooner had he said those words, than

<sup>1</sup> Si quis aperuerit cisternam, et foderit, et non operuerit eam, cecideritque bos aut asinus in eam, reddet dominus cisternæ pretium jumentorum.—Exod. xxi. 33, 34.

<sup>2</sup> Si ingressus ignis invenerit spinas, et comprehenderit acervos frugum, sive stantes segetes in agris, reddet damnum qui ignem succenderit.—Ibid. xxii. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Vade post me, satana: scandalum es mihi.—Matth. xvi. 23.

<sup>4</sup> Amice, ad quid venisti?—Ibid. xxvi. 50.

<sup>5</sup> Ite, et dicite vulpi illi.—Luke xlii. 22.

<sup>6</sup> Serpentes, gentium viperarum.—Matth. xxiii. 33.

<sup>7</sup> Absit a te, Domine; non erit tibi hoc.—Ibid. xvi. 22.

Thou at once saidst to him: "Go behind Me, satan, thou art a scandal unto Me."

Oh, what a number of real scandals are given nowadays, and yet Thou art silent! Yes, God tolerates them; He is silent for the present, as He Himself says by the Prophet David: "Sitting, thou didst speak against thy brother and didst lay a scandal against thy mother's son; these things hast thou done, and I was silent."<sup>1</sup> But wait; the day of my vengeance will come; "I will reprove thee and set before thy face;"<sup>2</sup> "woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh." Woe to him who joins with the devil, and robs Me of souls! Christians, is it possible that such a diabolical vice should be found amongst us? It is no wonder that the devil should plot against our souls, and do his utmost to lead us into sin; for his envy and hatred of God make him mad and desperate. But that men, who still adore the true God, that Christians, who publicly profess to be followers of Jesus Christ, and who still hope, as children of God, to inherit the kingdom of Heaven, should be guilty of leading others into sin, that implies such diabolical malice, that we might well question its possibility. But, alas, it is only too possible, only too true, for people are guilty of it every day. Although scandal-giving is a most grievous and diabolical vice, yet it is a common one nowadays amongst men, as I now proceed to explain.

And threatens him with special punishment.

### Second Part.

There are many who have a wrong idea of the meaning of the word scandal; they confound it very often with back-biting, or else they use it in an improper sense to express an exceptional degree of malice or effrontery in an action. That is a scandalous thing, they say, meaning thereby that it is a very bad, or a very disgraceful thing. It is true that scandal is really given by a very bad action; but the epithet, as applied to that action, does not express fully the nature of the vice of scandal-giving. According to the teaching of St. Thomas, and of all theologians, to take scandal, or to be scandalized, means "to commit sin in thought, word, or deed, because one has heard or seen something in another which has given occasion to that sin," no matter what the nature of the sin may be. To give scandal, of which we are now speaking, is "to say or do anything which occasions the spiritual ruin of another."<sup>3</sup> Thus he gives scandal who

How scandal may be given.

<sup>1</sup> Sedens adversus fratrem tuum loquebaris, et adversus filium matris tuæ ponebas scandalum. Hæc fecisti et tacui.—Ps. xlix. 20, 21.

<sup>2</sup> Arguam te, et statuam contra faciem tuam.—Ibid. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Dictum vel factum occasionem præbens ruinæ.

does, or says, or omits, in presence of others, anything that either in itself, or through force of circumstances, is apt to lead them into sin, whether they really commit the sin or not, or whether or not it is the intention of the person who does or omits the action, to lead them into sin thereby. Alas, what is more common than this, among people of all classes! How often is it not found even among those who are otherwise good and pious? Nay, how often may not one thus be the cause of sin, when one least imagines it!

It is often given by words and outward signs.

In the first place, scandal may be given by word, and all those are guilty of it who by instructions, advice, exhortation, command, or request, endeavor to lead others into sin, or to deter them from doing good; all who praise the sins of others, or encourage them in wrong-doing; all who ridicule or laugh at others, in order to dissuade them from the good they are doing, or intend to do; all who, in presence of others, boast of the sins they have committed; all who speak contemptuously, or sarcastically, of God and His saints, of holy and spiritual things, or of the ceremonies of the Church; all who speak immodestly, or relate impure tales, or what is still worse sometimes, use double-meaning expressions tending to impurity; all who, in a quarrelsome and contentious spirit, use expressions that they know will provoke others to anger; and so on. Alas, what a number of people there are in the world who thus give scandal by word! Again, scandal may be given by outward signs, such as indecent behavior, laughing, winking, letter-writing, showing indecent pictures, editing, printing, selling, giving, or lending unchaste books and romances, and by immodesty in dress; for all these things occasion impure thoughts and desires. Alas, what a number of people there are who give scandal in that way!

By acts and bad example.

Thirdly, scandal is given by act and example; and all those are guilty of it who, in presence of others, do a wrong action, which is apt to be imitated by them; thus, they who associate with, or support, persons of bad character; those who openly go to houses of bad repute; who allow or tolerate in their houses dangerous promiscuous gatherings, or permit those under their charge to take part in them; those who lead reckless lives, and give just reason for suspecting that they are addicted to a certain vice. Alas, how many there are who give scandal in that way! Thus sin is committed, especially by superiors and those in authority, when they give bad example. For, if the elders of the Jewish nation cried out against Our Lord in their madness,

“crucify Him, crucify Him,” what wonder is it that the common people joined in the cry? If the town-clock goes wrong, how can the other clocks, which must be regulated by it, keep the right time? Priests and religious are especially guilty in this respect, if they lead worldly, sensual, intemperate or scandalous lives; for, as Christ says, they must be “the salt of the earth,”<sup>1</sup> and by their good and edifying example keep the souls of others from the corruption of sin. How inexcusable they would be, says St. Gregory, if they gave bad example, and thus were a cause of ruin to souls! They must be, “the light of the world,”<sup>2</sup> to show others the way to virtue and to zeal in the divine service. What a perversion it would be, if, although they must give light to others, the latter were to see nothing to imitate in them, but vice and imperfection. They must be, and are in fact appointed by Christ in His Church, by which they live, as pastors of souls, whose lives are to be imitated by the members of their flock. What inconceivable malice it would be for them to lead the hellish wolf into the fold of Christ, by their bad example! In the same way too, parents are guilty of sin, who are not careful as to what they say or do in presence of their children; for thus the latter learn much evil that they should be ignorant of; and the same is to be said of those parents who have a habit of cursing or swearing, or are addicted to other vices, and thus are the occasion of their children acquiring a habit of sin, and transmitting it to their posterity. Alas, it is but too true that many children have no worse spiritual enemies, than their own fathers and mothers!

Fourthly, scandal may be given by omission, that is, by not preventing sin when it is in one’s power to do so; thus they are guilty of scandal-giving, who tolerate houses of ill fame, or do not punish or remove abuses from a community, when they are bound to do so by virtue of their office; masters and mistresses sin by not training their children and servants in the fear of God, by not punishing them for wrong-doing, by not keeping them away from dangerous occasions, and by not instructing, or causing them to be instructed, in good. Alas, how many there are who give scandal by negligence of that kind, and deliver over precious souls into the hands of the devil! Fifthly, scandal may be given through culpable ignorance. Many imagine, if they do no harm themselves, and do not wish to give scandal to others, or to lead them into sin, that they are all

By omission  
and culpa-  
ble igno-  
rance.

<sup>1</sup> *Ses terræ.*

<sup>2</sup> *Lux mundi.*

right, and have nothing to answer for. What have I to do with other people? they say. If they find an occasion of sin in my actions or behavior, it is due to their own malice; I do what pleases me, and I conform to the general custom; I have not the least intention of giving them scandal. A likely thing indeed! What is the value of your intention? "Shall we be any better off," asks St. Peter Damian, "if we are damned for the sins of others, although not for our own," when we could and should have prevented the sins of others? "Few sins, indeed, are committed by you," wrote St. Augustine once to a certain nobleman, "but many on account of you." After Berengarius had renounced heresy, and had done penance for his other sins, and when he was on his death-bed, ah, he said, now I must appear before the judgment-seat of God, and give an account of my past life! As far as my own sins are concerned, I hope to stand well with my Judge, for I have repented of and detested them with my whole heart; but as to the sins which I have caused others to commit by my false teaching and bad example, I am afraid I shall be lost on account of them! Alas, how many there are who will have to make the same confession at the hour of death!

Even by actions that are in themselves lawful.

Even by actions that are lawful in themselves scandal may be given, if there is reasonable cause for suspecting that others will find an occasion of sin in them. There was no law in former times, nor is there any law now, forbidding the eating of meat which has been offered to idols; the meat is just as good as before; and yet, since the early Christians refused to eat it, because they wished to have no fellowship with heathens or idolaters, St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "Wherefore, if meat scandalize my brother, I will never eat flesh, lest I should scandalize my brother."<sup>3</sup> Although there is no law against it, yet the law of fraternal charity forbids me to do it. What a fearful amount of scandal is thus given by actions which are lawful in themselves, but are rendered bad by circumstances! For instance, there are many actions and many subjects of conversation that are lawful to married people among themselves, but become sinful if others are present. Your friendship with that person may be harmless in itself, but are you not bound to break it off, so as to prevent scandal, if it gives rise to a sus-

<sup>1</sup> Quid nobis proderit, non damnari proprio peccato, si damnamur alieno?

<sup>2</sup> Pauca quidem per te, sed multa propter te.

<sup>3</sup> Quapropter, si esca scandalizat fratrem meum, non manducabo carnem in aeternum, ne fratrem meum scandalizem.—I. Cor. viii. 13.

pcion that you are committing sin? I do not intend leading others into sin, you say; and I believe you. For he would indeed be a man of the devil, and there are many such in the world, who would deliberately set about betraying his neighbor into sin. But that has nothing to do with your action; you may desire that no one should think evil; nevertheless you are guilty of the sin of scandal, if you do or say anything, or allow anything to be observed in your manner or behavior, that of its own nature, or by force of circumstances, is capable of enticing others to do evil.

For instance, a woman goes about, according to the detestable fashion of the day, with uncovered, or very lightly covered neck and shoulders. (Thanks be to God! there is a great improvement in that respect in this country.) She has no evil intention, she maintains; and her only object is to conform to the fashion. I quite believe her; but does that excuse her before God? She will find out that when she is summoned to judgment, no matter what the fashion is, even if all of her sex went about dressed in that way, she is still guilty of the sin of scandal, which no sound theology can excuse; for that style of dress is in itself apt to excite bad thoughts and desires. And here I do not wish to speak of a certain kind of dress, which is now very common amongst women, so that if any here present are dressed in that way, they need not be ashamed; but that dress owes its origin to nothing but the vain spirit of the world, which, to say the least of it, is opposed to the humble law of Jesus Christ, and it is very apt to give rise to bad thoughts and desires and thus be an occasion of sin. A few years ago, one could hardly look up, when meeting a fashionably dressed woman, so scantily was the upper portion of the body covered; now one can hardly look down, for the covering is deficient, on account of the hooped and puffed out dresses that are in vogue. I do not like to speak of this matter at all. I thought at first that that fashion was adopted for the sake of economy; but it appears that even more material is now required than formerly. Again I imagined that perhaps it was a comfortable style of dress; but in that too I was mistaken, for it seems that when those women are at home, they lay the hooped dress aside for comfort's sake; certainly they can move about more conveniently without it, as we see by the efforts they make, and the postures they assume, when trying to sit down or to get into a seat in church. The whole thing then is simply vanity, and a vanity

By vanity  
in dress.

which can easily occasion bad thoughts to unmortified people. Oh, hold your tongue, you say to me; there is no use in your talking about it! It is the fashion, and it is useless for you to try to preach it down! And I am afraid you are right, too; otherwise I should not have kept silence about the matter so long; as it is, I will say no more about it; I will not even mention the name of the dress.

In which amendment is to be vainly looked for.

Ah, my good God, have things come to such a pass, that one dare not speak out the truth plainly, and for the sole reason that, since no amendment can be hoped for, they who would otherwise learn their obligations may not be punished more severely, and be less excusable before Thy judgment-seat! The floodgates are opened wide; no efforts can now keep back the torrent; the fashion is too general. Alas, it seems to me that I again hear the Jews crying out to Pilate, when he wished to free Our Lord: "We have a law, and according to the law, he ought to die."<sup>1</sup> But why? asks Pilate; what harm has He done? "I find no cause in Him."<sup>2</sup> No matter about that; we have a law, and according to it, He must die, even if He is innocent. In the same way, I say, people seem to me to act, when they allege the fashions as an excuse for indecency in dress. But, Christians, the fashions are opposed to the humble law of Jesus Christ! No matter; "we have a law, and according to the law He ought to die;" we have our fashions and customs, and according to them the spirit of Christ must die in us, and the spirit of His holy Gospel must be set aside. But your fashions give occasion to many eyes and hearts to crucify Jesus anew! We cannot help that; we have the fashion, and according to it, He must be crucified. Eyes may be scandalized, hearts may sin by bad desires, Jesus may have to die again; we must allow it to be so; the law of the world and the fashions require it. Christ Jesus, hear what is said by Thy Christians, who profess to be Thy children and followers! But what is the use of my giving up the fashions? each one thinks; others will still adhere to them, and then I shall have to be ashamed of myself; and so they all remain as they were before. Why then do you not say: what is the use of my entering on the narrow way that leads to Heaven? All the others will continue to walk on the broad way to hell; and then I shall have to be ashamed of myself to go to Heaven alone? What is the use of my being the only one to

<sup>1</sup> Nos legem habemus, et secundum legem debet mori.—John xix. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Nullam inventio in eo causam.—Ibid. 4.

abstain from giving scandal? All the others will give it, and I shall have to be ashamed of being the only one who is not an occasion of sin to others? No; you should rather say: let others go where they will, I am determined to enter on the way of humility, and to follow in the footsteps of Our Lord and His servants; let others undertake to be responsible for the sins they cause their neighbor to commit, I will look to myself, and see that I have nothing to answer for; let others follow the vain fashions of the world, I have but one soul, which I must and will bring to Heaven by the surest road. If each one would come to this determination, the objectionable fashion would soon be abolished. But people prefer to go with the crowd; "we have a law," they say. Now, dearest Saviour, what can I do? I must even let them have their way!

But I hear Thee crying out, and threatening. "Woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh," no matter in what manner it is given! Woe to him who is the occasion of sin to others, either by word or deed, by signs or outward behavior, according to or against the fashion, with or without a malicious intention! Woe to that man from Me! The time will come when I will demand from him an account of the labors I underwent, the blood I shed, the death I suffered, which he made profitless to so many souls. Woe to that man from the souls that are scandalized and betrayed into sin by him! The time will come when they will cry out for vengeance against him, and I will hear their cry, and avenge them. Woe to that man from the very demons whom he joined, and whose interests he promoted! The time will come when he will be their companion in eternal torments.

Woe to all who in any way give scandal.

Oh no, my God, let it not go so far as that! I hope for better things from Thy endless mercy, which I can still move by my repentance and tears! I acknowledge that I have dug a pit for many a soul, by my bad example! Perhaps there are now souls in hell who are lost through me. Oh woe to me, if that is the case! I can bewail my own sins, but an ocean of tears could not extinguish the flames of hell. What am I to do? I give Thee my soul, O Lord, as a pledge; avenge Thyself on it, but during this life, and according to the measure of Thy mercy. I will be more careful in future not to give any one knowingly the least occasion to sin; and I will work with all possible zeal to keep others from sin, and to incite them to good by giving them an edifying example, that I may bring them with me to Thee in Heaven. Amen.

Resolution of amendment.

*Another Introduction to the same sermon for the Feast of St. Thomas, Apostle.*

**Text.**

*Nisi videro in manibus ejus fixuram clavorum . . . non credam.*  
John xx. 25.

“Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails . . . I will not believe.”

What a number of sins St. Thomas committed by making that resolution! First of all he was guilty of incredulity, since he did not believe the repeated assurances of Our Lord that He would rise again, and would not admit that the Resurrection had really been accomplished; secondly, of obstinacy, since he persisted in his wrong opinion, although the other Apostles and the holy women had told him that they had actually seen and spoken with the Lord; thirdly, of presumption, because he dared to prescribe to Our Lord the manner in which he was to be convinced of the truth: “except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe;” fourthly, of scandal, which he gave all the other disciples by his obstinacy, so that doubtless many of them were impatient, angry and discontented; nay, some of them may have commenced to doubt about the truth of Our Lord’s resurrection, and to think that they had perhaps seen a spirit instead of Him. It is not my purpose now, my dear brethren, to decide which of these sins is the most grievous; but I think the sin of scandal is one of the worst; for to take scandal is mostly a consequence of human weakness, etc. *Continues as before.*

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*SIXTIETH SERMON.*

**ON THE EVIL EFFECTS OF SCANDAL.**

**Subject.**

They who give scandal are sworn enemies and bitter opposers of Christ and of the holy angels guardian; therefore, woe to them!—*Preached on the Feast of the Holy Angels Guardian.*

**Text.**

*Vae homini illi per quem scandalum venit.*—Matth. xviii. 7.  
“Woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh.”

**Introduction.**

Not without reason has the Catholic Church appointed the gospel of to-day to be read on the Feast of the holy angels guardian; for when we consider the matter rightly, we shall see that there is no sin which Christ and His holy angels hate more than scandal-giving; nay, they have no greater enemies on earth than those by whom scandal comes. For the latter, instead of being grateful to their Saviour and to their faithful guardians for the countless benefits received from them every day and moment of their lives, ally themselves with the devil and make war on Christ and His angels, as I shall now prove without further introduction. I speak now, my dear brethren, of scandal in general, no matter how it is given, and I say:

**Plan of Discourse.**

*They who give scandal are sworn enemies and bitter opponents of Christ and of the holy angels guardian; therefore, "woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh!" Such is the whole subject.*

Christ Jesus, and you, heavenly spirits, help me to-day to defend your honor against those enemies of yours, and to gain a victory over their minds! This I beg especially of thee, O Mary Queen of angels, that none of those who are here present may be in the number of the unhappy wretches against whom that curse has been uttered, "woe to that man."

To give scandal and to be scandalized are two different things, one of which can be without the other. For instance, there are three of you together; one begins an impure conversation, and thus gives scandal to the other two; the second laughs at it, and consents to a bad thought; he is scandalized; the third is angry with both of them, and leaves their company; he commits no sin, but rather practises a work of virtue. From this we can see what little reason many pious souls have to grow uneasy, when they hear or see anything wicked that displeases them, and to complain that they have been scandalized. What nonsense that is! How have you been scandalized? Have you committed a sin on account of what you have heard or seen? By no means. You have been disgusted and angry at the sin committed by others, and therefore, instead of committing sin, you have rather done a meritorious action. Being scandalized, then, means to offend God on account of some action or omis-

In what scandal-giving consists.

sion on the part of others; while to give scandal means to do or omit something which gives or can give occasion of sin to another. This latter is the vice that Christ warns us against, in the gospel; a vice that, grievous as it is, is unfortunately only too common in the world nowadays amongst people of all classes; so that one might almost say with truth that one half of the world gives scandal, and the other half suffers from it, and thus, on account of scandal, the whole world is in a state of sin.

How scandal is given.

I should require a whole day for my sermon, if I were to explain the different ways in which this sin is committed, even by people who do not actually intend committing it. I shall briefly repeat what I have said more at length on a former occasion on this subject; for there are many who hear a sermon about the wickedness of a certain vice, and yet do not know how that vice is committed, so that they can neither know what faults and sins they are guilty of in that way, nor amend them. Be attentive, then, to what I am about to say. Scandal can be given by words, and all those are guilty of it who command, advise, urge, or request their neighbor to do something unlawful; also all who try to dissuade others from doing works of Christian piety and virtue; all who praise and approve of the evil done by others, and encourage them in doing it; all who condemn or revile others for being pious; all who boast of their sins, relate unchaste stories, or sing impure songs; all who vilify others knowingly, so as to make them angry; and so on. Scandal can be given by signs, by winking, laughing, writing impure letters, exposing indecent pictures to view, selling, giving, or lending bad books and love tales, indecency in dress, etc. Scandal can be given by act and example, by committing sin in presence of others, by purchasing stolen goods from the thief, by helping to commit sin, by keeping suspicious characters, or frequenting houses of ill fame, by encouraging or permitting dangerous gatherings, or allowing those under one's charge to take part in them, etc. Scandal can be given by omission, by not hindering evil when possible, by superiors not correcting and abolishing abuses and vices, by parents not instructing their children and servants in good, and not punishing them for their sins. In a word, scandal can be given by saying, doing, or omitting anything which, of its own nature or by force of circumstances, is capable of leading others into any kind of sin, although there be no intention of leading them astray, although no sin actually follows.

Woe to all men by whom scandal comes! Woe to them, if it were only because they take sides with the devil against Christ and His angels, who seek nothing so earnestly as the glory of God and the salvation of souls! In both these objects they are opposed by scandal-givers, who try to rob them of souls, and God of glory. The angels are commissioned by Jesus Christ to guard from evil and to encourage to good the souls entrusted to them; to that end they make use of inward inspirations and admonitions, by which our understanding learns divine truths and experiences the sweet impulse and movement by which the will is impelled to good, and the salutary uneasiness which warns us so often when we are in danger of sin. All this is to the end that we may progress more and more in the way of salvation. But how do the partisans of the devil, that is scandal-givers, act? Their object is to teach wickedness to innocent souls, and thus to lead them astray. David calls such people teachers who "sit in the chair of pestilence:" "Blessed is the man who hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the chair of pestilence."<sup>1</sup> What is that chair of pestilence, and who are they that sit thereon? St. Bernard answers in the following words: "He sits thereon, who teaches others to sin by his example."<sup>2</sup> Why does the Prophet call it a chair of pestilence, and not of impiety? Because, answers St. Basil, there are two kinds of sin; some are like ordinary maladies, which hurt only the person who suffers them; others are like a plague, which spreads its contagion among many. "The Holy Scripture," he says, "calls those sinners pestilential, who not only destroy themselves, but spread among others the plague that infects them."<sup>3</sup> It is certain that most souls preserve their innocence and piety, because they know little or nothing of certain vices. Many children who are educated in convents preserve their innocence to their old age, and even to the grave, who, if they had lived in the tumult of the world, where they would have seen, heard, and learned wickedness, would have been led into many kinds of sin, and have been lost forever. Take a child ten or twelve years old; I ask you, if that child never heard an impure conversation, would it know how to talk impurely? If it never heard cursing or

He who gives scandal strives against Christ and the holy angels to ruin souls.

<sup>1</sup> Beatus vir. qui non abiit in consilio impiorum, et in via peccatorum non stetit, et in cathedra pestilentiae non sedit.—Ps. i. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Sedet, qui docet exemplo suo, faciens peccare alios.—S. Bern. Serm. 35, ex parvis.

<sup>3</sup> Pestilentes solet scriptura vocare, qui non solum seipsos perdunt, sed etiam in alios peste suam juxta pestilentis morbi rationem transferunt.—S. Basil in Ps. 1.

swearing, would it know how to use impious language? If it never was tempted to impurity by others, and knew not how sins of that kind are committed, would it be guilty of them? And if young people are dissolute in their morals, they have learned to be so from others; children learn it from grown-up people, and these latter from their seniors. See what a plague is spread in a community by those agents of the devil who give scandal!

He is worse  
than the  
devil in this  
respect.

Why do I call them agents of the devil? The name is far too good for them; they do more to lead souls astray, than the devil himself. When Bajazet II., sultan of Turkey, had defeated the Christian forces at Nicopolis, he caused six hundred of the noblest among the French prisoners to be slain before his eyes. He had ordered John, Duke of Burgundy, who was also a prisoner, to be slain with the others, when a certain pasha stood up and said to him: Sire, let this man go free, and he will destroy more Christians than our whole army could. And the event proved that he was right; for the duke afterwards caused such dissensions and wars throughout the whole of France, that more people lost their lives, than the Mussulmans could ever have cut down with their scimiters. The same can truly be said of those who give scandal. One of them gains more for hell, and destroys more souls, than a hundred demons could, with all their temptations and snares. Which of you, my dear brethren, can say that an evil spirit has given him a bad example, and thereby led him into sin? Who can say the devil has taught me this or that vice? You have never seen one of those fallen spirits, and if one were to appear to you, you would run away through fear and terror of him? But are there not many who must acknowledge that they have been led to offend God by the treachery of their fellow-men? Thus, what the demon cannot do by himself to destroy souls, he effects by the help of scandal-givers. What caused the fall of our forefather Adam? The hellish serpent did not dare to tempt him, knowing well that he was too wise to yield to temptation, but when Eve came up to him with her flatteries and caresses, after having eaten the forbidden fruit, his ruin and that of us all was at once effected. In the History of the Church we read of holy men, such as Macarius, James, John, and others, who, after having spent long years in the desert and in the mountain caves, practising the greatest austerities, fell into the most shameful crimes. Who caused their fall? The devil cannot boast of having done it; he had made repeated attacks on them; he had appeared to them in the shape of a lion, an

ox, a swine; he had beaten them till they were half dead, but he could not gain a single victory over them; an abandoned woman was able to do more than all the demons in hell, to make those men offend God and fall into the most grievous sins. So powerful is scandal to destroy souls; and the devil, with all his rage against souls and all his craft in tempting them, would often fail to succeed, were it not that he calls in scandal-givers to help him.

“Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire,”<sup>1</sup> says God by the Prophet Isaias. Who is that smith? He is the devil, answers St. Jerome, who kindles the fire of anger and impurity in the hearts of men. And how is that fire kindled? Go into a smith’s forge, and you will see that the fire is hidden under the ashes, as if it were quite extinguished; what does the smith do, when he wishes to go on with his work? Does he start the fire by blowing it with his breath? If he trusted to that alone, it would take him a long time to make the iron red-hot! No; he works the bellows two or three times, and the fire blazes up at once. What the smith cannot do by himself, he does by means of the bellows. In the same way does that hellish smith, the devil, act. How many innocent souls there are who, happy in their ignorance, do not yet know anything about impurity, anger, or vindictiveness! Evil inclinations and desires are, as it were, dead within them, like coals under the ashes, and the devil, who cannot bear to see them so innocent, attacks them and suggests bad thoughts to them; they, however, do not understand or know the meaning of such thoughts, and the temptation has no effect on them. What does the tempter then do? He blows his bellows, he makes use of some dissolute companion to explain to those innocent souls the evil they were hitherto in ignorance of, or to place the evil really before them by bad example or indecent pictures, and thus the flames of passion are fanned, the fire of impurity, of bad thoughts and desires blazes up, and burns so fiercely, that many years may elapse before it is extinguished. The devil is also compared to a hunter, who goes out to ensnare souls. A huntsman may go about for a long time with his gun or his snares, before he finds any game, because it all lies hidden in the bush. What does he do then? He takes a dog with him to start the game, and then he can easily secure it. Oh, how many a young girl spends her time in modest retirement at home, oc-

Shown by  
smiles.

<sup>1</sup> Ecce, ego creavi fabrum sufflantem in igne prunas.—Isai. liv. 16.

cupied with her usual work, without a wanton glance being ever cast at her, without the devil, in spite of all his efforts, being able to turn her mind away from the service of God and the practice of virtue! But how long does that last? Until some hellish dog finds her out and tempts her; some traitor, under the pretext of courtesy, friendship, or relationship, begins to speak to her at first in a most innocent manner; then he goes on to flattery, and last of all to scandalous talk and behavior; and eventually he brings matters so far, that she leaves her solitude, stands idly at the door, and mixes freely with the opposite sex. Alas, the hellish hunter of souls has succeeded in ensnaring her!

Therefore  
he is more  
to be feared  
than the  
devil.

O you wicked teachers of evil, who give scandal to others, are you not ashamed to think that you are worse even than the devil? Are you not afraid to act the part of incendiaries of hearts? Are you not terrified at the impious war you wage against Christ and His angels, endeavoring, as you do, to rob them of, and to ruin, human souls that have cost them such care and trouble? It would be better for us, if God were to open the gates of hell, and to allow all the demons to roam about the world in visible shape to tempt man to sin! Better, I say, and safer for us; for the just, in their fright, could and would easily defend themselves by the sign of the Cross, and by calling on Christ and His angels for protection. But when you, wicked men, attack innocent souls so secretly and treacherously, who can be sufficiently on his guard against you? Where can one fly, to be safe from your machinations? See, O dear Lord, “they have destroyed the things which Thou hast made;”<sup>1</sup> the good Thou hast built up in souls by means of Thy angels, they with Thy sworn enemy pull down! The precious souls, ransomed with Thy Blood, which Thou and Thy angels wish to bring to Heaven, are hurled by those traitors into the abyss of hell! Oh, “woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh.” What a terrible crime it is to lead others into sin!

He strives  
against  
Christ and  
His angels  
by spread-  
ing sin and  
vice.

The next charge laid on the holy angels, as ambassadors of Jesus Christ, and which they so carefully endeavor to fulfil, is to promote the honor and glory of their Creator, by spreading His name and His praises everywhere, by upholding His authority throughout the world, and exhorting all men to serve and adore Him, so that all may bless their Creator here in time and hereafter in eternity. O blessed spirits, what glorious things

<sup>1</sup> Quæ perfectisti, destruxerunt.—Ps. x. 4.

could you not do in fulfilling this office of yours, were it not for the scandal given by wicked men! For these latter are building up another kingdom in the world, the kingdom of the devil, the kingdom of the sins which they sow broadcast and spread everywhere by their bad example; they deprive virtue of its lustre, and vice of its shame, and thus vast numbers of people are made to dishonor their Creator during this life, and to be cursed by Him in the next. Let us see, my dear brethren, whether I am saying too much. If all were like the small number of whom the Prophet David says: "Much peace have they that love Thy law; and to them there is no stumbling block,"<sup>1</sup> because they pay no attention to what others do or say, but always mind what they have to do themselves, then indeed, (and would to God it were so in reality!) I should confess that I have said too much; but who does not see and experience the immense power of bad example, and how it draws others like a strong chain? "How easily," says St. Ambrose, "one goes astray when one has a bad guide!"<sup>2</sup> And this is all the more apt to occur, because, unfortunately, our nature is more inclined to evil than to good. Thus the words we read in the book of Jeremias are verified: "Lift up thy eyes on high; and see where thou hast not prostituted thyself; thou didst sit, in the ways, waiting for them as a robber in the wilderness, and thou hast polluted the land with thy fornication, and with thy wickedness;"<sup>3</sup> for a whole country or town is sometimes polluted by the scandal given by one individual. Because, as Sanchez remarks, if there is only one who sins publicly, or entices to sin, many others sin at once through him; for some sin by keeping silence and not decriing his wickedness, others by approving of it, others again by the uncharitable talk it gives rise to, and the greater number by imitating the bad example set them.

Hence it is that one is easily inclined to do what one, without being astonished thereby, hears of and sees others doing. A stranger on a journey comes to a river that he has to cross; he cannot find a bridge, nor does he know whether the river is deep or not, so that he is afraid to ford it. He walks along the bank for a time, and at length notices the traces of footsteps leading down to the water; he is overjoyed at this, and at once ventures

Which, on account of the scandal given, are committed openly and without shame.

<sup>1</sup> Pax multa diligentibus legem tuam, et non est illis scandalum.—Ps. cxviii. 165.

<sup>2</sup> Cito malis ducibus erratur.—S. Ambr. de fuga sæculi. c. ult.

<sup>3</sup> Leva oculos tuos in directum, et vide, ubi non prostrata sis; in viis sedebas, expectans eos quasi latro in solitudine, et polluisti terram in fornicationibus tuis, et in mallis tuis.—Jer. liii. 2.

in. Foolish man! wait: how do you know that you will be able to get across? Oh, I see that others have been here before me, and where they crossed, I can cross too. But are you sure that they reached the opposite bank alive, and were not carried down by the stream? He does not stop to consider that; he rushes in, gets into a deep place, and is drowned. The footsteps led him astray. Oh, you who give scandal, into what a raging, hellish sea you plunge, whenever you commit mortal sin! You dishonor your God, you kill your precious souls, you ruin yourselves completely! But that is not all; you leave behind treacherous footsteps to mislead those who follow, and thus you involve many souls in the same destruction with yourselves, as St. Gregory complains: "when by our works we give scandal to others, we go out of our way as it were, to leave footsteps, to lead astray those who follow us."<sup>1</sup> How many would never have entered on the way of sin, if they had not been led astray by the footsteps of others! At first a pious soul is horrified at the very name of this or that vice. Shall I do that? she asks herself. If you do, says her conscience, you will be ruined. But meanwhile she notices the footsteps of others, their examples and the customs they conform to, and her horror is gone at once! Where they have gone, she thinks, surely I may go. A well-reared child is horrified at the first oath or curse it hears; but if it grows accustomed to such language from its father at home, or from other children in the street, it will begin to curse and swear too; if my parents or the servants curse, it thinks, why should not I? A modest, innocent young girl is disgusted at anything approaching impurity; but if she hears unchaste conversation, attends promiscuous gatherings, in which the laws of purity are certainly not too strictly observed, or sees others behaving improperly, and if she hears and sees such things frequently, she will think that, since so many do those things, there cannot be much harm in them, and there will soon be an end to her former modesty and reserve. An innocent young man avoids dangerous company and suspicious houses; he is invited to such places by others, laughed at as wishing to appear a saint if he refuses to go, and at last he accepts the invitation. A man of a peaceful disposition hates nothing more than quarrelling and fighting; he knows that it is unchristian to return evil for evil; but he sees how the children of the world fight and quarrel, and become bitter enemies for a single word of contradiction; he hears

<sup>1</sup> Quasi inflexo extra viam pede sequentibus vestigia distrata relinquimus, dum per nostra ad scandalum aliena corda provocamus.—S. Greg. L. ii. Moral. c. 25.

that they who bear injuries patiently, without trying to have satisfaction for them, are laughed at as cowards, and he too goes the way of the world. A business man, whose tender conscience at first makes him uneasy, lest he might now and then be guilty of an injustice, notices the footsteps of others, and sees how they are accustomed to act under certain circumstances; oh, he thinks, they have a conscience too; why should it not be lawful for me to do as they do? there is no other way of getting through the world nowadays; and so he acts as he sees others acting. Thus a countless multitude of souls are daily hurried to eternal ruin.

But if the bad example is also given by those who are in high positions, and they, whose bounden duty it is to punish vices and abuses, overlook them, and actually indulge in them, oh, then, indeed, the devil has all he wants; then all remonstrance and preaching are useless; there is no hope of amendment; vice has received the stamp of authority, and it can almost prescribe against the divine law; it loses even, so to speak, all its sinfulness, and passes for virtue. Hence, says Salvianus, it is looked on as dishonorable amongst Christians to live piously according to the maxims of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and men are almost driven to lead vicious lives according to the general custom, and to be ashamed of serving God, lest they should be ridiculed. In my youth, he says, I ran so blindly on in the way of sin, that I was ashamed to appear less wicked than others. I heaped sin upon sin, not merely for the sake of pleasure, but that I might be more praised and esteemed; and when I saw that others surpassed me in wickedness, I pretended that I had committed deeds of shame, of which I really was not guilty, and boasted of them, because I dreaded appearing more chaste, innocent, or pious than others. See, he concludes, what company brought me to! My dear brethren, how many vices are prevalent now in the world, which, by dint of frequent repetition, no longer cause shame, and are looked upon as honorable, so that there is no hope of amendment as far as they are concerned! If one were to come into this world for the first time, and to see a drunken man, he would think he was looking at a wild beast; but how do people in our dear fatherland look on drunkenness now? They have so many footsteps before them leading in that direction, that it is hardly deemed a disgrace any longer to say of a man that he is drunk. It is considered an honor to be able to make a man drunk. If one of our Christian forefathers were to rise from his grave, and to go into many cities of Europe,

Until all  
shame is  
lost.

and, alas, of Germany (I will not come any nearer home), and to hear the horrible oaths and curses which old and young daily utter against each other, would he think that he was in the country in which he was born and bred? Would he not rather imagine himself to be in a kind of hell, in which nothing is heard but imprecations, curses and blasphemies? If he saw how freely and openly young people of both sexes associate with each other, and the vain fashions in dress that have been invented by the devil for the destruction of souls, would he think that he was in the same town in which he lived formerly? Would he not rather imagine that he was in some part of the world, where half-clad savages roam about? But all that has become the fashion now; it is an honorable, a respectable thing to conform to it, and any arguing against it is only a waste of time and words. What God will have to say hereafter of those fashions, we shall find out too late. I will say nothing more of this, since I am speaking of scandal in general. Meanwhile, "woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh!"

Thus the labor of the holy angels is frustrated.

Ah, dear angels, what is the good of your coming down from Heaven to us, as ambassadors of Christ? Why do you remain always at our side? Why do you spend the whole day and the whole night watching over the salvation of our souls? Why do you take such trouble to keep us from evil, to urge us to good, and to promote the honor and glory of God? What is the good of it all? We miserable mortals put to shame all your diligence, care, and trouble; we labor, by word, and work, and example, to keep out of your society the souls you love so much, to deliver them over to the devil, and to banish from the world the honor and glory of your Creator and ours! Is it possible, my dear brethren, that Christians are guilty of such wickedness? It is no wonder that the devil persecutes virtue, for he has long since despaired of ever seeing God; that he tempts souls and tries to lead them into sin, we can readily understand, for he is full of bitter hatred against God, who has condemned him to hell for ever; that he opposes Jesus Christ need not astonish us, for he is driven out everywhere by the Sacred Name; nor is it surprising that he who is full of envy should try to prostrate the efforts of the holy angels, because he is banished out of Heaven and their society forever, and has nothing to hope for any more; but how can a Christian, who still has hopes of eternal salvation, who has been redeemed from hell by the Blood of Jesus Christ, who receives so many benefits every day, hour, and mo-

ment from the holy angels, and who is in such extreme need of their protection and guardianship,—how can such a one dare try to throw down what they are building up?

“Woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh!” Woe to him! I will not now say from God, from the souls he has betrayed, or from the demons; but woe to him from the holy angels! How can they wish to guard him, if he acts as their enemy? “Behold,” says God, “I will send My angel, who shall go before thee, and keep thee in thy journey, and bring thee into the place that I have prepared;”<sup>1</sup> but, “take notice of him, and hear his voice, and do not think him one to be contemned.”<sup>2</sup> Why? “For he will not forgive when thou hast sinned.”<sup>3</sup> And what revenge will he take, when, besides sinning yourself, you lead into sin the soul entrusted to his care? In truth, if, as Christ says, the conversion of one soul causes the angels such joy,—“I say to you, there shall be joy before the angels of God upon one sinner doing penance,”<sup>4</sup>—how great must be your sorrow, O blessed spirits, when a soul is lost eternally? Ninety-nine times greater than your joy at ninety-nine just. Imagine, my dear brethren, the anger of a mother with the servant who, through mere wantonness, allows her little son to fall out of her arms on the ground, so that he hurts himself, and is lamed. How, then, can an angel look on him who ruins eternally the beloved soul entrusted to his care by Christ? “See,” says Our Lord, speaking against scandal, “that you despise not one of these little ones; for I say to you that their angels in Heaven always see the face of My Father who is in Heaven;”<sup>5</sup> that is, according to the interpretation of St. John Chrysostom: be on your guard, for the angels before the throne of God will cry out for vengeance against you, if you scandalize or injure a single soul.

Woe to you on your death-bed, when you are most in need of the help of the holy angels! Even the holiest men look on that anxious hour as a terrible and dangerous one; what must it then be for you, who have so often troubled the angels, and turned them against you? How will it be with you when you are on the threshold of eternity, and the prayer for your departing soul

Woe to the scandal-giver in this life from the angels.

Woe in the hour of death and at the last judgment.

<sup>1</sup> Ecce ego mittam angelum meum, qui præcedat te, et custodiat in via, et introducat in locum quem paravi.—Exod. xxiii. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Observa eum, et audi vocem ejus, nec contemnendum putes.—Ibid. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Quia non dimittet cum peccaveris.—Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Dico vobis: Gaudium erit coram angelis Dei super uno peccatore poenitentiam agente.—Luke xv. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Videte, ne contemnatis unum ex his pusillis, dico enim vobis: quia angeli eorum in oculis semper vident faciem patris mei, qui in caelis est.—Matth. xviii. 10.

is being said, "May the holy angels of God meet him, and lead him into the heavenly city."<sup>1</sup> You will be forced to remember that you opposed those very angels during your life. Woe to you in the particular judgment, in which, according to the opinion of the holy Fathers, the Archangel Michael will be the judge in place of Jesus Christ! What answer will you make when he asks you, what has become of the soul you have betrayed, when he will require that soul at your hands? Will you answer him like the fratricide Cain: "am I my brother's keeper?" That is what the children of the world say; what are others to me? they ask; I sin on my own account; I have no desire to lead others astray, etc. Certainly, the judge will answer, you are to blame for the ruin of that soul; your wicked talk, your flattery, your bad example has destroyed that soul, and many others too; I now require all these souls at your hands. What answer will you make? Woe to you, finally, in the general judgment, when the Son of God Himself will come and, as He says in the Gospel of St. Matthew, "the Son of man shall send His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all scandals."<sup>2</sup> If these angels do not find amongst the elect the souls entrusted to their care, because through you those souls are lost, where will you fly from their anger? How will you be able to account for the number of sins that have been committed through the scandal given by you? Hear what will happen to you: "and shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth;"<sup>3</sup> in that eternal fire, of which Our Lord says elsewhere, that it "was prepared for the devil and his angels."<sup>4</sup> But who are the angels of the devil? asks St. Cyril; they are, he answers, not only those unhappy spirits who fell from Heaven with Lucifer, but also those bad Christians who do the work of the devil by betraying others into sin; for them the eternal fires of hell have been prepared. Woe, and eternal woe, to that man by whom the scandal cometh!

Conclusion  
and ad-  
monition to  
those who  
give  
scandal.

What resource is there left for those who give scandal! None but this: you must give back the souls that you have filched away from Christ and His angels; and first of all, you must give back your own soul to God by a true repentance for your sins, and

<sup>1</sup> Veniant illi obviam sancti angeli Dei, et perducant eam in civitatem cœlestem.

<sup>2</sup> Num custos fratris mei sum ego?—Gen. iv. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Mittet Filius hominis angelos suos, et colligent de regno ejus omnia scandala.—Matth. xiii. 41.

<sup>4</sup> Et mittent eos in carnium ignis; ibi erit fletus et stridor dentium.—Ibid. 42.

<sup>5</sup> Qui paratus est diabolo, et angelis ejus.—Ibid. xxv. 41.

then you must endeavor to encourage others to virtue by edifying conversation, a pious life and good example, so that you may make some atonement for the loss you have caused by leading souls astray. Cannot the desire of your own salvation move you to this? Are you still resolved to offend your God? Have you renounced all hopes of Heaven? Does not the thought of an eternal hell inspire you with fear? Or have you made up your mind to be lost forever? If so, then have your own way; (alas, that I must say so, and how I pity your precious souls!) go on to your eternal destruction. But one thing I ask of you with God Himself: "let all your wicked doings suffice you;"<sup>1</sup> sin yourselves, but do not prevent others from doing good; let them save their souls, and do not drag them down to hell with you, for they will only increase your torments. If you are embittered against another, and are determined on having revenge, then I say to you, as God said to Satan, when the latter wished to have Job in his power to torment as he pleased: "Behold he is in thy hand, but yet save his life."<sup>2</sup> Go, impious man, and revenge yourself on your neighbor; I cannot prevent you from doing that; attack him in his honor, his property, his body; persecute and torment him as you will; but do not touch his soul; do not disturb his conscience; do not, by your scandalous example, make him rebel against God; do not keep him out of Heaven, nor drag him down to hell with yourself!

But you, just and pious souls, protect yourselves and those under your care from those wicked men, who join with the devil against Jesus Christ and His holy angels! Avoid their company and keep others away from them, for they seek your destruction. Fly most carefully every one who gives scandal. Hold fast to Christ and your angel guardian with childlike confidence. Pray daily with the Prophet David: "Keep me from the snare which they have laid for me, and from the stumbling blocks of them that work iniquity."<sup>3</sup> I give my soul over to thee, O dearest angel! Preserve it from all danger of sin; inspire me with inward fear and dread of that house, that company, in which my soul might suffer harm; rather tear out my eyes, than allow them to rest on dangerous objects that might be a scandal to me; cut off my hand, rather than allow it to stretch itself forth to do what might lead me into sin; cut off

Exhortation  
to the just  
and inno-  
cent.

<sup>1</sup> Sufficiant vobis omnia scelera vestra.—Ezech. xliv. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Ecce in manu tua est, verumtamen animam illius serva.—Job. ii. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Custodi me a laqueo, quem statuerunt mihi, et a scandalis operantium iniquitatem.—Ps. cxl. 9.

my foot, rather than allow me to go where I may be betrayed into offending God! And if I have by my actions given scandal and occasion of sin to others, and thus perhaps robbed you of a soul, oh, I am heartily sorry for it! I offer you my own soul as a pledge that I will make restitution to you by sincere repentance, that I will carefully avoid the least word or sign that might lead others into sin, and that I will endeavor, by giving them good example, to encourage them to fear the Lord, so that instead of the sorrow I have caused you by giving scandal, you may have all the more joy, on account of my soul, as well as the souls of others; that thus I may have you as guardians during life, as helpers in the hour of death, and as companions in a happy eternity. Amen.

*Another Introduction to the same sermon for the Sunday within the Octave of Christmas.*

Text.

*Ecce positus est hic in ruinam et in resurrectionem multorum in Israel.*—Luke ii. 34.

“Behold this Child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel.”

That Jesus is set for the resurrection of many to eternal life, is not wonderful; for He it is, “who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from Heaven, and was made man;” He it is who says of Himself: “the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost:”<sup>1</sup> and again: “I am come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly.”<sup>2</sup> But that the same Jesus should be set for the fall of many, how am I to understand that? And yet it is the infallible truth, which St. Paul assures us of, writing to the Corinthians: “but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews indeed a stumbling block, and unto the Gentiles, foolishness;”<sup>3</sup> for the majority refused to believe in Him, and thus becoming hardened in wickedness, were lost forever, instead of being saved through Him. How many Christians, even, there are, for whose fall Jesus is set, because, although they acknowledge Him to be the true God, they do not honor Him as they ought, and are ashamed to follow His example; so that the life of Christ is to them only an

<sup>1</sup> Venit enim Filius hominis quærere, et saluum facere, quod perierat.—Luke xix. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Ego veni, ut vitam habeant, et abundantius habeant.—John x. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Nos autem prædicamus Christum crucifixum, Judæis quidem scandalum, gentibus autem stultitiam. I. Cor. 23.

occasion of a deeper damnation. But this is all contrary to the intention of our dearest Saviour, who came down from Heaven and suffered death, that all men might be saved; and therefore it was solely through their own malice that the Son of God was a stumbling block to the Jews and Gentiles; and it is still owing solely to the wickedness of Christians, that many of them turn away from Christ, and are lost forever. But how many Christians there are nowadays, my dear brethren, of whom one might say with truth, in another sense: behold, this man is placed, not for the resurrection, but for the fall, of many souls! They are those who deliberately go in opposition to Our Lord, and dig a pit for the souls of others, by giving them scandal and leading them into sin. I have already shown how wicked and how common this vice is; I have still something to add, in order to make its wickedness more evident.—*continues as before.*

# ON WICKED TONGUES.

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## SIXTY-FIRST SERMON.

### ON THE MULTIPLICITY OF SINS OF THE TONGUE.

#### Subject.

Many kinds of sins of the tongue are committed when speaking with others, against others, and of others.—*Preached on Easter Monday.*

#### Text.

*Qui sunt hi sermones quos confertis ad invicem?*—Luke xxiv. 17.  
“What are these discourses that you hold one with another?”

#### Introduction.

From the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh; if you wish to know what another has in his heart and mind, find out what he generally speaks of. The two disciples who were going to Emmaus were thinking of Jesus, and therefore they were speaking of Him; they were talking of all that had happened to Him, how He was condemned to death by the high-priests, and crucified; and why should it then surprise us to find that Jesus came up to them, and walked with them? For He had already promised them: “for where there are two or three gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.”<sup>1</sup> Happy disciples, who, because you were speaking of Christ, deserved, in preference to others, to have Him as your companion! “He was present amongst those who were speaking of Him,”<sup>2</sup> says St. Gregory in his homily on to-day’s gospel. My dear brethren, if we wish to know whether Jesus is present with His grace

<sup>1</sup> *Ubi enim sunt duo vel tres congregati in nomine meo, ibi sum in medio eorum.*—*Matth.* xviii. 20.

<sup>2</sup> *De se ergo loquentibus presentiam exhibuit.*

during our conversations at home, out walking, and in company, we have only to consider what is the subject of our conversation, and of whom and how we are talking. To this end I will examine now, as far as time allows, the conversations usually carried on in the world nowadays; and to proceed in due order, I will divide them into three classes, as follows:

#### Plan of Discourse.

*What are the discourses that we generally hold one with another? That will be the first question. What are the discourses we hold against others who are present? The second question. What are the discourses we hold of others, who are absent? The third question. The conscience of each one, and daily experience will supply the answers. But I am afraid that I shall have to come to a rather unsatisfactory conclusion, that, namely, there are very few companies in which God and His blessing are found; and I shall have to acknowledge that very many, when they are speaking, have not Jesus as their companion, but a far different personage. Still, I will venture to speak of this matter, that we may know what faults we are guilty of in conversation, sincerely repent of the sins we have hitherto committed by the tongue, keep that unruly member in check, and use it only to praise God.*

Give us Thy grace thereto, Christ Jesus, through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary and our holy angels guardian.

Alas, I hardly begin to examine the style of conversation prevalent nowadays, when I am driven to despair! Oh no, Christ is not amongst us; God is no longer with us; His blessing has left the world! It is the devil who is present during most of the conversations that are now carried on. Where shall I find those blessed lips, that the Lord promised by the Prophet Sophonias: "I will restore to the people a chosen lip, that all may call upon the name of the Lord."<sup>1</sup> Where is the society to be found, in which people talk of the praises of God, of Christ and His sufferings, of the saints, and of things advantageous to souls? Have I not reason to complain with the Prophet David: "They are all gone aside, they are become unprofitable together, there is none that doth good, no not one."<sup>2</sup> Why? he gives the reason: "their throat is an open sepulchre, with their tongues they acted deceitfully, the poison of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of

Generally speaking, the conversation of men nowadays is wicked.

<sup>1</sup> Reddam populus labium electum ut invocent omnes in nomine Domini.—Soph. iii. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Omnes declinaverunt, simul in utiles facti sunt: non est, qui faciat bonum; non est usque ad unum.—Ps. xlii. 3.

cursing and bitterness.”<sup>1</sup> And when you consider the matter duly, my dear brethren, must you not acknowledge that such is the case? What are the discourses that you daily hold, at home, in the streets, in business? Is Christ always present at them?

It consists  
of cursing  
and swear-  
ing.

Yet I need not ask you, nor do I require an answer. One need only go about to find how general is the habit of cursing and swearing. At almost every step you take you will hear imprecations and oaths from the soldier on guard, the peasant in the field, the boys in the streets, the tradesman in his workshop; masters and mistresses are ready with an imprecation if the servants do not obey the least sign; the servants in turn curse their employers, if they are told to do anything disagreeable. No work can be begun, nor a horse driven, unless the devil is called in to help. He is always on people's tongues; to him is consecrated not merely the tenth, but the third part, and even the half, of the words we use. It is looked on as an honor and glory to be an adept in cursing. Nay, there are in some families (and who would believe it, if experience did not teach us the truth of it) little children who can hardly stammer out words enough to ask for a bit of bread, and yet they know how to curse and swear. And after all, is that surprising? They hear nothing else from their parents, and of course they imitate them. It is the general style of conversation with their fathers and mothers, and consequently they are in the same state as those Hebrew children of whom we read in the Book of Esdras. When the Jews married women of other nations, their children could not speak the Hebrew language, so that it nearly died out: “And their children spoke half in the speech of Azotus, and could not speak the Jews' language, but they spoke according to the language of this people, and that people.”<sup>2</sup> Such is the case too, nowadays, unfortunately, in many households; because the parents are given to cursing and swearing, their Catholic children cannot speak the language of Catholics, but call on the devil, instead of saying the Lord's prayer. What a strict account will have to be rendered at the judgment seat of God by those parents, who are bound to teach their children how to praise and bless God!

Which is  
very unbecom-  
ing a  
Christian.

How unbecoming, how wicked for Christians, to indulge in language of that kind! Is the devil then so beautiful, so wor-

<sup>1</sup> Sepulchrum patens est guttur eorum : linguis suis dolose agebant, venenum aspidum sub labiis eorum; quorum os maledictione et amaritudine plenum est.—Ps. xlii. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Filii eorum ex media parte loquebantur Azotice, et nesciebant loqui Judæe, et loquebantur juxta linguam populi et populi.—II. Esd. xlii. 24.

thy of love, that he deserves to be always on one's lips? We are always ready to speak of what we love, and so it appears that the devil must have a place in the hearts of many, for they are continually speaking of him. Yet they need not do so, for that evil spirit is always at our side; he comes uninvited, and tries to do our souls all the harm he can; there is no necessity then for calling on him so often. Nay, in one way the devil is too good, or rather, I should say, God is too merciful; for if the Almighty allowed him to do what we often ask and desire of him, many a time he might have hurried us off alive into hell; thousands would be possessed by the devil; there would be hardly one in the whole town whose neck he would not have broken, according to the imprecations we give vent to under the influence of impatience, anger, vindictiveness, or malice. But go on with your cursing, wicked men; you will soon find that all your imprecations will fall on your own heads, according to the words of David: "He loved cursing, and it shall come unto him: and he would not have blessing, and it shall be far from him." "And he put on cursing like a garment. May it be unto him like a garment which covereth him, and like a girdle with which he is girded continually." Scarcity, unfruitful seasons, wars and famine, what wonder is it that you often reduce whole countries to extreme misery? The fearful curses that men are in the habit of uttering daily, would alone suffice to bring you upon a country; for what blessing can be expected from God, where there is nothing heard but oaths and imprecations? Nor must you try to excuse yourselves by saying that you mean no harm and that you curse only through habit; for that very reason, says St. John Chrysostom, your sin is greater, and you are under a stricter obligation to get rid of the bad habit. I am certain that if you were to give a halfpenny to a poor man every time an oath or a curse falls from your lips, you would conquer the habit in a few days, and you are bound in conscience to use some such means as that to free yourselves from it. Where such talk is carried on, Jesus is not present, nor is the blessing of God there.

What are those discourses that you hold one with another in your bickerings, when buying and selling, and making con-

Unneces-  
sary abjur-  
ations.

<sup>1</sup> *Dilexit maledictionem, et veniet ei: et noliit benedictionem et elongabitur ab eo.—Ps. cviii. 18.*

<sup>2</sup> *Induit maledictionem sicut vestimentum. Fiat et sicut vestimentum, quo operitur, et sicut zona, qua semper præcingitur.—Ibid. 18, 19.*

great God as a witness to everything you say, and constantly swear by your soul and its salvation? Swearing, says St. Augustine, is so wicked, that even blind heathens, who adored stocks and stones, were afraid to swear by their false gods, lest they should be punished for it. But who nowadays is afraid to call upon the living, Almighty, and all-just God to witness the truth of the most trivial things, and even in support of deliberate falsehood? Are there not many who forswear themselves a hundred times, before they once pray for their daily bread? Even if there is question of only a few pence, one is ready to swear by all that is sacred, that he cannot give it so cheaply, etc., as if we could secure temporal prosperity by transgressing the divine law! You would not dare, says St. Chrysostom, to call upon a man in high position as a witness in such matters; he would take it as an insult; but you do not hesitate to mention the King of Heaven and earth, at whose name the heavenly spirits tremble, as a witness in your business, your sports, or your conversation. I must do so, you say, or else people will not believe me, and I shall not be able to sell my wares. And do you think people believe you when you swear so horribly? They will be far less likely to trust you, and even if they have hitherto looked on you as an honest man, they will now begin to doubt you. You should follow the advice of St. Paul, and, like all good Christians, not go beyond yea and nay in your speech; then people would have a good opinion of you, and acknowledge that you are upright and honest. As it is, Christ has no part in your discourse, nor is the blessing of God on it.

Impure  
songs and  
conversa-  
tions.

What are those discourses that you hold in company, in public houses, when out walking and amusing yourselves, and when you are dancing and diverting yourselves in remote lanes and alleys? What sort of discourse, I ask, do you then either openly carry on, or secretly whisper into each other's ears? I am ashamed to allude to it, nor dare I examine this question at length, for fear of sullyng my own thoughts! But you know well enough what I mean; I am speaking of those shameless and foul-mouthed people, who, like cesspools, vomit out their filth on every one who has anything to do with them. "Was not our heart burning within us," said the two disciples who were going to Emmaus, as we read in to-day's gospel, "whilst He spoke in the way, and opened to us the Scriptures?"<sup>1</sup> Oh what

<sup>1</sup> Nonne cor nostrum ardens erat in nobis, dum loqueretur in via, et aperiret nobis Scripturas.—Luke xxiv. 32.

a different fire is set alight in the hearts of those who hear the abominable discourses that are held on the way to an impious Emmaus: a fire which comes from hell, and belongs to hell alone; they sing impure songs and, partly by gestures, partly by words, give expression to filthy ideas that no decent man ought to think of for a moment, much less speak of afterwards. Such filthy language is enough to make us forsake the world altogether. They think they cannot enjoy themselves, nor have a hearty laugh, unless obscenity has at share in their conversation.

Nor is the impure talk confined to the common people in public houses; for there is reason to fear that it may be heard also amongst those of the better class, not indeed in such coarse and unpolished words as the lower classes make use of, but in double-meaning expressions, which are even more dangerous and injurious. A violent wind often blows out a fire that has just began to light, but a gentle breeze fans it into a flame. In the same way, if a person uses coarse and impure language in company, a decent man who hears him would blush for shame and feel quite uncomfortable; and even if he had a secret pleasure in that kind of talk, still, for decency's sake, he is obliged to act as if he did not like it, and thus the other is soon reduced to silence. But if impure subjects are talked of in a hidden and polished manner, and by means of similes and figures, it is quite another matter; the conversation is then looked on as witty, and it is considered good taste to laugh at it, so that even they who do not know what it is about, join in the laugh; and so one word brings on another, and the filthy conversation is carried on for hours. When a thing of that kind is blurted out at once, every one knows what is meant, and there is an end of the matter; but when it is talked of covertly, and hidden under figures, the imagination at once sets to work, and the mind is filled with all sorts of impure thoughts, which are often worse than those suggested; thus the fire of impurity is made to burn more fiercely.

Double-meaning expressions, which are still more dangerous.

Certainly one would have to go somewhere out of this world altogether, if he wished to keep his ears from being sullied, so common is impure conversation. And what a disgrace that is! When we are in decent company, we abstain, as far as possible, from coughing and spitting; yet we do not hesitate to vomit forth filth of that kind! Is that language befitting the tongues of Christians, that are so often washed with the Blood of Jesus

Great scandal is thus given.

Christ? O wicked tongues, what a strict account you will have to render, not only for your own sins, but for the souls that you have led into sin by your wicked conversation! Do not try to excuse yourselves by saying that you have no bad intention, and that you only wish to raise a laugh. It is a laugh in which the devil joins! And how do those who listen to you know what intention you have? How do you know what foul thoughts and unchaste desires are excited in them by what you say? Alas, how many would still have preserved their baptismal innocence, if they had not happened to be present in company in which such impure conversation was indulged in! Why should you pour oil on the fire? Human nature is already only too much inclined to impurity; there is not the least necessity for your increasing that inclination. But woe to you, if you do increase it by your wicked tongues! If you wish to go to hell, then go, although I pity your poor souls; but do not interfere with those who are innocent, for if you betray them into sin by your filthy talk, they will increase the torments you will have to suffer for all eternity. I will say no more of this, my dear brethren, it is clear enough that not Christ, but the demon of impurity is present at such conversations.

Wicked talk about those who are present; namely, quarrelsome and bitter words.

To go on now to the second class: what are those discourses that you hold when visiting one another, against those who are present? Is Christ always present at them! Here I may remark, that there are many of whom one might say what Moses writes of Joseph's brethren, "they could not speak peaceably to him." Quarrelsome and bitter words that disturb peace, and injure Christian charity, how common you are! Hardly can a few people meet together, even if they are otherwise friendly, when they commence to talk uncharitably to each other, politely of course, and with a smile on their lips, but with envy and bitterness in their hearts, and to make unkind allusions to each other's faults, allusions that one would not dare to make openly to one's greatest enemy. Thus one is reproached with his curiosity, another with his stupidity, a third with his secret poverty, a fourth with his lowly origin, a fifth with his ill success; in a word, everything that is likely to annoy another is brought up. From this come misunderstandings amongst friends, and hatreds and enmities that it may take years to heal. One cutting word may sometimes give rise to an enmity that will cease only with life itself. If we all acted like good Christians,

<sup>1</sup> Nec poterant ei quidquam pacifice loqui.— Gen. xxxvii. 4.

returned good for evil, and bore the sarcasms of others with patience and meekness, as St. Paul says of himself and the first Christians: "We are reviled, and we bless; we are persecuted, and we suffer it,"<sup>1</sup> then that kind of conversation would not be the cause of so much evil. But, alas, how far differently we act! we cannot bear the least word that is said against us; we must give vent to the displeasure it causes us, and return sarcasm for sarcasm, and so the quarrel never comes to an end. We act something like that brave Portuguese soldier, of whom Bidermann writes. During a siege he had shot away all his bullets at the enemy, and could not get a fresh supply; so he pulled out his teeth one by one, loaded his musket with them, and shot them off at the enemy. In the same way, but sinfully, we spare ourselves no trouble nor discomfort in order to have satisfaction for the sarcasms flung at us. Christ cannot be present during such uncharitable conversation, for He is a lover of peace, charity, and fraternal unity.

But where these sarcastic and biting expressions are wanting, there is another kind of discourse much favored by those who are far too fond of peace, namely, those who are given to fawning and flattery, and who can suit what they say to every one's inclination, although they do not at all speak with sincerity. They have nothing but sugar and honey on their tongues, but gall in their hearts; they approve outwardly of everything that others say or do; they are so much under the influence of human respect, that they have not a word of blame, even for the worst actions. Thus, for instance, they praise a man for having taken revenge, and say that he has acted rightly, so that they actually confirm him in his wicked purpose. St. Gregory compares such flatterers to the dogs that licked the sores of Lazarus, but did not heal them. "Woe," says the Prophet Isaias, "to you that call evil good, and good evil, that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter; that justify the wicked for gifts, and take away the justice of the just from him."<sup>2</sup>

Fawning  
and flattery

I come now to the third class, and I ask, what are those discourses that you hold in your meetings and gatherings about others who are absent? Is God always present at such discourses? Alas, I shudder, when I think that the sins of the tongue,

Impious talk  
of the  
absent;  
namely,  
detraction.

<sup>1</sup> *Maledicimur, et benedicimus: persecutionem patimur, et sustinemus.*—1. Cor. iv. 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Væ, qui dicitis malum bonum et bonum malum; ponentes tenebras lucem, et lucem tenebras; ponentes amarum in dulce, et dulce in amarum, qui justificatis imptum pro muneribus, et justitiam justis auferitis ab eo.*—Isai. v. 20, 23.

to which I have now to call your attention, are the most dangerous and the most common of all, that is to say, backbiting and detraction, by which the absent are robbed, either partially or wholly, of their best and dearest possession, their honor and good name. I say it is the most dangerous of all kinds of sins of the tongue, for, with the sole exception of impurity, there is no vice which causes the loss of so many souls. And it is the commonest of vices; for where can one find a town, a street, a house, that is not infected with it? When two people are talking together, they soon begin to make some one who is absent the subject of their discourse, and then, either through malice or through hatred and envy, or through sheer loquacity, they relate what they have seen, or heard, or dreamt, or imagined, or suspected of him, and thus they lessen his reputation. In that way they take away his good name, whether they speak the truth, or not. How many there are who eat and drink together, while some one, who is far away from them, and has no share in their enjoyment, must pay the score, inasmuch as his faults and failings are made the subject of conversation! The Wise Man warns us to be on our guard against those sins of the tongue: "Be not in the feasts of great drinkers, nor in their meetings who contribute flesh to eat."<sup>1</sup> "What is the meaning here of eating flesh," asks Richard of St. Victor, "if not to tear the infirmities of others with a poisonous tooth?"<sup>2</sup> The Prophet David says of such people: "shall not all they know that work iniquity, who devour my people, as they eat bread?"<sup>3</sup> Why do the Prophet and the Wise Man compare those backbiters to people eating meat and bread? Why do they not compare them to one who eats fish? Because he who eats fish must be very cautious lest a bone should stick in his throat; whereas meat and bread can be eaten without any such fear. So it is with backbiters and detractors. They devour the good name of others like meat or bread, without any respect for the persons of whom they speak; they attack every one, and spare none. That priest, they say, does not give good example; that man is unjust, we know how he has made his money; that woman is not what she ought to be; that young girl is too free in company; one is this, another that, etc. If what they speak of is true and commonly known, they can add

<sup>1</sup> Noli esse in convivis potatorum, nec in comessionibus eorum, qui carnes ad vescendum conferunt.—Prov. xxiii. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Quid est hic carnes comedere, nisi aliena infirma maledico dente lacerare?

<sup>3</sup> Nonne cognoscent omnes, qui operantur iniquitatem, qui devorant plebem meam sicut escam panis.—Ps. xiii. 4.

to it and make it worse than it is in reality; a word put in here and there can do a great deal of harm, until the thing is magnified to an enormous degree, and in a few days is known all through the town. If what is thus said is not against justice, because it is true, there is no doubt that it is against Christian charity, which commands us to hide the faults of others as much as possible. Tell me; suppose one of you had done some disgraceful thing, which has already come to the knowledge of a good many people, would it be all the same to you if that act of yours were made a common topic of conversation, and a subject of ridicule everywhere? I think not; and you would have just cause for sorrow if your name were thus bandied about. Hence the first general rule of Christian charity is, to do unto others, as you wish they should do unto you. And what pleasure, or honor, or profit, do we find in backbiting? It is a fine honor indeed to attack the absent, who cannot defend themselves! Is there nothing else in the world worth talking of, that we must tear one another's good name to pieces? Oh, if every one paid attention to his own faults, what a lot he would find to correct! Every one would find enough weeds in his own garden, enough dirt at his own doorstep, and a beam in his own eye. Are we not miserable mortals, thus to heap up so many evil acts for the day of judgment, when God, that most strict and inexorable Judge, will examine into, and punish, each one of them?

Thoughtless and wicked people! do you know what a grievous sin you commit? It is not my intention to explain it to you at length to-day, as it will be the subject of a future sermon; my only design now is to examine it, along with other kinds of evil talk. But this much I may say; not only is Jesus Christ far from you when you are engaged in such conversation, but I very much fear that He will never be with you for all eternity; for that is the vice against which the wise Ecclesiasticus warns us in the following words: "Take heed lest thou slip with thy tongue, and fall in the sight of the enemies, who lie in wait for thee, and thy fall be incurable unto death;"<sup>1</sup> so that you will never rise again to grace. Not that God is wanting in mercy, or that He is less ready to forgive this sin, than any other; but because the whole difficulty in obtaining pardon of it rests with ourselves. For what is more difficult for a respectable man, than to acknowledge himself a liar who has robbed another of his good

It is a  
grievous  
and danger-  
ous sin.

<sup>1</sup> Attende, ne forte labaris in lingua, et cadas in conspectu inimicorum insidiantium tibi, et sit casus tuus insanabilis in mortem.—EccI. xxviii. 30.

name? Yet that he must do, if he has falsely attributed a fault to another. But if the fault really exists, although it is not publicly known, he must make what restitution he can for having injured the fair fame of another, and moreover make good to the latter all the harm caused by the detraction, if he wishes to be reconciled to God. Otherwise, neither confession nor prayer will be of any help to him. This is the general teaching of theologians, and it is founded on right reason: "The sin will not be forgiven, unless restitution of the stolen goods be made."<sup>1</sup> My own impression is, that out of a hundred who accuse themselves properly in confession of a sin of detraction, there are hardly ten who make due restitution for having injured their neighbor's character. Certainly then, my dear brethren, most dangerous is that conversation which has for its subject the faults of others! There is one thing, however, that I will tell you for your consolation; and that is, that there are reasons which excuse from making restitution in this case. Therefore he who is guilty in this respect, and wishes to know what he has to do, should consult an experienced confessor, and tell him plainly all the circumstances regarding what he said, the social position of the persons of and to whom he spoke, how many there were who heard him, whether what he said was true or not, whether it was publicly known or not, whether it is lately, or many years ago that he was guilty of the uncharitable conversation, whether they who heard it are still in the same place, or have gone away, whether they have probably forgotten it or not, whether the person spoken of is living or dead, whether the conversation has caused injury to others, or is likely to cause it or not, and so on; then the confessor can advise him as to what he has to do. Once for all, anything that injures another's good name, is a delicate and difficult matter to deal with. Let us then be careful never to say anything injurious to others, since it is so difficult to obtain forgiveness for such a sin.

Tale bear-  
ing, mur-  
muring,  
and com-  
plaining.

What are the discourses held by tale bearers, who try to please all parties, who blow hot and cold out of the same mouth, cook sweet and sour in the one pot, and carry stories about from one to another of what they have heard and seen? Listen my good friend, they say, to a word of advice; such a one has said this of you; be on your guard against that person; you think he is your best friend, but you are mistaken; he has this or that against you, etc. Thus they cause or increase misunderstandings, dis-

<sup>1</sup> Non dimittitur peccatum, nisi restituatur ablatum.

union, and enmity between those who were formerly fast friends, between brothers and sisters, nay, between husband and wife, who otherwise would live like angels together, in love and peace, so that they now can hardly bear the sight of each other. Still more impious is this kind of conversation, than all the others! Christ can have no part in it; it is the devil who prompts it. "The whisperer and the double tongued is accursed; for he hath troubled many that were at peace."<sup>1</sup> What are the discourses that subjects often hold against their superiors, citizens against their magistrate, servants against their masters and mistresses? They complain of and murmur against their rule, find fault with their roughness of manner, are dissatisfied with the food given them, etc., and thus make their superiors odious to every one. And what is the good of your talking in that way? Why do you not complain to those who have the power of making things better? There is certainly not the least use in retailing your grievances to those whom they do not concern. God has nothing to do with such conversation.

What are those discourses which you hold against Heaven, Blasphemy against the elect, and even against the great God Himself? "They have spoken iniquity on high," says the Prophet David, "they have set their mouth against Heaven;"<sup>2</sup> they are blasphemers. Who would imagine that a worm of the earth would dare to open his mouth against Heaven, and to speak disrespectfully of the great God? And yet, it is unfortunately only too often the case. For what else are they but blasphemers, who murmur against God, say that He is unmerciful to them, and that He sends them too many crosses and trials? What are they but blasphemers, who criticise the all-wise Providence of God, as if in this or that particular it had acted unwisely? What else are they but blasphemers, who despair, on account of the number of their sins, and say that God cannot or will not forgive them? How often do we not hear the most horrible expressions used against God in anger? How many are there not, who make sport of God and of Heaven, by speaking of them in a ridiculous manner, such as, God is a good man, He knows me well and will not do anything against me; Heaven is not made for geese; St. Peter is an old acquaintance of mine, he has the keys of Heaven, and will let me in, etc.? What else is that, but mak-

<sup>1</sup> Susurro et bilinguis maledictus; multos enim turbavit pacem habentes.—Ecl. xxviii. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Iniquitatem in excelsis locuti sunt; posuerunt in cœlum os suum.—Ps. lxxii. 8, 9.

ing a laughing stock of God and His saints, as if they were abject mortals? Jesus Christ has no part in such impious talk.

Many other  
kinds of  
wicked con-  
versation.

I have not time now to examine many other kinds of wicked conversations, such as, revealing secrets, boasting and speaking in one's own praise, and even glorying in the sins one has committed. I will say nothing at all of lying. For who thinks anything of it? If no one is injured by a lie, it is looked upon as quite lawful. Nay there are some who think they have to tell lies occasionally. Nor do I wish to speak now of the vice of loquacity, beyond saying that Jesus Christ assures us that we shall have to give an account of every idle word at the judgment-seat; nor of those who speak too little, who are dumb when they should speak out to defend the right, to admonish those subject to them, such as their children and servants, and even their fellow-men sometimes, when occasion requires that their vices should be corrected. The Prophet Isaias complains, in the person of such people: "Woe is me, because I have held my peace, because I am a man of unclean lips."<sup>1</sup> Would to God that those dumb people never came to confession, for through shame they conceal their sins, and sometimes from youth to old age continue to make sacrilegious confessions and Communion, of which they take the guilt on their souls into eternity! I find no end of the sins which are committed in the world by the tongue, and I should require more tongues than one to speak of them all. Only one thing more I have to say in the words of St. Jerome: "few there are, and very few who are not guilty of some sin of the tongue."<sup>2</sup>

Thus in  
most con-  
versations  
Jesus is not  
present.

No one need now wonder at what I said in the beginning, that I would hardly find Jesus present at any conversation. No one need be astonished that the blessing of God is leaving the world more and more nowadays, and that hard times, and want, and calamity are so general. We drive God away from us by our wicked tongues, and close the heavens so that they do not rain down fruitfulness on the earth. A single complaint on the part of Aaron and Mary against their brother Moses was enough to cause the people of Israel to remain seven whole days longer in the desert, for the cloud that guided them remained immovable during that time: "Mary, therefore was put out of the camp seven days; and the people moved not from that place."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Vae mihi, quia tacei, quia vir pollutus labiis ego sum.*—Isai. vi. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Pauci sunt, qui linguae vitio renuntiant.*

<sup>3</sup> *Exclusa est itaque Maria extra castra septem diebus; et populus non est motus de loco illo.*—Num. xii. 15.

What evils and misfortunes then, are not caused nowadays, in a whole city or country, by the many and manifold sins of the tongue that are committed against God and man! Let no one be astonished at the fewness of the elect; if there was no other vice in the world, wicked tongues alone would be enough to fill hell with lost souls. If there was neither adultery nor impurity committed in a country, of which, alas, there is only too much, yet there is enough impure conversation to bring down fire from Heaven, to consume us like Sodom and Gomorrha. If there was no injustice in the world,—and God knows there is too much of it!—there is enough cursing and swearing, and backbiting and uncharitable talk to doom us to eternal death. “If I would justify myself,” says Job with fear and trembling, and sitting on the dunghill, “my own mouth shall condemn me; if I would show myself innocent, he shall prove me wicked.”<sup>1</sup> Although I am not aware of being guilty of any evil, my mouth will condemn me. Oh, pious, patient, and holy man, art thou afraid of thy mouth? Ah, that is a complaint for me and others like me to make! For in spite of all your trials, the loss of all your wealth, your abandonment by your friends, and the bodily torments you endured, you never sinned in word, as God Himself testifies: “In all these things Job did not sin with his lips.”<sup>2</sup> Your speech, your words, were constantly: “As it hath pleased the Lord, so is it done; blessed be the name of the Lord.”<sup>3</sup> And yet thou art afraid thy mouth will condemn thee! Hear this, you who commit so many sins of the tongue! How will it be with you and me? How shall we escape damnation?

Ah, dear Christians, watch over your tongues! Even if you are as just and holy as Job, still be careful of what you say in your ordinary conversation; see that it will not be a cause of condemnation to you hereafter! If I could open hell, and show you the lost souls there, and tell you why they are lost, thousands of them would point to their tongues, and cry out like the rich glutton: “I am tormented in this flame,”<sup>4</sup> my mouth has condemned me! This talkative, impure, profane, uncharitable tongue of mine, is the cause of my ruin! “Restrain the tongue,” is my conclusion, in the words of St. Chrysostom; “and if it will not be quiet, bite it, until it is silent; for it is better for it to suffer that pain here, than to seek in vain for a

Conclusion  
and exhortation to  
watch over  
the tongue.

<sup>1</sup> Si Innocentem ostendero, pravum me comprobabit.—Job. ix. 20.

<sup>2</sup> In omnibus his non peccavit Job labiis suis.—Ibid. ii. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Sicut Domino placuit, ita factum est: sit nomen Domini benedictum.—Ibid. i. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Crucior in hac flamma.—Luke xvi. 24.

drop of water to cool it in eternity.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, my dear brethren, let us not spare our tongues in our Easter confession, and do penance for the sins we have hitherto committed in our conversations; and let us be mindful of the exhortation of the Apostle: “If any man speak, let him speak as the words of God.”<sup>2</sup> God has given us our tongues to praise and bless Him; let them be used then to that end, and let us begin now to hold that discourse which we hope and desire to continue in our eternal country, where our only conversation will be a joyful Alleluia, praised be God. Amen.

*Another Introduction to the same sermon for Pentecost Sunday.*

Text.

*Cœperunt loqui variis linguis, prout Spiritus Sanctus dabat eloqui illis—Act. ii. 4.*

“And they began to speak with divers tongues, according as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak.”

Nothing but good and holy can the tongues be, that are ruled by the holy spirit of God; nothing but wicked can the tongues be, that are moved by the spirit of evil. Do we wish to know, my dear brethren, whether the Holy Ghost or the evil spirit dwells in us? We must, if so, pay special attention to the use we make of our tongues. To find it out, I will examine to-day, as far as time allows, the conversations in vogue in the world, and I will divide my sermon into three questions: first, what are the subjects of our daily conversations? Secondly, how do we speak of those who are present? Thirdly, how do we speak of the absent? Each one’s conscience and daily experience will furnish the answers to these questions. But I am afraid I shall have to come to the conclusion that there are very few tongues ruled by the spirit of God, etc.—*continues as before.*

<sup>1</sup> Refræna linguam et si non patitur reticere, dentium morsu quiescat; nam hoc ei est conductibilis sustinere, quam postea aquæ guttam nullatenus promereri.

<sup>2</sup> Si quis loquitur, quasi sermones Dei.—I. Pet. iv. 11.

# ON FAULT-FINDING, AND INTER- PRETING IN A BAD SENSE THE ACTIONS OF OTHERS.

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## SIXTY-SECOND SERMON.

### ON THE INJUSTICE OF FINDING FAULT WITH, AND INTERPRET- ING IN A BAD SENSE, THE ACTIONS OF OTHERS.

#### Subject.

To concern one's self, through a spirit of curiosity, with the affairs of others, is especially opposed to the charity we owe our neighbor, whether that meddling on our part arise from malice or from imprudence.—*Preached on the sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

#### Text.

*Et ipsi observabant eum.*—Luke xiv.1.  
“They watched Him.”

#### Introduction.

The Pharisees, being once filled with hatred and envy of Our Lord, kept a close watch on everything He did. But what did they consider especially? The holiness of His life, by which He wished to give to the world an example, and a proof of His divinity? The many miracles with which He confirmed His teaching? Oh no; these were the very things that filled them with envy and bitterness; of them they say nothing, and if they could, they would blot them out of the memory of every one. What then was the object of their vigilance? They desired to see or to hear something from Him, which they could have found fault with, so as to make Him odious to the people. For this reason alone “they watched Him.” O Christian world, how many

critical observers of the same kind thou canst count in our days, who examine, watch, and pry into the actions of others, put a wrong interpretation on and criticise them, make them the subject of rash judgments and groundless suspicions, and thus talk of and condemn their faults and failings! A vice which, alas! is very common among all classes of people, and is especially injurious to the charity we owe our neighbor, as I shall now show.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*To concern one's self thus with the affairs of others is especially opposed to the charity we owe our neighbor, whether that meddling on our part arise from malice or from imprudence. Such is the whole subject. Let each one attend to his own faults; and let no one who is innocent mind what others say of him; such shall be the conclusion.*

Help us thereto, O God, by Thy grace, which we beg of Thee through Thy dear Mother Mary and the holy angels.

Evil interpretation and fault finding, wherever, it comes from, is against charity.

That prying, inquisitive spirit, that criticising, finding fault with, and talking about the affairs of others, which is so common nowadays, comes principally from two sources; either from hatred and dislike towards our neighbor, and then it is malice; or else from curiosity and a thoughtless loquacity, and then it is imprudence. From loquacity, I say; because we are human beings, who love to be in each other's society, which necessitates talking; and when we have exhausted all we have to say about our own concerns, we must bring up those of our neighbor, and make them the subject of our conversation. From hatred and dislike, as is often the case; for if I have an ill feeling towards another, and find out something against him, although my heart, as far as charity is concerned, is far from him, yet my ill-will accompanies him everywhere, and so my mouth overflows with the dislike I have towards him, and I seek to lessen the sense of injury I am laboring under, and to have some satisfaction by talking of his faults. Whatever be the source and origin of such talk, it is certainly always against the rights, or at least against the charity which is due to our neighbor.

For if it comes from hatred and dislike, we observe

In the first place, as far as hatred and dislike are concerned, not much proof is required. Everything that comes from passion is opposed to fraternal charity; for we can easily imagine that, when we have a bitter feeling towards another, we are not likely

to think or speak well of him when he is made the subject of conversation. When the envious Pharisees failed to find anything faulty in Our Lord's conduct, they began to complain of His disciples, and to accuse them of being transgressors of the law, because they ate with unwashed hands, plucked ears of corn on the Sabbath, etc. But they took no notice of how the same disciples healed the sick, drove out devils, practised voluntary poverty, and did other praiseworthy actions, as the Pharisees themselves were well aware. Thus the effect of hatred and dislike towards another is to make us hide and conceal what is praiseworthy in him, and to publish his faults as much as possible. Anything that we hear, see, or suspect him of to his discredit, we cannot keep secret; we must speak of it at the first opportunity, and we are more inclined to exaggerate, than to lessen it. We say: "do you know what happened lately? Such and such a one acted most shamefully, his villany has been discovered, I cannot trust him any longer; I thought that man knew better, he pretended to be very clever, but now he has made a grievous blunder, etc." But they who thus give way to hatred of their neighbor, are not always willing to make known their feelings, much less do they wish to incur the blame of trying to injure another's character, and therefore they endeavor to conceal their motive as well as they can. It is a well-known fact, they say, otherwise I would not mention it; I am sorry for the poor man; it is a great pity he has such a fault, etc. O hypocrite! Are you really sorry for him? If so, why do you not try to conceal his faults, that he may at least have a chance of retaining the esteem of others? Why do you bring further disgrace on him, by relating his faults? It is a well-known fact, otherwise I would not mention it! If it is so well-known, then what is the use of your saying anything about it? You are merely wasting your words. Suppose I said to you, my dear brethren: "Two and two make four; to-day is Sunday; these are well-known facts, otherwise I would not mention them;" would you not think me mad? We know these facts already, you would say, there is no necessity for you to repeat them to us. It is a well-known fact, otherwise I would not mention it! To whom is it known? To yourself, and not to others? Then you are evidently guilty of injuring your neighbor's character; you act against the right he has to his good name, and you are alone to blame for making known his faults. If his faults are known to many in the town, but not to those to whom you speak of them, you still

only the faults of our neighbor to criticise them.

cannot be excused from a breach of charity, since you spread still farther what is disadvantageous to his good name. If Christian charity and not ill feeling prompted you to speak, you would find in the same person many good qualities that redound to his praise; but as it is, you say not a word about them. You are like a spider; you seek the poison, and leave the honey behind, because your heart is full of ill-will against your neighbor.

The praise-worthy qualities of another are misinterpreted.

There is a still worse consequence of that fault-finding and criticising, when it comes from hatred and envy; for, not only are the faults and failings of another noticed and talked of, but even his good qualities are misinterpreted; because, when the heart is once filled with hatred of another, it is very hard to look with a favorable eye at anything he does. The envious Pharisees were not satisfied with criticising what they imagined to be faulty in Christ and His disciples; they found fault even with what they should have praised and approved of. Such is the complaint Our Lord makes in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say: he hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say: Behold a man that is a glutton and a wine-drinker, a friend of publicans and sinners."<sup>1</sup> If I drive out devils, they say I do it in the name of Beelzebub, the prince of devils; if I heal the sick, and teach the people, they cry me down as a disturber and a raiser of sedition. St. John Chrysostom makes the same complaint of those Pharisees who are still to be found in great numbers amongst Christians. If one, he says, whom I do not love, is really humble of heart, I call him a hypocrite; if he is patient and a lover of peace, he is looked on as a coward; if he frequents respectable company, he is accused of being fond of the pleasures of the table; if he avoids company, he is called a misanthropist; if he does his duty without any regard to human respect, he is looked on as an unmannerly boor; if he is friendly and polite to every one, he is considered a flatterer and a deceiver; if he is reserved, either naturally, or through love of virtue, with the opposite sex, he is again accused of being unmannerly, and of not knowing how to deal with people, and so on. This hatred and ill-will finds something sinful and faulty even in virtues, and when a man forms a judgment of that kind, of course it comes out in conversation with others.

<sup>1</sup> Venit enim Joannes neque manducans, neque bibens, et dicunt: Dæmonium habet. Venit Filius hominis manducans et bibens, et dicunt: Ecce homo vorax et potator vini publicanorum et peccatorum amicus.—Matth. xi. 18, 19.

Nay, what adds to the malice and injustice of these hostile criticisms, is that when nothing in a person's outward life and actions can be found fault with, his secret thoughts and intentions, although known only to God and himself, are made the object of attack, and bad motives are imputed to him; his words, and actions, and behavior are carefully studied, in order to find in them some proof that his intentions are bad. Thus they say: that priest goes so often to that house and visits such and such a person, he cannot mean anything good by it; that woman, that girl is always well dressed when she appears in church, she can hardly come for devotion's sake alone, she never paid for that dress out of her own pocket, etc.; I have seen those two talking together for along time, and could see by their manner how they are affected towards each other; did you not notice what a face so-and-so made? I can easily guess what he is thinking of; did you hear what he said, on that occasion? I know what he means well enough, etc. Do not people very often talk, my dear brethren, in the manner spoken of by St. James in his Epistle, although in a different sense: "Do you not judge within yourselves, and are become judges of unjust thoughts?"<sup>1</sup>

Even bad motives are attributed.

Now is not that a really diabolical malice? If the law of Christian charity obliges a man to esteem his neighbor, and to give him credit for good intentions, unless there is undoubted proof of his wickedness,—and even in case of doubt, one is bound to believe in the innocence of one's neighbor, rather than in his guilt;—and if the same charity obliges us to excuse another's intention, even when we cannot approve of his outward actions, how unchristian, then, and wicked it must be to condemn the thoughts and motives of another, when one cannot find fault with, or condemn his actions, and thus to attribute to him a fault that he never perhaps thought of? Let all the evil spirits appear against me; let my outward actions accuse me before the throne of God; as long as my own conscience does not give testimony against me, I am innocent in His sight; if my own conscience does not condemn me, neither will God.

Thereby charity is grievously injured.

But what neither the conscience of an innocent man, nor the demons of hell, nor the angels of Heaven, nor God Himself can do, a mere mortal treacherously attempts by rashly judging, criticising, and defaming his neighbor's character. What

<sup>1</sup> Nonne judicatis apud vosmetipsos, et facti estis iudices cogitationum iniquarum?—James ii. 4.

an injustice! What has become of Christian charity? Still, where there is hatred against another, we can easily see that it will give rise to rash judgments and uncharitable talk.

When others are spoken of through sheer loquacity, their faults, not their virtues, are likely to be the subject of conversation.

But what we cannot sufficiently wonder at and deplore, is the fact that the great majority of men, and even those who have no hatred or enmity towards others, and who otherwise lead holy, pious, and spiritual lives, are subject to this vice; for they cannot restrain their suspicious thoughts, their rash judgments, nor can they keep their slippery tongues in check. Sometimes, when in company, they tell all they know about another; not out of ill-will, or malice; but through sheer thoughtlessness, or love of talk. These latter are not guilty of so great a sin as the former, since their intention is not wicked; still, they infringe the right which he of whom they speak has to their charity, when his faults and failings are made the subject of conversation, as is generally the case; for our corrupt nature is far more apt to remark, to remember, to be impressed by, and therefore to speak of what is faulty and vicious in another, than what is good and virtuous. In ancient times the Egyptians had a symbol representing an eclipse of the sun and a clock, with the inscription: "Neither of these is looked at unless it is in fault."<sup>1</sup> Not at all a bad idea, my dear brethren, and one which will serve admirably to illustrate my subject. The sun rises and sets every day, and all things enjoy the benefit of its light; the fields and forests receive their fruitfulness from it; and yet, who is there who ever thinks of the sun during the day? Hardly one, except perhaps astronomers, who are wont to study the courses of the heavenly bodies. But when the sun is eclipsed, every one looks at it; the most ignorant then become astronomers and examine it; they talk of its cause, its duration, its probable effects, and they know enough about it to keep them talking for a whole day; "the sun is not looked at unless it is in fault." It is the same thing with a clock; as long as it gives the right time, people are satisfied; they like to know what progress the day is making; but of the clock itself they never speak, unless it happens to go wrong, and to strike out of time; and if it does so once or twice, they are wont to say: oh, that clock is of no use; it strikes when it likes. It is just the same with the criticisms that men have to bear from one another. When a man by his virtues and piety shines like the sun, while the holiness of his life might serve as a clock for others to regulate their

lives by, there are few who pay any attention to him; hardly one in a thousand takes the least notice of him, and it would be looked upon as bad taste to bore others with a long conversation about his virtues. But if this sun is eclipsed for a moment; if this clock strikes the wrong hour only once; if that man says or does anything faulty; if he makes even an apparent mistake, then indeed he has observers enough to watch him, to examine and scrutinize his conduct, and to speak about it, some through envy and hatred, most through thoughtlessness and loquacity.

Hence it is, and it can hardly be otherwise, that in this fault-finding and criticising there is a great deal that is false and untrue, and the person spoken of is accused of doing what he is altogether innocent of, and thus he suffers great injustice. Why so? Because our opinions and judgments, and our imaginary knowledge of another's actions are nearly always founded on uncertain and deceitful appearances. For, tell me, how do you know that what you say of that person is true? I have seen, or heard it, you answer. And that is generally the only foundation of the criticism: I have seen, or heard it! That is the judgment-seat before which the virtues are summoned to receive their sentence. Has not the Holy Ghost given us to understand clearly enough, by the Prophet Isaias, that we must not trust such treacherous witnesses as our eyes and ears? "He shall not judge according to the sight of the eyes, nor reprove according to the hearing of the ears."<sup>1</sup> How many there are whom these senses deceive! "I have seen it!" What have you seen? "What that man did, where he went, how he behaved." And is that all? Have you seen his heart? Have you seen the intention he had in acting as he did, in going to that place, in behaving in that way; for it is certain that the goodness or malice of an outward act depends principally on the intention one has when performing it. "For what man," asks St. Paul, "knoweth the things of a man, but the spirit of a man that is in him?"<sup>2</sup> If you were to see a young woman, splendidly dressed, going through a hostile camp to the tent of the general whose licentiousness is well-known, and spending the night in it, what would you think? Oh, certainly, you would say, she has lost her virtue, and is a bad woman. And yet that was done in the old Law by one of

They mix up a great deal of falsehood with what they say, because outward appearances often deceive.

<sup>1</sup> Non secundum visionem oculorum judicabit, neque secundum auditum aurium arguet.—Isai. xi. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Quis enim hominum scit, quæ sunt hominis, nisi spiritus hominis, qui in ipso est.—I. Cor. ii. 11.

the most chaste of women, Judith, whose purity was untarnished. If you saw a religious going by night into a house of ill fame, and giving money to a noted courtesan, what would you say? Certainly that he was guilty of a grievous sin. And yet that was done once by a holy hermit, whose only intention was to prevent that woman from offending God, at least for one night. Thus we are often deceived when we form our opinions from outward appearances alone.

And much  
more our  
ears.

“I have heard it.” Indeed? And must it be true therefore? If we are to take all we hear as Gospel, there will be no lies in the world any longer. If everything people say is true, hardly any one will have a good character, and we must look on Susanna and Joseph as guilty of adultery, and Our Lord Himself as a drinker of wine, a disturber of the people, a blasphemer, and a deceiver. Susanna was accused on oath by the two elders, and all the people believed the accusation, and were about to stone her; Joseph was accused by the wife of Putiphar, and was cast into prison; Christ Himself was publicly accused by the high-priest, the scribes, and nearly all the Jewish people, and was condemned to death and nailed to the Cross; yet all these accusations were wicked calumnies. How often have you not been deceived by reports you have heard, so that you have afterwards found to be false what you at first believed? How often do not people interpret a thing in a wrong sense, either because they do not understand what is said, or because some important word has escaped their ears? How often does it not happen that an exaggerated or an imperfect report of a thing makes it look quite different from what it really is? In a word, he who believes things on hearsay evidence will very often put his faith in falsehood.

Thus a  
grievous  
injustice  
is done to  
one's neigh-  
bor.

Meanwhile, with such a weak and treacherous foundation to build on, you imprudently talk of others, and relate what you have seen or heard of them. Prudent people will take what you say as a joke; others will believe it, because they are prying, ill-disposed persons, and will carry it farther, and so the story goes on, with no other foundation than mere hearsay, until it becomes public talk and is accepted as a fact. But the poor, innocent person of whom it is told has to bear all the blame and the disgrace, and frequently suffers grievously on account of it; he loses his good character, and becomes the talk of the town; when he finds out that such is the case, he may perhaps begin to give vent to his anger, and thus enmities and dissensions are

caused; the religious is no longer looked on as true to his vocation; no one will look at that poor girl; that lawyer loses a great number of his clients; people are afraid to trust that business man; that tradesman loses his customers, etc. See what mischief you cause by your imprudent tongue! How are you to make good the loss you have caused, and restore the good name you have ruined, the friendship you have destroyed? You had no trouble at all in speaking; but it will take time and trouble enough to make restitution for all the injury you have inflicted on others. And how difficult it will be for you to account for your conduct satisfactorily in this respect to your divine Judge!

Supposing even that what you say is literally true, and that many are already aware of it, nay more, supposing that no harm is done to any one by your talking of it; yet you can hardly avoid violating Christian charity even then. For you act in direct opposition to the rule of charity: "do unto others as you wish them to do unto you." Consider the matter fairly, and acknowledge the truth, if not to me, at least to your own conscience; would you be satisfied if others spoke of you in that way? if you were painted in such black colors? Would you like other people, to whom you are not at all answerable, to pry into your concerns, to watch all your actions, to keep a list of the persons with whom you associate, the places you visit, the conversations you hold, to interpret your behavior, your faults, and failings according to their own ideas, and to make sport of them with others, to laugh at and ridicule them? Even if your faults are known to many, would you like to have them frequently spoken of, so as to keep them fresh in people's memories? I do not think that, if you have any love for yourself, you would be indifferent to such a proceeding; for how could you like to have others tearing your character to pieces? But if you do not wish that to be done to you, you must be careful not to do it to others. Why can you not keep silent about your neighbor's faults; when you are so anxious that your own should be kept secret? This is what St. Augustine could not understand. "Why is it," he asks, that he who is unwilling to be judged by others, should set himself up as their judge?"<sup>1</sup>

Even if the report is true, it is against charity.

In a word, if you loved your neighbor as yourself, according to the Christian law, you would abstain from finding fault with and putting a bad meaning on the actions of others. When we love a person, we hardly like to condemn his faults, much less

For charity looks at everything in the best light.

<sup>1</sup> Cum homo non ita se velit ab aliis judicare.

to speak of them to others; and if we hear a word against him, we are pained, and show, by our silence at least, that such talk is not pleasing to us. That is the charity that St. Paul requires all of us to practise towards our neighbor. "Charity is patient, is kind," he writes to the Corinthians; "dealeth not perversely," nay, "thinketh no evil;"<sup>1</sup> much less does she talk ill of others; she excuses as well as she can the faults she has witnessed; if she cannot approve of the outward act, she tries at all events to attribute it to a good intention, and if she cannot do that, she puts the matter out of her thoughts altogether, and leaves it to the all-seeing Judge.

After the  
example of  
Christ.

Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Saviour, who has proposed Himself to us as a model and pattern of all virtue, has given us a special example of the charity we must practise towards one another. It is well known how cruelly He was treated by the envious Jews; He could not excuse the hatred of the high-priest, the bitter feelings of the Scribes and Pharisees, the odious ingratitude of those on whom He had conferred so many favors, the falsehood of the suborned witnesses, the injustice of Pilate, the unheard of cruelty of the soldiers and executioners who tortured Him more than they had been commanded to do; He knew all this too well to be able to palliate it, so that His charity could find only one excuse, and that was that His persecutors did not really know who He was; and while He was hanging on the Cross, He put forward that excuse to His heavenly Father, in order to lessen the gravity of their crime: "Father," He cried in His death agony, "forgive them, for they know not what they do."<sup>2</sup>

Therefore  
fault-finders  
and they  
who put a  
bad interpretation  
on others'  
actions,  
show that  
they do not  
love their  
neighbor.

O dear Lord, Thou hast found in Thy worst enemies a reason to excuse and to palliate the heinous crime of deicide, of which they were guilty; and we, sinful mortals, cannot, or rather will not, keep silent about the faults of our fellow-men, of our own brethren, although we cannot have a certain knowledge of them; for since we are not able to see into their hearts, we cannot be sure that they are actuated by bad motives! Instead of following Thy example, and interpreting what they do in a good sense, we make them out to be worse than they are; instead of hiding their faults, we do our best to make them known! O my God, why are we not so fond of criticising and finding fault with ourselves?

<sup>1</sup> *Charitas patiens est, benigna est, non agit perperam, non cogitat malum.*—I. Cor. xiii. 4, 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Pater, dimitte illis: non enim sciunt, quid faciunt.*—Luke xxiii. 34.

How is it that we are so anxious to hide our own faults? We are ready at once with a hundred excuses to palliate them. And why do we not act in the same way towards others? Ah, why indeed? Because we do not love our neighbor as ourselves; and therefore, when with our fault-finding and attributing bad motives to others, and speaking ill of them, we offend against charity, and violate Thy chief command, neither do we love Thee, O Lord, nor walk in Thy footsteps, and consequently we can have no part in Thee!

I address you now, my dear brethren, in the words of our Saviour: "Judge not, that you may not be judged. For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged, and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again."<sup>1</sup> If you wish to give your neighbor his due, and to practise the charity you owe him; if you wish to be friends and followers of Jesus Christ; if you wish to stand well with God at the judgment-seat, then you must never judge ill of another, and much less say anything to his detriment. Do not meddle with the affairs of others. If curiosity should prompt you to inquire what this or that person has said or done, if the slippery tongue is on the point of criticising others, restrain it, reprove it in the words in which Christ reprov'd Peter, when the latter was too anxious to find out what was to become of John: "What is it to thee; follow thou Me."<sup>2</sup> What hast thou to do with the faults of others? Art thou created for no other purpose but to criticise them? Look after yourself and your own soul; that is all that God requires of you. Thus you should criticise your own actions, and see whether they are good or bad, praiseworthy or reprehensible. According to the beautiful exhortation of St. Paul, "Let every one prove his own work, and so he shall have glory in himself only, and not in another,"<sup>3</sup> that is a matter that concerns us all; but we have nothing to do with the actions of others, for whom we are not responsible to God. "For every one shall bear his own burden;"<sup>4</sup> every one will have to give an account of his own works, and according to them he shall be either punished or rewarded. Let us act like the Apostles at the Last Supper, when Christ told them that one of them was about

Conclusion and exhortation to each one to mind his own faults.

<sup>1</sup> Nolite judicare, ut non judicemini. In quo enim iudicio judicaveritis, iudicabimini: et in qua mensura mensi fueritis, remeietur vobis.—Matth. vii. 1, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Quid ad te? tu me sequere.—John xxi. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Opus autem suum probet unusquisque, et sic in semetipso tantum gloriam habebit, et non in altero.—Gal. vi. 4, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Unusquisque enim onus suum portabit.—Ibid.

to betray Him. "And they being very much troubled, began every one to say: Is it I, Lord?"<sup>1</sup> Not one asked, is it my neighbor? Is it Peter, Andrew, or Judas? but each one was afraid that he himself might be the unhappy traitor. "Is it I, Lord?" Oh, if every one were to attend to himself, and to his own faults and sins, how much would he not find to blame and condemn! He would soon see that he is like a traveller who is carrying a bag on his back, and who can see only what is before him, but not the load of sins he himself is carrying. You know my dear brethren, how Christ acted when the Pharisees brought before Him the woman taken in adultery, and said to Him, that she should be stoned: "Jesus, bowing himself down, wrote with His finger on the ground;"<sup>2</sup> that is, as commentators say, He wrote on the ground their secret sins. "When, therefore, they continued asking Him, He lifted Himself up and said to them: he that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."<sup>3</sup> How astonished they must have been when they heard this! They slunk away one after the other, like thieves caught in the act; not one of them dared to cast a stone at the guilty woman. "But they hearing this went out one by one, beginning at the eldest; and Jesus alone remained, and the woman standing in the midst."<sup>4</sup> Oh if that same finger were to write down the sins and daily faults of each one of us, so that we could see them, then indeed we should be silent about others, and not be so ready to find fault with and to cast stones at our neighbor; we should then leave him in peace, and try to rectify our own misdeeds! Therefore, if ever you are present when the faults of others are talked of, look at once into your own consciences, where your offences against God are written down, and ask yourselves: have I then no fault? Certainly, and not a few of them! Then why should I condemn others? I must repent of my own misdeeds, accuse myself of them in confession, and do penance for them.

Advice for  
those who  
listen to  
such talk.

But you, who sometimes hear talk of that kind in company, you should follow the advice of the Wise Ecclesiastic: "In many things be as if thou wert ignorant."<sup>5</sup> Act as if you did

<sup>1</sup> Et contristati valde, cœperunt singuli dicere: Numquid ego sum, Domine?—Matth. xxvi. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Jesus autem inclinans se deorsum, digito scribebat in terra.—John viii. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Cum ergo perseverarent interrogantes eum, erepuit se, et dixit eis: Qui sine peccato est vestrum, primus in illam lapidem mittat.—Ibid. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Audientes autem unus post unum exibant, incipientes a senioribus; et remansit solus Jesus, et mulier in medio stans.—Ibid. 9.

<sup>5</sup> In multis esto quasi inscius.—Ecl. xxxii. 12.

not know what the talk is about; for if you listen to it, and show that you take pleasure in it, you co-operate in the sin and in the injury done to charity. Therefore, if you have any authority over those who are finding fault with their neighbor, you must exercise it, and say to them with a holy zeal: what is that to you? And this you are bound to do. If they are not subject to you, although they are your inferiors, you must modestly say to them; what is that to me? I know nothing about the matter, nor do I concern myself with the affairs of other people; or else, like St. Chrysostom, you may say: If you wish to praise another in my hearing, I will listen to you; but I have no ears for fault-finding. And this is required by Christian charity. But if your superiors talk in that way, so that you dare not remonstrate, then be silent, and think to yourself: What is that to me? There is so much talk of that kind going about, that one knows not what to believe; I will not form a rash judgment of my neighbor, etc. If all listeners were to act in that way, there would soon be an end to uncharitable talk.

Finally, you, who are exposed to the criticisms and fault-finding of others, be not disturbed at it; let people think and say of you what they please; if you are guilty of what they accuse you of, humble yourselves, acknowledge that you deserve to be found fault with, and resolve to amend. If you give reasonable grounds for suspicion or for unfavorable judgments of your conduct, you are bound in conscience to remove that stumbling block out of the way of others. If you are innocent, then be comforted! You are not the only one; you have countless companions who must bear patiently similar criticisms of their conduct; the saint who is free from them, has yet to be born. Continue then to live as true Christians; say confidently with St. Paul: "But to me it is a very small thing to be judged by you, or by any man's day;"<sup>1</sup> it does not trouble or concern me in the least, that men should condemn me; I seek not their favor, nor do I fear their displeasure; "but he that judgeth me, is the Lord."<sup>2</sup> He can see into my heart, of which men know nothing; they may now condemn my actions behind my back, but by and by they will not be my judges: there is One who will judge me, and He will judge them too, and their talk. To Him I appeal; to Him I entrust my cause; if He does not speak against me, then my affairs are prospering, even if the

For those  
who are  
criticised  
and found  
fault with.

<sup>1</sup> *Mihi autem pro minimo est, ut a vobis iudicer, aut ab humano die.*—I. Cor. iv. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Qui autem iudicat me, Dominus est.*—Ibid. 4.

whole world were to look on me as the greatest malefactor. Oh what a consolation it is for me, O Lord, to be able to say to Thee with Thy penitent servant David: "To Thee only have I sinned, and have done evil before Thee."¹ If I have transgressed Thy commands, as, I now sorrowfully acknowledge, I have done only too often, Thou art the only one against whom I have sinned. If I have done my duty and led a good life, it is for Thy sake alone. If I have deserved punishment, it is from Thee alone that I have to fear it, it is Thy pardon alone that I still can implore. If I have deserved a reward, it is Thou alone who wilt give it me. The world, O Lord, has judged, condemned, and reviled Thee; am I any better than Thou? I ought to look on it as an honor to suffer a little with Thee. Yes, O Lord, I am satisfied! I will continue to serve Thee, and to seek Thee and Thy favor alone! If I have Thee as my friend, I have enough. Amen.

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SIXTY-THIRD SERMON.

ON THE INJURY DONE TO ONE'S SELF AND TO GOD BY  
FAULT-FINDING.

Subject.

He who pries into, criticises and finds fault with the actions of others, 1. Neglects his own soul, and therefore acts against the love he owes himself; 2. Usurps the right and the office of God, and therefore acts against the love he owes to God.—*Preached on the Feast of St. John the Evangelist.*

Text.

*Quid ad te? Tu me sequere.*—John xxi. 22.  
"What is it to thee? follow thou Me."

Introduction.

There seemed to be some ground for the question asked by Peter. O dear Lord, he said, Thou hast told me how I am to be like Thee in my death; but here is another whom Thou lovest very much, my fellow Apostle John: "What shall this man do?" What will become of him? Certainly the question appears reasonable enough, and evinced an anxiety that arose out

¹ Tibi soli peccavi, et malum coram te feci.—Ps. l. 6.

of brotherly love. Yet St. Peter received a sharp reproof by way of answer: "What is it to thee? follow thou Me," you must be satisfied with what I have told you. My dear brethren, Our Lord, who acted and spoke always for our instruction and justification, warns by this reproof, not only Peter, but all of us, to abstain from inquiring curiously into the affairs of others; for we must look after ourselves and our own souls, if we wish to follow Christ to Heaven. How many there are nowadays who deserve that reproof! "What is it to thee?" You who are fond of prying into the lives of others, "what is it to thee?" You, who, without sufficient grounds, suspect and condemn your neighbor, "what is it to thee?" You who put a bad interpretation on the actions of others, and blame and criticise them, "what is it to thee?" You who are fond of speaking of others' faults and failings, "what is it to thee?" Look to yourself, and see that you follow the Lord by leading a Christian life. But that you cannot do, as things are; for, is it following Christ, to usurp the office of judge, which belongs to God? Is it following Christ, to neglect the salvation of your soul? Is it following Christ, to violate the law of Christian charity? But that is what you do whenever you interfere with others, either by judging them, or prying into their concerns, or finding fault with and talking about them. Thereby you violate the law of Christian charity, and act most unjustly, as I have already shown: but you act also against the love of yourself and the love of God, as I shall now prove.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*By thus interfering with the affairs of others which do not concern us, we neglect our own souls, and therefore act against the love we owe ourselves: the first part. We usurp the right and the office of God, and therefore act against the love we owe Him: the second part.*

O Almighty and merciful God, what a great thing it would be for us, if Thy grace were this day to impel us all to amend or to avoid that great and common fault! We humbly beg that grace of Thee through the merits of Thy dearest Mother Mary, and the intercession of our holy angels guardian.

It is a well-known saying that he who is intent on too many things at once, is not likely to do any of them properly; <sup>He who attempts to do many differ-</sup> <sup>ent things</sup> nay it

<sup>1</sup> Pluribus intentus minor est ad singula sensus.

ent things  
at once, will  
do none of  
them well.

is almost an impossibility for our weak human understanding to bring even two opposite undertakings to a successful conclusion at the same time; one of them must necessarily give way to the other, or be accomplished in a very imperfect manner. I have not ten hands; I cannot be present in two places at once; how then can I do everything at once? Such is the cry that we hear from servants, when their masters expect too much from them. And sometimes too they have a right to excuse themselves humbly and respectfully; but they should never murmur or grumble against their master or mistress.

Our great-  
est concern  
should be  
to serve  
God and  
save our  
souls.

What, my dear brethren, is the chief duty that God has imposed on each one of us during this life? Ask the children in the catechism class, why man was created, and they will answer you: to love and serve God, and to be happy with Him forever. This is the one necessary thing by which, as Ecclesiastes says, a wise man may be known: "Fear God and keep His commandments; for this is all man."<sup>1</sup> This is the only affair that concerns every one in particular; the king in his government, the peasant at the plough, the soldier in the field, the merchant in his office, the tradesman in his workshop, the servant in his employment, the maid in the kitchen or at the spinning-wheel, all have to serve God, to keep His commandments, that their souls may gain Heaven. This is what we must unceasingly attend to at all times, in all places, and under all circumstances; all other thoughts, cares, considerations, words, and works, must depend on this; what does not help us therein, is of no concern to us; what hinders us therein, we must avoid as the greatest evil. This is the only thing about which each one will be questioned at the judgment-seat of God, as to whether and how he attended to it. "For," as St. Paul says, "we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. Therefore every one of us shall render account to God for himself."<sup>2</sup> Whether another, who is not under my care, has lived well or ill, served his God faithfully or not, that I shall not have to answer for; but I shall certainly be asked how I lived myself, and how I loved and served my God. Where the soul of my brother is gone, unless I have perverted it and am bound to convert it, that is not the question that will be put to me; if it is lost it will not hinder my salvation; if it is in Heaven, it will not prevent my damnation if I deserve

<sup>1</sup> Deum time, et mandata ejus observa, hoc est enim omnis homo.—Eccles. xii. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Omnes enim stabimus ante tribunal Christi. Itaque unusquisque nostrum pro se rationem reddet Deo.—Rom. xiv. 10, 12.

it. It is the eternal welfare of my own soul that I must look after; this is the most important and necessary thing I have to attend to, as long as I am on this earth. All other things in the world do not concern me.

And, O inquisitive, meddling man, this one necessary thing is the very one that you neglect, when you meddle with the affairs of other people, whom God has not committed to your care. For, while you are engaged in prying into their lives and actions, how can you keep a watchful eye over yourself, so as to regulate your own conduct? If you think and judge ill of others, and put a bad interpretation on their actions, how can you form a sound opinion of the nature of your own thoughts, words, and works, so as to decide whether or not they are in accordance with your last end? If you like to listen to backbiting and detraction, and to hear the faults of others spoken of, how can you hear the voice of conscience, or know what faults it reproaches you with? If you ridicule, criticise, and comment on the defects you have seen, heard of, or suspected in your neighbor, either through hatred and ill-will, or through imprudence and loquacity; how can you be in earnest in your efforts to correct and amend your own defects? If you are so quick in discovering your neighbor to be sinful or vicious, so that you therefore despise and condemn him secretly to yourself, and publicly in presence of others, how can you repent of and detest your own faults? And therefore, how can you at the same time attend to the most necessary affair of your salvation, and fulfil it as you ought? That is, humanly speaking, impossible; these things are so different from each other, that they cannot be attended to at the same time.

It is neglected by him who meddles with the affairs of others.

When the natural heat of the body comes too much to the surface, it is, according to the testimony of all medical authorities, a sign that the internal heat is decreasing, and that the stomach is getting all the colder. And we find that to be true by our own experience; we have, generally speaking, a better appetite in winter than in summer; and in summer a cold drink is far more injurious than in winter. Why so? Because in summer, when the surface of the body is heated, the stomach loses a portion of its natural and necessary heat through the opening of the pores of the skin; but in winter the cold outside prevents the escape of the internal heat. So it is with those who pour out their thoughts, cares, and conversation, over things outside themselves, and are anxious to know how others live, and how they act, and speak; but with regard to their own interior, their own souls,

For he does not try to attend to the amendment of his own faults.

they are ignorant, careless, and indifferent. As the ancients used to say, they carry a sack over their shoulders, in the front part of which they have the faults and sins of their neighbor, so that they can always keep them before their eyes and criticise them; but in the back part they have their own faults and sins, so that they cannot see, feel, or notice them, and therefore cannot correct them. The holy Fathers, and especially St. Basil, St. Chrysologos, and St. Bernard, compare those people to an open eye, which sees everything that comes in its way in clear daylight, but cannot see itself. St. Augustine calls them lazy or indolent people; "they are curious about the lives of others, but careless about amending their own lives."<sup>1</sup> "The great fault of curiosity is," says St. Gregory, "that it leads the mind of an individual away from himself to study the lives of others, while it hides from him the state of his own soul; thus he knows much about others, and very little about himself."<sup>2</sup> As we read in the Gospel of St. Matthew, the Son of God made the same complaint when he warned us not to judge others, and much less to speak ill of them: "Why seest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye; and seest not the beam that is in thy own eye? or how sayest thou to thy brother: Let me cast the mote out of thy eye; and behold a beam is in thy own eye?"<sup>3</sup> but you do not notice it; you see, judge, criticise and condemn a friendly look, a quiet word, which one person has exchanged with another; but you do not see or condemn your own far worse misdeeds, which you commit daily; you can talk about and find fault with the amusements of others, which are often innocent enough; but you do not seem to notice that your own life is consumed in idleness, eating, drinking, sleeping, and dangerous amusements; you put a bad interpretation on your neighbor's actions, although you cannot know whether they are bad or not; but you do not amend your own wicked ways, although you have no doubt of their malice.

If each one did so, there would not be so many rash judgments and criticisms.

Poor blind man that you are! look to yourself; attend to yourself before interfering with and talking of the concerns of others, which are nothing to you! "Thou hypocrite, cast out first the

<sup>1</sup> *Curiosum genus ad cognoscendam vitam alienam, desidiosum ad corrigendam suam.*—S. Aug. L. 1. Confess.

<sup>2</sup> *Grave curiositatis vitium est, quæ dum cujuslibet mentem ad investigandam proximam vitam exterius ducit, semper ei sua intima abscondit, ut aliena sciens, se nesciat.*—S. Greg. L. Mor.

<sup>3</sup> *Quid autem vides festucam in oculo fratris tui, et trabem in oculo tuo non vides. Aut quomodo dicis fratri tuo: Sine, ejicam festucam de oculo tuo: et ecce, trabs est in oculo tuo.*—Matth. vii. 3, 4.

beam out of thy own eye, and then shalt thou see to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."<sup>1</sup> Why should it concern you to know and be able to speak of how others live? Have you to answer to God for them? Is there perhaps nothing in your own heart and conscience that is worth thinking about and amending? Can you say with St. Paul: "I am not conscious to myself of anything"?<sup>2</sup> It would be rare indeed to find one who could say that. But hear what the Apostle adds: "Yet am I not hereby justified."<sup>3</sup> How! says St. Chrysostom, Paul does not dare to say that he is free from faults and sins, although his conscience does not accuse him of any; can we then venture to say that we are innocent? But if we cannot say that, if we do not even know how it is with us, how can we be so presumptuous as to pass judgment on others? "I know not myself; how can I say anything of another?"<sup>4</sup> Oh, says St. Peter Damian, "if we were as strict in judging ourselves as we ought to be, others would not have so much to suffer from our censoriousness."<sup>5</sup> If the Pharisee, who extolled himself in the temple so much above other men, had looked into his own heart, and seen the secret pride and hypocrisy that filled it, he would not have despised, nor condemned as a robber and adulterer, the public sinner who, filled with humility and sorrow for his sins, stood at the door, and did not dare to raise his eyes to Heaven. If the Jews, as we read in the eighth chapter of the Gospel of St. John, had considered their own sins and vices, which Christ wrote with His finger on the ground, they would not have dared to accuse the woman taken in adultery, nor to condemn her to be stoned. If the scribes and the high-priest had examined their own consciences, and tried to amend their wicked lives, Jesus Christ, the Holy of holies, would not have had so many to spy and watch Him. In the same way, my dear brethren, if each one of us were to attend properly to the affairs of his soul, no honest man would be troubled by censorious critics. But, as daily experience proves, since the whole world is filled with those critics, it is no wonder that there are so very few who really strive earnestly to save their souls. Once for all; it is impossible to attend to

<sup>1</sup> *Hypocrita, eijce primum trabem de oculo tuo, et tunc videbis eijcere festucam de oculo fratris tui.*—Matth. vii. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Nihil mihi conscius sum.*—I. Cor. iv. 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Sed non in hoc justificatus sum.*—Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> *Quomodo, qui mea nescio, aliena indicare potero?*

<sup>5</sup> *Si districti circa nos essemus, ut dignum est, iudices, non tam rigidos experiretur vita aliena censores.*

one's soul properly, and at the same time to judge and find fault with the actions of others.

He who is given to fault-finding shows thereby that his soul is not in a good state.

Nay, they who are so fond of fault-finding show clearly enough that their souls are not in a good state. Nor do I allude now to the violation of the law of charity of which they are guilty, as I have proved already. But they give clear proof that they are guilty of the very faults and sins which they think they find in others. "Wherefore," says St. Paul to the Romans, "thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art, that judgest. For, wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou dost the same things which thou judgest."<sup>1</sup> How is it that the same food and drink is bad for one, and good for another? The one is healthy and strong, although his food is coarse and common; the other, although he has the healthiest, choicest food every day, is always pale, thin, and delicate. What is the reason of that? The one has a healthy stomach which digests the food it receives, and converts it into flesh and blood; the other has a delicate stomach, which converts even the daintiest food into bile and evil humors. "So it is with us mortals," says St. Augustine, "we suspect, judge, and speak of others according to our own interior dispositions."<sup>2</sup> We measure our neighbor's shoe by our own last. He whose soul is in a good state interprets the actions of others in a good sense; he whose soul is corrupted by faults and sins sees nothing but evil, even in the good that others do.

For he judges others by his own faults and sins.

A pious Christian, who makes profession of true virtue, thinks that every one is like himself; he looks on every one as good and pious, whose wickedness he is not thoroughly convinced of; he hardly ever suspects and never judges ill of others. He does his duty, and leaves the rest to God. A wicked, tepid half-Christian thinks that every one is defiled with the filth in which he himself is buried up to the eyes. "The fool when he walketh in the way," says the wise Preacher, "whereas he himself is a fool, esteemeth all men fools."<sup>3</sup> The impure man thinks that all are like himself, and that they have the same thoughts, the same meaning in their words and conversations as he has; a treacherous flatterer trusts no one, through fear of being deceived; an impatient, quarrelsome, passionate man takes every sour look, every thoughtless word as an insult; a proud, conceited man,

<sup>1</sup> Propter quod inexcusabilis es, O homo omnis, qui judicas. In quo enim judicas alterum, teipsum condemnas; eadem enim agis, quæ judicas.—Rom. ii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Hoc homo proclivius suspicatur in aliis, quod sentit in se ipso.—S. Aug. in Ps. 118.

<sup>3</sup> In via stultus ambulans, cum ipse insipiens sit, omnes s'vitos æstimat.—Eccles. x. 3.

whose only idea is to have a high position in the world, thinks that every one is trying to forestall him. In a word, just as looking through a red or blue glass makes everything appear red or blue, so each one will judge another according to the vices to which he himself is subject. Hence, when he has discovered a fault in his neighbor, his memory seizes hold of it at once, his imagination paints it much blacker than it really is, and on the first opportunity that offers, he will talk about it, either because it gratifies him to see that another is subject to the same fault as himself, or because he is so full of hatred and envy, that he cannot bear to see any good qualities in him.

What wicked thoughts King Saul had of David? He often complained to his attendants that he was in dread of his life on his account, and he even asked David to spare his life, when he was come into the possession of his kingdom. How could Saul have given way to a fear of that kind? How could such a thought have entered his mind? For David had always served him truly, had saved him from the hands of the Philistines, and more than once had spared his life, when he might have taken it. How was it then that Saul had such a bad opinion of him? Because he himself had a violent hatred of the innocent David; and for that reason he thought the latter as wicked as himself. Cain cried out full of anguish: "Every one therefore that findeth me, shall kill me."<sup>1</sup> But why? why should they kill you? No one will harm you! But he himself had killed his brother, and therefore he was afraid of every one. When Luther, the heresiarch, had turned apostate, doffed his monk's habit, and given himself up to impurity, he publicly taught in his writings that it was impossible for any one to observe chastity. Thus people who are fond of meddling with others' affairs are apt to measure them by their own standard. Hence, when they are given to criticising and fault-finding, no matter how good and pious they are in other respects, they have good reason to fear that their own souls are in a bad state; that their lives are not, or have not been good, that their consciences are burdened with many secret faults and vices, and therefore, that they condemn themselves as guilty of the very sins of which they accuse others.

I shall conclude this part in the words of Christ: "What is it to thee? follow thou Me;" What have you to do with others? You must follow Christ. Do you wish to gratify your curiosity? asks St. Chrysostom; if so, I will give you matter

Proved by  
examples.

Conclusion  
and exhortation to all  
to look after  
themselves  
and their  
own souls.

<sup>1</sup> Omnis igitur, qui invenerit me, occidet me.—Gen. iv. 14.

enough; you have not to go far to seek it; you need only look at yourself; begin and end with yourself; see how matters are with your own soul and conscience; criticise your own faults and sins; amend what is still unchristian and imperfect in your own language, behavior, and actions; look after yourself; see that you serve God and love Him with your whole heart, above all things, that so you may save your soul. You will find so much to arrange and set in order in this one only thing, which necessarily concerns you, that you will easily forget the faults of your neighbor, which do not concern you, and will leave him in peace. Oh, what a great thing it would be, if every one were to live in that way, if every one tried to do his own duty, and left others to attend to theirs! What peace and union there would be in families, what happiness and prosperity everywhere! What a Heaven there would be on earth! I am astonished when I consider that marriage feast in the Gospel of St. Matthew. One of the guests present had not on a wedding-garment. "Then the king said to the waiters: bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the exterior darkness."<sup>1</sup> Is it possible, I ask, that none of the guests noticed that the man was not properly clad, and did not warn him to procure a wedding garment before the king's arrival? No, says a holy Father, every one was intent on himself, so that his own garments might be in good order; consequently no one troubled himself about that man, but left him altogether to the king's good pleasure. Let us act in the same way, my dear brethren; we are all invited to the heavenly banquet; let each of us endeavor, with all possible diligence, to appear at the end of our lives with the garment of sanctifying grace. We have nothing to do with others; we must leave them to be disposed of according to the good will and pleasure of the King of Heaven. And this is the second point in which those prying, inquisitive fault-finders are guilty of sin, for they usurp the right and office that God has reserved to Himself, namely that of examining and judging our actions, and therefore they act, not only against the love they owe themselves, but also against the love and reverence they owe the divine Majesty, as I shall now show in the

### Second Part.

**They do not usurp the** But what am I saying? Has God then so strictly reserved to

<sup>1</sup> *Tunc dixit rex ministris: Ligatis manibus et pedibus ejus, mitte eum in tenebras exteriores.*—*Matth. xxii. 13.*

Himself all examination of the actions of others, that each one must attend to himself alone? Am I usurping the office of God, when I take an interest in the souls of others? If that is the case, why am I here preaching to you? And how can I have the audacity to reprove and condemn loquacity in others? What would it concern me if every one were addicted to this vice, and what would be the use of preaching? Sin may flourish and gain the upper hand as much as it will, preachers have nothing to do with that; they must look after their own souls! Hear this, masters and mistresses, magistrates and superiors! See what a load of care is lifted off your shoulders! You need not trouble yourselves about what goes on in the town or district, about how those subject to you live, or about the abuses that are prevalent; it is no concern of yours, whether your servants lead Christian lives or not; you have only to look after your own souls! Even you, parents, may be indifferent about your children, you need not try to bring them up carefully, or to keep them out of bad company, or from keeping late hours; for it is all one to you, whether they go to Heaven or to hell; you must take no interest in them, as you have only your own souls to mind! But how can that be, my dear brethren? If God says to us all in general: "judge not, and you shall not be judged; condemn not, and you shall not be condemned,"<sup>1</sup> yet He tells parents by His Apostle, St. Paul, how they are to deal with their children: "You fathers, provoke not your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and correction of the Lord."<sup>2</sup> He tells masters and mistresses how they are to treat their servants. "But if any man have not care of his own, and especially of those of his house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."<sup>3</sup> He tells preachers and pastors what they must do. "Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season; reprove, entreat, rebuke, in all patience and doctrine;"<sup>4</sup> and He says to all men: "if thy brother shall offend against thee, go, and rebuke him between thee and him alone."<sup>5</sup> But how can all

office of the Almighty, who take an interest in those who are entrusted to their care.

<sup>1</sup> Nolite judicare, et non judicabimini: nolite condemnare, et non condemnabimini!—Luke vi. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Vos patres, nolite ad iracundiam provocare filios vestros, sed educate illos in disciplina et correptione Domini.—Ephes. vi. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Si quis autem suorum, et maxime domesticorum, curam non habet, fidem negavit, et est infidelis deterior.—I. Tim. v. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Prædica verbum, insta opportune, importune: argue, obsecra, increpa in omni patientia et doctrina.—II. Tim. iv. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Si peccaverit in te frater tuus, vade, et corripe eum inter te et ipsum solum.—Matth. xviii. 15.

this be done without watching, judging, and reproving the actions of others?

Superiors,  
parents,  
etc., are  
bound to do  
this.

We must not, therefore, imagine that this command allows of no exception. It is one thing to watch and notice the conduct of those whom God has committed to our care, and another to interfere with those for whom we are not at all responsible. Again, it is one thing to notice others' conduct, in order to prevent sin and to bring souls to Heaven, and another to notice it out of sheer curiosity, and to look only for faults in our neighbor, that we may condemn him and speak ill of him. God has given us no right to this latter, but the former He has imposed on many as a duty. Thus superiors must keep a watchful eye on their subjects, for the good of the latter; masters and mistresses must try to keep their servants from sin, and encourage them to practise virtue; preachers and pastors of souls must instruct their flocks, guard them from vice, and show them the road to Heaven; but especially parents must bring up their children in a Christian manner, keep them from occasions of sin, chastise their faults, and teach them to love and fear God. And this duty He has laid on them in such a way, that He will require at their hands the souls He entrusted to their care. Oh, would that we were more curious still in this respect, and that we took as much trouble to fulfil that duty, as we do to notice and criticise the faults of our neighbor!

But many of  
them neg-  
lect their  
duty, and  
meddle in  
things that  
do not con-  
cern them.

But, strange to say, we neglect what we are commanded to do, and devote ourselves thoroughly to what we are forbidden to interfere with. We have a striking example of this in the First Book of Kings, in the person of the High-Priest Heli. He had the eye of a lynx to spy out the slightest fault committed by strangers who entered the temple; but he was blind to the great sins which his own sons committed, in his own house as well as in the temple. The whole city complained of the conduct of his sons, the people murmured at their impurity and the sacrileges they were guilty of, and spoke of the scandal they gave publicly. "The sin of the young men was exceedingly great before the Lord,"<sup>1</sup> says the Sacred Scripture. But their father was the last to know anything of their wickedness, or to reprove it. Meanwhile he was very sharp in detecting the faults of others. When the pious Anna came into the temple, laboring under a grievous sorrow, he rebuked her at once, and accused her of being drunk, "and said to her: How long wilt thou be

<sup>1</sup> *Erat ergo peccatum puerorum grande nimis coram Domino.*—1. Kings ii. 17.

drunk? Digest a little the wine of which thou hast taken too much.”<sup>1</sup> How many there are nowadays who resemble him! Tell that father to look after his son; that master to be careful of his servant, and not to allow him to go with bad companions, or to spend his time in drinking and gambling; tell that mother, her daughter or her servant-maid spends too much time at the door in the evening, talking to a person of the neighborhood. What is that to me? is the answer you would get; I do not meddle in other people’s affairs. What a pious mortal you are to be sure! You do not meddle in other people’s affairs! And why then are you so fond of talking of your neighbor’s faults to those who cannot help him to amend them, and with no other object but to bring ridicule and dishonor on him? What are his faults to you? But even if I were to make known the faults of another, with a good intention, to his parents or superiors, what better should I be? Mind your own business, is the only answer I should often get; I cannot believe such a thing of my children, or my servants; they are too good for that; I know well that they mean no wrong. Ah, mind your own business! Why do you not think of that when you spend hours talking of your neighbor’s faults. You cannot imagine that your children or servants mean any wrong; you do not believe they are guilty; you look on them as pious. Why do you not act in the same way when the faults of other people’s children are related to you by some backbiting, talkative individual? You are only too ready to believe them, and to join in the uncharitable remarks that are made. The law of Christian charity requires us, even in a private capacity, to warn our neighbor of his faults and reprove them in private, if we think that such warning will help him to amend; but who is there who has the courage to undertake to perform a duty of that kind? We are only too apt to say then, that the man is nothing to us; we have nothing to do with him, etc; and yet, when he is not present, and there is not the least hope of doing him any good, we criticise his faults, and make him the subject of injurious suspicions, rash judgments, and uncharitable talk, and we make light of doing so, although it is then, really, that we should remember that we have not to trouble ourselves about our neighbor’s affairs.

For it belongs to God alone to pronounce judgment on others, and we are thus guilty of usurping His office. “But who art thou that judgest thy neighbor?”<sup>2</sup> asks St. James in

And thus  
usurps the  
office of  
judge that

<sup>1</sup> Dixitque ei: Usquequo ebria eris? digere paulisper vinum, quo mades.—1. Kings i. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Tu autem, quis es, qui iudicas proximum?—James iv. 13.

belongs to  
Christ.

his epistle, and who find fault with and condemn his actions? Who has commissioned you to do that? Are you appointed his judge and overseer? No, for the Supreme Judge has forbidden you to usurp that office: "Judge not;"<sup>1</sup> "Look not after wickedness in the house of the just;"<sup>2</sup> nor seek for faults in your neighbor. If a stranger came into your house without knocking at the door, and entered your room, you would consider him guilty of great insolence, and show him the door at once; and yet you venture, uninvited, into the houses of others, that is, you examine, criticise, and find fault with what is done in them, and speak of it everywhere. Who gave you authority to do that? You usurp an authority that does not belong to you, nor indeed to any mortal like yourself, for God does not allow any one to judge his neighbor in that way; nor does it belong to the angels, for God, who has appointed them to do His will, and to guard the souls of men, has not given them the right to judge our actions and intentions: "For God hath not subjected unto angels the world."<sup>3</sup> But you usurp a right which belongs to Jesus Christ alone, the Son of God, who purchased it with His blood, the right namely, of judging the living and the dead. "There is one law-giver and judge," says St. James, "that is able to destroy and to deliver."<sup>4</sup> Therefore St. Chrysostom warns us not to take upon ourselves this office of Our Lord: "Be careful not to usurp the office of judge that belongs to Christ; because it is for Him alone to examine your neighbor's life," and to pronounce upon his thoughts, words and actions, "and not for you."<sup>5</sup>

That is  
great pre-  
sumption.

Job, although he was the most patient of men, and bore all his trials meekly and silently, blessing God for them, yet, when his inconsiderate friends, not content with reproaching him with his sufferings, began to find fault with his actions, and to attribute the calamities that had befallen him to his sins, he could not restrain himself any longer, and he cried out: "Why do you persecute me as God?"<sup>6</sup> Why do you presume to act the part of God, and to sit in judgment on me and my actions? Inquisitive and meddling fault-finder! do you then wish to make yourself equal to God, as far as His office as Judge is concerned?

<sup>1</sup> Nolle judicare.—Matth. vii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ne quæras impletatem in domo justî.—Prov. xxiv. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Non enim angelis subjecit Deus orbem terræ.—Hebr. ii. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Unus est legislator et judex, qui potest perdere et liberare.—James iv. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Noli præripere Christi judicis ordinem. Illius est munus, ista discutere, non tuum.

<sup>6</sup> Quare persequimini me sicut Deus?—Job. xix. 22.

But what do I say? Equal? You arrogate to yourself even greater authority than God exercises. Christ, although He is the Lord of all created things, and has full power over the present and the future, yet does not pronounce judgment on any one, until after death: "And then will He render to every man according to his works."<sup>1</sup> He will examine the life of each one, and render to him according to his deserts. How patiently meanwhile He bears with sinners! How careful He is to prevent their misdeeds from being publicly known! How strictly He commands confessors never to make known by the least sign any sin they have heard in confession! But you, presumptuous man, dare to anticipate His judgment, and to pry into, judge, condemn, and talk about the faults of others, while the latter are still on earth, and perhaps, too, even after they have amended those faults, or resolved to amend them at some future time. What excessive presumption on the part of a miserable mortal, who is himself in great need of the divine mercy, to arrogate to himself what belongs to God, and to criticise his neighbor!

Woe to you, fault-finders and prying intermeddlers, on that day when your turn shall come to be judged! I would not willingly be in your place then! Not without reason has Our Lord, who cannot and will not allow His honor to suffer, threatened in three of the gospels, that, as you deal with others, so will He deal with you. You now constitute yourselves judges of others, without any right to do so; but you yourselves will have to appear before a Judge from whom you will not be able to conceal anything. You now discuss and examine, partly through curiosity, partly through envy and malice, the lives of others, and you notice the least fault they commit; "with the same measure that you shall mete withal, it shall be measured to you again."<sup>2</sup> God Himself will subject your lives to a strict examination; He will light a lantern, as He says Himself, and will search the most-hidden recesses of your hearts, nor shall the least fault escape Him. You now interpret in a bad sense all you see or hear of others, although you should give them credit for a good intention, even when their outward acts are inexcusable; "it shall be measured to you again;" God will take no excuse from you, but will pronounce sentence on you, according to the strictness of His justice, and the full weight of your sins. You now

Woe at the last judgment to fault-finders and those who pry into the actions of others.

<sup>1</sup> Et tunc reddet unicuique secundum opera ejus.—Matth. xvi. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Eadem quippe mensura, qua mensi fueritis, remetietur vobis.—Luke vi. 38.

speak of your neighbor's faults, and make no secret of anything that you know or suspect to another's disadvantage, and thus you bring ridicule and dishonor on many a one: "it shall be measured to you again;" when the proper time comes, God will not keep silent about you; He will open the Book in which He has the record of all your wickedness, even to your most secret thoughts, and He will read it out, to your unutterable confusion, in presence of the whole world, before Heaven and earth, before angels, men, and devils. You now talk ill of and condemn many an honest man behind his back, when he cannot defend himself: "it shall be measured to you again;" God, without asking you about it, will pronounce on you that most severe and irrevocable sentence, without pity or mercy, which condemns the wicked to the flames of hell, and makes them accursed forever.

Conclusion  
and exhortation  
not to judge,  
much less to speak  
ill of others.

But you, pious and sensible Christians, who, according to the Christian law, look after your own souls, and can say with truth: I do not trouble myself about others for whom I am not responsible; I neither suspect, nor judge ill of my neighbor; I put the best interpretation on his actions; rejoice at the favorable, mild, and merciful judgment that awaits you. You are amongst the number of those of whom Our Lord says: "judge not, and you shall not be judged," and of whom He again assures us by St. Paul: "But if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged."<sup>1</sup> Let us then, my dear brethren, shut ourselves up within our own consciences, in order to detect and to amend the faults we are guilty of. What does a river gain by overflowing its banks, except to sully and dirty its waters? Our lives, the time given us here below by God, is too short to be wasted in prying into and criticising the actions of others. The business of our eternal salvation is too difficult, and perilous, and important, for us to set it aside that we may occupy ourselves uselessly and mischievously with others' concerns. The account that we shall have to give of ourselves at the judgment-seat of God is perplexing enough already; why should we seek to make it worse by interfering unnecessarily with other people? Heaven and its eternal joys are far too beautiful to be sacrificed for the sake of gratifying a miserable curiosity regarding the conduct of others. Let others think, judge, talk, and laugh about our faults, as long as they please; our only concern must be to look well to ourselves, and to live as we ought. That is the way to act in a sensible, Christian manner. O Lord, from whose hands all good thoughts and

<sup>1</sup> Quod si nosmetipsos dijudicemus, non utique iudicemur.—I. Cor. xi. 31.

purposes must come, grant that I may always have this true Christian spirit! If I sometimes am inclined to suspect others, to judge them in thought, or to put a bad interpretation on their actions, do not omit to warn me by my holy angel guardian, and to whisper to me: "what is it to thee? follow thou Me." If uncharitable conversation is going on in my presence, stop my ears, or else enlighten my understanding, that I may take what I hear in a good sense, and think to myself, what is it to me? If my slippery tongue is on the point of talking of my neighbor's faults, remind me of the same words: "what is it to thee?" so that I may keep silence, "that my mouth may not speak the works of men,"<sup>1</sup> according to the prayer of Thy servant David; so that I may not usurp the office of judge, which belongs to Thee, but attend to my own business constantly, follow Thee, serve Thee, with all possible care, and save my soul. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Ut non loquatur os meum opera hominum.—Ps. xvi. 4.

# ON INJURING THE CHARACTER OF OUR NEIGHBOR.

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## SIXTY-FOURTH SERMON.

### ON THE WICKEDNESS OF DEFAMING THE CHARACTER OF OUR NEIGHBOR.

#### Subject.

To defame the character of others is one of the most grievous of vices; therefore all should avoid it most carefully. *Preached on the third Sunday after Pentecost.*

#### Text.

*Et murmurabant Pharisæi et Scribæ, dicentes; quia hic peccatores recipit.*—Luke xv. 2.

“And the Pharisees and Scribes murmured, saying: This man receiveth sinners.”

#### Introduction.

Out of the flowers, from which the bees extract honey, spiders extract poison. We see by the Gospel of to-day that the same holds true of men in another sense. The publicans and sinners came to Jesus Christ to hear His divine words, and to be moved to repentance and amendment of their lives. “Now the publicans and sinners drew near unto Him to hear Him.” Certainly their intention was a good one, and who could find fault with it? Christ receives sinners; He goes into their houses; He eats and drinks with them, so as to win their hearts, and convert them to God. A most holy work indeed, and who could have anything to say against it? And yet there were false and wicked tongues that spat out poison, and murmured and complained, and cried down Our Lord as a public sinner, on account of that holy work. “The Pharisees and the Scribes murmured, saying: this man

receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." But, if that was a good work, why did they complain of it? If it was wicked, why did they not represent that to Christ Himself, in the spirit of fraternal correction? Why did they talk about it everywhere behind His back? I am not so much surprised, my dear brethren, to find the wicked Jews guilty of acting in that way, for they were filled with bitter hatred and envy against Our Lord; but it is surprising that the same fault should exist amongst us Christians. What is more common among not only those who have a deadly hatred towards each other, but also among friends and relations, and Christians who otherwise are lovers of peace, and seem to lead holy lives, than for one to speak behind another's back of what he has seen or heard of him, to make his faults and defects the subject of conversation, and to rob him of his good name, and lessen his reputation by murmuring against and finding fault with him? This vice of uncharitable tongues is as common, as it is grievous and damnable, nor can one speak often enough against it, because generally it becomes almost incurable on account of the habit of loquacity it fosters. O Holy Spirit of God, Thou art the master and Lord of hearts, and rulest over them according to Thy good pleasure; Thou canst at once effect that which has cost me already much useless labor, and canst restrain the tongue, that unruly member which, as St. James says, no one can keep in order properly. We beg of Thee, by the merits of Thy virginal Spouse Mary, and through the intercession of all our holy angels guardian, to restrain our tongues, that they may never indulge in uncharitable talk. Trusting in the help of Thy light and grace, I shall speak to-day of the malice of this talk, and I say:

#### Plan of Discourse.

*To defame the character of others is one of the most grievous of vices; therefore, Christians, guard against it most carefully. Such is the whole subject of my sermon.*

If he who defames his neighbor did nothing more than sever the bond of charity, harmony, and union, which should exist among men, he would, by that fact alone, be guilty of one of the most grievous of vices, since he acts against the fundamental law of charity. How important is it not in the sight of God, that this union and charity should exist and be constantly preserved among us! To love God, to love Him above all things, to love Him with our whole heart; what can be more reasonable than

The Almighty lays great stress on preserving the bond of charity amongst men.

that? And therefore that is the first and greatest command that God lays upon us: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart." Still, great and important as is this command to love God, He places another command in the same rank with it. "And the second is like to this, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;"<sup>1</sup> that is every one, great or small, rich or poor, friend or enemy, good or bad, and you must love them all as yourself. Nay, God frequently commands you, under pain of sin, to set aside the service you owe Him, when the love of your neighbor requires you to do so. For instance, on a Sunday or holyday, when you were prevented from hearing any of the earlier Masses, you hear the bell ringing for the last Mass; but there is a sick person whom you must attend to, and you have no one to take your place; what are you to do under these circumstances? It is true that you are bound to hear Mass every Sunday and holyday under pain of mortal sin; but not in this case, for the love of your neighbor has a prior claim on you; you must remain with the sick man if he is really in need of you and would suffer great inconvenience if deprived of your services; so that you must omit hearing the Mass that you would otherwise be bound to offer to God. Jesus Christ our Saviour has given to His disciples, and in their persons to all of us, many beautiful instructions and exhortations; but there is nothing He impresses on us so forcibly as mutual charity. How often did He not repeat, both before and after His resurrection, the words: "These things I command you, that you love one another;"<sup>2</sup> "A new commandment I give unto you: That you love one another."<sup>3</sup> The last prayer that He offered to His Father for His Apostles, before He took leave of them, was that they might practise this charity: "Holy Father:" I offer Thee those whom Thou hast given Me, and all who will believe in Me; "keep them in Thy name . . . that they may be one, as We also are . . . And not for them only do I pray, but for them also who through their word shall believe in Me; that they may all be one, as Thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee."<sup>4</sup> To the same end, as St. Augustine says, He has given us His flesh and blood in the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar, in order that all Christians partaking of the

<sup>1</sup> Secundum autem simile est huic: diliges proximum tuum, sicut teipsum.—Matth. xxi, 39.

<sup>2</sup> Hæc mando vobis: ut diligatis invicem.—John xv. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Mandatum novum do vobis, ut diligatis invicem.—Ibid. xiii. 34.

<sup>4</sup> Pater sancte, serva eos in nomine tuo, . . . ut sint unum, sicut et nos. Non pro eis autem rogo tantum, sed et pro eis qui credituri sunt per verbum eorum in me; ut omnes unum sint, sicut tu Pater in me, et ego in te.—Ibid. xvii. 11, 20, 21.

same spiritual food may be united in the bonds of charity; and for that reason the reception of this sacrament is called Communion, to signify the love and harmony that should reign amongst Christians. In a word, on this charity depends the observance of all the laws of God, as Christ tells us in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "On these two commandments," namely, that of the love of God, and that of the love of our neighbor, "dependeth the whole law and the prophets."<sup>1</sup> "My little children, love one another;"<sup>2</sup> was the only sermon that St. John, the beloved disciple, preached to his disciples; for, said he, if you do that, it suffices.

Wicked, uncharitable tongues, what do you do, when you talk about, criticise, ridicule, and find fault with the actions, the failings, and the defects of the absent? You violate the great fundamental law of charity; you break the bond of union that should exist amongst those for whom Christ died, that they might love one another; you tear out of their hearts the spirit of charity that Christ wishes to nourish in them, by giving them His own flesh and blood as their food and drink; you deprive of its effect that prayer that Our Lord and Saviour offered to His Eternal Father for all the faithful, that they might be one; for the only result of your uncharitable talk is to foment hatred and discord among men.

This command is violated by him who defames his neighbor.

For, in the first place, what is it that gives rise to talk of that kind if not ill-will, or hatred, or envy, or vindictiveness and bitterness, with which your hearts must be filled towards those whose faults or failings you talk about? "Charity covereth all sins,"<sup>3</sup> says the Holy Ghost by the Wise Man; it is a mantle that hides, as far as may be, all the vices and defects of our fellow-men. If I love a person, I would rather bite my tongue off, than say the least thing to his disadvantage, or to make him appear ridiculous. Besides, you cause those who listen to you to have a similar ill-will and aversion to the person you speak ill of, so that they lose the good opinion they formerly may have had of him. Nor will they, if they are as fond of talking as you are, keep to themselves what they have heard, but will make a point of spreading it about just as wickedly as you did, until everybody in the place knows all about it. Finally, what effect do you think your talk will have on the person of whom you speak, supposing it comes to his ears? What is more likely than that anger, ill-will, hatred,

In his own heart, and in the hearts of those to whom and against whom he speaks.

<sup>1</sup> In his duobus mandatis universa Lex pendet, et Prophetæ—Matth. xxii. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Filii mei diligite invicem.

<sup>3</sup> Universa delicta operit charitas. Prov. x. 12.

and desire of revenge will take the place of charity? You see now that with one breath, one uncharitable word, you have destroyed the peace, unity, and charity that God has so emphatically recommended to us! This it is, that makes the sin of injuring another's character so odious to God and man. O my God, if it were my good fortune to be able to banish this hateful vice out of even one town, what quarrels, and disputes, and misunderstandings, and hatreds, and persecutions I should put a stop to! For those are the evils caused by wicked tongues amongst neighbors, friends and relations, brothers and sisters. What a number of souls I should rescue from hell! For back-biting and injuring the fair fame of others causes the loss of many a soul! But my wish is in vain, and I need not waste any more time in giving expression to it.

A good name is the greatest and best of all natural possessions.

There is nothing which proves more clearly the wickedness of uncharitable talk, than the great value of the treasure it robs one of. "The greater the value of the property that is injured," says St. Thomas, "the greater is the harm done." But of all the natural and temporal possessions that a man can have on this earth, is there any which is more esteemed, valued, and loved, than a good name or reputation? God, our religion, the world and its prudence, all unite in saying to and inculcating on every one that he must preserve his good name. God exhorts us by the wise Ecclesiasticus: "Take care of a good name; for this shall continue with thee, more than a thousand treasures precious and great."<sup>1</sup> Our religion calls a good name the good odor of a Christian life, which encourages men to practise virtue, as much as the bad example and scandal-giving betrays men to evil. The maxims and principles of the world forbid any one to suffer the least taint to rest on his honor. Ask any honorable man whether he would prefer to be looked upon as dishonorable, or to lose a hundred ducats: away he would say at once; away with all my money! My good name is far more to me! I would rather be poor and keep my good name, than rich and dishonorable. All worldly offices and employments depend on the good name of those who fill them; master, lord, merchant, magistrate, prince, king, emperor, all these are mere empty titles, if those who bear them have lost their good name; credit, faith, confidence, everything is lost, when honor is lost. As the saying goes, there is nothing more pleasant than health, and it is true; and there is

<sup>1</sup> Curam habe de bono nomine: hoc enim magis permanebit tibi, quam mille thesauri pretiosi et magni.—EccI. xii. 15.

nothing sweeter than life, to preserve which a man will readily sacrifice all his wealth. And yet honor and a good reputation are sweeter and more pleasant than life and health. How many there are who risk their lives for the sake of making a name for themselves! And why? The reason of that the Holy Ghost gives by the wise Ecclesiasticus: "A good life hath its number of days; but a good name shall continue forever;"<sup>1</sup> everything we can enjoy during life, comes to an end in a short time; but a good name is not confined to this life, for it lasts after death, and is carried down to posterity. Hence, a good name is called the moral life of a man, and he who takes it away is called by the Apostle a murderer.

Murderers you are, then, you who defame your neighbor, and take away his moral and most precious life. One can compare you to nothing better than to that stone that was cut from the mountain without hands, as we read in the Book of Daniel. King Nabuchodonosor once saw in a dream a great statue, the head of which was of gold, the breast and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of brass, the legs of iron, and the feet partly of iron and partly of clay. Suddenly the whole statue fell to pieces and crumbled into dust, which was blown away by the wind. What was the cause of this utter ruin? A single stone that fell from the mountain. "A stone was cut out of a mountain, without hands, and it struck the statue."<sup>2</sup> And on what part of the statue did the stone fall? On the golden head, the silver breast, the brazen body, or the iron legs? No; for it could not have broken those metals; but it fell on the feet, that were of clay. "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."<sup>3</sup> A picture, my dear brethren, of what is done every day in the world by uncharitable tongues. Many a one is as beautiful as gold in virtue and piety, as shining as silver in his purity, as strong as brass and iron in his constancy, while the good name he enjoys makes him like a beautiful statue in

This is taken away by him who defames his neighbor.

<sup>1</sup> Bonæ vitæ numerus dierum : bonum autem nomen permanebit in ævum.—EccI. xII. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Abscessus est lapis de monte sine manibus, et percussit statuam.—Dan. II. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Percussit statuam in pedibus ejus ferreis et ætilibus, et comminuit eos. Tunc contrita sunt pariter ferrum, testa, æs, argentum, et aurum, et redacta quasi in favillam æstivæ aræ, quæ raptâ sunt vento, nullusque locus inventus est eis.—Ibid. 34, 35.

the eyes of men. And yet, how little is required to overthrow this statue and reduce it to dust! A single stone is enough; that is, a single word of calumny or detraction. And what does the calumniator or the detractor first attack? The gold and silver? What is good and praiseworthy in the man? By no means; he says not a word of that; but he begins by assailing the earthen feet; he finds out even the smallest faults and defects in the other, and talks about them, frequently exaggerating them, until the beautiful statue is destroyed, and the innocent and honorable man loses his good name and the moral life he before enjoyed.

Shown by a  
smile.

Sperenger, in his "*Malleum Maleficorum*," relates that there were in his day certain sorcerers and professors of the black art, who, on being asked how they could manage to deprive of life, when desired to do so, a person who was perhaps a hundred miles distant, replied that they had received from the devil certain arrows that they had to shoot at a crucifix, and if the arrow hit the mark, the person would surely die, even if he were in the Indies and within four walls. We have reason to be horrified at such wickedness, my dear brethren; but for my part I should perhaps refuse to believe in the truth of it, if I were not aware that all who attack their neighbor's character are guilty of just as great a crime. "A man that beareth false witness against his neighbor," says the Holy Ghost, "is like a dart and a sword and a sharp arrow."<sup>1</sup> How is he like an arrow? The Prophet Jeremias answers: "Their tongue is a piercing arrow."<sup>2</sup> And what bow do they shoot with? "And they have bent their tongue as a bow,"<sup>3</sup> in order to shoot off their calumnies, and with them to kill, not only those who are near them, but also and generally, those who are absent and far away, whom they deprive, not of bodily life, but of moral life, which is far more precious, by taking away their good name and reputation.

God takes  
care of a  
man's good  
name.

And that life is so precious in the sight of God, that generally speaking, whenever He mentions the wicked in Holy Scripture, He conceals their names that they may not be known. In the Book of Genesis we read of the presumption of those who attempted to build the tower of Babel. Who was the first to propose the building of it? Who made the plan? We know not; all we read is: "and each one said to his neighbor; come let us

<sup>1</sup> *Jaculum, et gladius, et sagitta acuta, homo, qui loquitur contra proximum suum falsum testimonium.*—Prov. xxv. 18.

<sup>2</sup> *Sagitta vulnerans lingua eorum.*—Jerem. ix. 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Extenderunt linguam suam quasi arcum.*—Ibid. 8.

make bricks, and bake them with fire.”<sup>1</sup> In the same Book we read that the people of Sodom surrounded the house of Lot, in order to seize the strangers whom he had harbored; not one of those wicked people is mentioned by name. In the Book of Exodus, the king who persecuted the Israelites is called Pharaoh, a name that was common to all the Egyptian kings; which of the Pharaohs he was, is not recorded. In the Book of Leviticus you will read of a blasphemer who was stoned, in the Book of Numbers, of one who profaned the Sabbath by servile works, but you cannot find out the name of either of them, nor of the Levite, whom we read of in the Book of Judges, who adored an idol in the house of Michas. Nor of the Benjaminites, whose foul lust caused a rebellion amongst the people, as we read in the same Book. In the gospels we seldom find the name of any guilty person recorded; they are called by general appellations, such as Scribes and Pharisees, the buyers and sellers in the temple, the woman who was a public sinner, one of the servants buffeting Jesus, the soldiers mocking Him, and so on. Whereby God gives us to understand how He hates and detests vice, but at the same time how careful He is of the sinner’s reputation, since He does not mention his name.

For the same reason God has strictly forbidden any one to mention even in confession the sin of another, when the latter is known to the confessor, who is still ignorant of his sin. But here I must remind you, my dear brethren, that it is a different matter to mention the fault of another to a confessor, or to some other person, with the intention of being helped to amend one’s own fault, or of helping one’s neighbor to amend; for in that case the law of fraternal correction obliges us to speak of the shortcomings of others, if we cannot induce them to correct those faults by privately admonishing them; otherwise it would be a great mistake to mention others by name in confession; and yet it is a common one. For instance, it oftens happens that the confessor is acquainted, or likely will be acquainted, with all the members of a family, husband, wife, brothers, sisters and servants. The wife comes to confession, (I am not repeating anything heard in confession, my dear brethren; I am merely saying what might happen) and though she ought to mention nothing but her own sins, she begins something in the following style: Alas, I have cursed, and sworn, and given way to impatience

So that it is never lawful to mention another’s sins in confession.

<sup>1</sup> Dixitque alter ad proximum suum: venite, faciamus lateres, et coquamus eos igni.—Gen. xi. 3.

very often; but I cannot help it; I am driven almost to desperation; my husband is enough to drive me mad; he gambles away all we earn; he is drunk nearly every day, and when he is in that state, one is not safe with him; he goes to houses of ill fame, etc. But what has that to do with your confession? You do not come here to accuse your husband, but yourself. You have cursed, and been impatient, and have almost despaired; these are your sins, and you should have told them without saying anything of your husband, who was the occasion of those sins. The husband acts in the same way with regard to his wife, and neither of them has gained anything by confession, but each has taken away the other's good name. Mothers, too, often act in the same way: I have a disobedient, wayward son, who will not obey me; he curses and abuses me if I give him good advice, and I cannot help myself; I must give way to my anger, and curse him in turn. My sister, says another, is so snappish and unkind, that I cannot bear her, etc. But what has your son, or your sister to do with your sins? What does the confessor want to know about their faults? Would you be satisfied if your children and relations were to mention your faults in confession? I have a hatred, says a fourth, against that judge, that lawyer, who took a bribe from my opponent, and caused me to lose my case unjustly, etc. Still! You have said enough already, without mentioning anything about the judge or the lawyer. My master, says a servant maid, has made improper proposals to me, in which I took pleasure; my mistress keeps up an unlawful intimacy, by which I was scandalised. Hush! You must not mention your master, or mistress, or any one else; it is not only quite unnecessary to do so, but it is also injurious to the fair fame of your neighbor; you cannot mention the sins of another, even under the seal of confession and to your confessor, without committing another sin; for he either knows the person you mention, or will likely know him at some future time, and thus the latter's good name will suffer.

Nay, according to some theologians, we should not name even the accomplice of our sin, although otherwise the nature

To make this matter still clearer, theologians propose the following question. In a place where there is only one priest to hear confessions, as is the case in remote country villages, and where the priest knows all the inhabitants, a person has committed sin with one of his own relations, his sister-in-law, for instance. What is that person to do when he goes to confession? If he mentions his accomplice, he reveals the sin of a person who is known to the confessor; and if not, he fails to declare the

nature of his sin and its circumstances, which ought to be confessed. Thus two precepts come into collision, both of which bind under grievous sin; one, which forbids us to say anything derogatory to the fair fame of our neighbor, and another, which forbids us to conceal deliberately the nature of the sin we have committed. What is to be done in a case of that kind? Generally speaking, theologians are agreed in saying that he who has the opportunity, or who can afford to wait for a short time until he has the opportunity, of confessing to a strange priest, should avail himself of it; but if he is obliged to go to his ordinary confessor, he must declare the nature of his sin, and mention the first degree of relationship as a circumstance of it, although thereby he reveals the guilt of his accomplice; because that revelation is, under the circumstances, only accidental, and cannot be helped. Still, there are many celebrated theologians who hold the contrary opinion, and maintain that the penitent, in such a case, must simply mention that he was guilty of the sin of impurity, and say nothing about the degree of relationship; but if he afterwards has the opportunity of confessing to a strange priest, he must then declare his sin fully; thus the accomplice does not lose her good name.

of the sin  
cannot be  
declared.

From all this, my dear brethren, I draw the following conclusion. If it is forbidden, even with the protection of the seal of confession, which binds the confessor so strictly that he can no more speak of what he hears therein, than if he had never heard it, and if theologians say with good reason that one is bound rather to conceal the nature of his sin, which should otherwise be declared in confession, rather than run the risk of injuring the character of another; if it is forbidden under those circumstances to disclose another's sin; how grievous, how inexcusable must not be the malice of those evil-tongued persons who, in company, without any cause whatever, speak of the faults and defects that they have seen, heard of, or noticed in others, or even merely suspected them of, whether they do so out of hatred, envy, and malice, or out of mere loquacity; for they rob their neighbor of his fair fame, that best of all natural possessions, which is so important in the eyes of God and man? With reason does St. Bernard cry out three times in succession: "detraction is a great vice; detraction is a grievous sin; detraction is an enormous crime."<sup>1</sup> And yet, alas! what a common thing it is in the

What a  
fearful sin  
it must then  
be, to de-  
fame another  
without  
necessity.

<sup>1</sup> Detractio grave vitium est! Detractio grave peccatum est! Detractio grande crimen est!—S. Bern. de modo bona vivendi. L. 3.

world nowadays, among people of all classes and conditions! How seldom can one hear a conversation in which the absent are not spoken ill of! On a future occasion I will explain the different ways in which the fair fame of others is attacked.

Therefore it is no wonder that God often punishes severely, in this life, those who defame others.

Oh woe to us, if each time that we are guilty of defaming our neighbor, we were to be punished for it visibly and evidently, by the divine justice, as was the case formerly with those who committed that sin! What misery there would then be in the world! Many a one would have his tongue rotting away in his mouth, or eaten up by worms. Many a one, as he is about to open his mouth to speak uncharitably, would find his tongue withered away. Many a one would be compelled to bite his own tongue in pieces, and devour it. Many a one would become possessed by the devil, or would die suddenly, or would be obliged to appear on earth after death, to restore the good name he injured during life. All these punishments, inflicted for uncharitable talk, are recorded in the *Magnum Speculum Exemplorum*; I have not time now to mention any more of them. How can he who exposes the sins of his fellow man dare to ask God to pardon his own sins? How can I say: "The sins of my youth and my ignorances do not remember,"<sup>1</sup> if my conscience upbraids me with having published my neighbor's sins, which were known otherwise only to himself and to God?

And in death.

How can I expect with confidence, at the end of my life, to receive the grace of final perseverance and a happy death, after having so often taken away from my neighbor his moral life, which God so strictly commands me to respect? Hear what happened to that unhappy man of whom Father Ambrose Catanens writes. He was on his death-bed, and was earnestly exhorted to confess his sins, and to trust in the mercy of God. What mercy, asked the dying man, can I expect from God? How can I hope that He will "cover the multitude of my sins,"<sup>2</sup> since during my life I did not hide the sins of my neighbor, but brought them out into the full light of day by my uncharitable tongue? Having said those words, he stretched forth his tongue, which suddenly became black and swollen, so that he could not draw it into his mouth again; in this fearful condition he breathed his last. Another man, who had made an agreement with a comrade of his to let him know in what state he would be during eternity, appeared to him after death, surrounded with flames.

<sup>1</sup> Delicta juventutis meæ, et ignorantias meas ne memineris.—Ps. xxiv. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ut operiat multitudinem peccatorum meorum.

and crying out, "I am lost, I am lost forever!" "And why?" asked the other, trembling; "did you not repent of and confess your sins?" "Alas, answered the unhappy soul, when I was on my death-bed, and was on the point of preparing myself for death, I saw a number of souls stretching out their hands before the judgment-seat of God, and crying out: 'Avenge, O Lord, our blood on this detractor,'<sup>1</sup> who has shed the living blood of our honor and good name. Thereupon all sorrow and repentance, all thoughts of confession, and all hopes of Heaven left me, and I died in despair." Terrible indeed will it be for the defamer of his neighbor's character, when the souls of his victims will cry out for vengeance on him! It is true, they will say, we have done evil, we have sinned often and grievously against the good God; but we have done penance for our sins, and the merciful God, who before was angry with us, has forgotten them, and has freed us from the eternal shame that we have so richly deserved. But you, wicked detractor, whom our secret sins did not at all concern, you, who were not responsible for them, and whom we have not in any way injured by them, and who perhaps were yourself guilty of the same and even worse sins, you did not spare our honor before men. Why did you speak of our sins to others? Justice, O Lord, "avenge our blood on this detractor!"

Ah, my dear brethren, I conclude with well-meant advice, which I give you in the words of the Holy Ghost, as we read in the Book of Wisdom, "keep yourselves therefore from murmuring, which profiteth nothing, and refrain your tongue from detraction."<sup>2</sup> Let each one make the same resolution as David: "that my mouth may not speak the works of men."<sup>3</sup> The works of men are sins, faults, and defects; whatever is good and praiseworthy in them, is the work of divine grace. If then I must speak of others, I will relate openly and fearlessly what they have received from God; I will not speak of the works of men, but will be careful not to allow the least word to escape me that might injure them, or lessen their reputation. Let each one remember the golden rule of charity, do unto others, as you wish them to do unto you. I do not wish my sins and faults, although they may be known here and there, to become the subject of common conversation; and therefore I must be careful not to speak of the faults of others. Let him who is tempted to

Conclusion, and exhortation to all to avoid this vice.

<sup>1</sup> Vindica, Domine! sanguinem nostrum de illo detractore.

<sup>2</sup> Custodite ergo vos a murmuracione, quæ nihil prodest, et a detractiõne parcite linguæ.  
—Wis. 1. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Ut non loquatur os meum opera hominum.—Ps. xvi. 4.

### 364 *Injury caused by Defaming another's Character*

speaking uncharitably think of his own misdeeds, as I have explained already on a former occasion, and he will find enough to accuse himself of, to be sorry for, and to amend. Why should I waste my precious time in weeding the gardens of others, when I have my own garden to attend to? Ah, my Lord and my God, I find only too much in myself that needs amendment; only too many faults and defects, that are deserving of eternal shame and disgrace! These I am now determined to examine, to declare in confession, and to endeavor earnestly to correct, with the help of Thy grace. Amen.

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#### SIXTY-FIFTH SERMON.

##### ON THE IRREPARABLE INJURY CAUSED BY DEFAMING ANOTHER'S CHARACTER.

###### Subject.

Amongst all sins there is none so difficult to atone for, and to make reparation for, as the sin of injuring our neighbor's character; therefore we must avoid it with the greatest care.—  
*Preached on the fifth Sunday after Pentecost.*

###### Text.

*Vade prius reconciliari fratri tuo.*—Matth. v. 24.  
“Go first to be reconciled to thy brother.”

###### Introduction.

It is a very difficult thing, when people are once embittered against each other, for them to be thoroughly reconciled: and yet it is a necessary thing to salvation; for without it all one's confessions and communions are sacrilegious and cannot merit the grace of forgiveness. I have lately, my dear brethren, spoken of the vice of defaming our neighbor, and have shown how grievous it is, because it violates Christian charity, and injures our neighbor's fair fame. There is still another point to be explained, in order to deter you all the more from this fearful vice, and to show those who are guilty in this respect, what they have to do. And what is that? “Go first to be reconciled to thy brother.” Have you said anything to injure his fair fame? “Go to be reconciled to him,” and to all those whose honor you have attacked; make good the harm you have done. Alas, I

shudder, and am filled with apprehension, when I think of this! I would rather not be obliged to speak of it! How easy it is to offend in this matter of defaming our neighbor, but how hard and difficult to atone for the injury done! This I shall now proceed to show.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*Amongst all sins there is none so difficult to atone for and to make reparation for, as the sin of injuring our neighbor's character; therefore we must avoid it with the greatest care. Such is the whole subject. If there are any here present who must acknowledge that they are guilty of this sin, I would ask them to repress until the end of the sermon the fears and apprehensions that will likely arise in their minds; for they may hear something before they go away, and after they have well understood the subject, which will console them.*

But do Thou, O Lord, inspire me and all here present with a salutary dread of that vice, and with a firm resolution never to be guilty of it again. This we ask of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy angels guardian.

If he who has defamed another wishes to be reconciled to God and to his neighbor, and to atone for his sin, besides a true repentance, a firm purpose of amendment, and a candid declaration of his sin in confession, he must make complete reparation for the injury he has inflicted on his neighbor's character, whether he has simply lessened that character, or taken it away altogether, provided such reparation be possible. This truth, my dear brethren, stands in no need of proof. "The sin will not be forgiven, unless that which is unjustly taken away be restored to its lawful owner."<sup>1</sup> If that axiom holds good, as no sensible man can doubt, of mere material goods, so that he who has committed a theft cannot hope for pardon, no matter how often he repents of and confesses his sin, unless he is firmly resolved to make restitution as soon as he can; how much more, then, must it not be true of the greatest and most valued of all natural possessions, namely the fair fame and good name, which are even more prized than life itself?

But, just Heaven! how fearfully difficult it is to make this reparation as it ought to be made! So difficult, that it is generally the next thing to an impossibility! Why so? For these three

Reparation must be made for the injury done our neighbor's character, before the sin is forgiven, when such reparation is possible.

This reparation is almost indescribably difficult.

<sup>1</sup> Non dimittitur peccatum, nisi restituatur ablatum.

reasons: if I have stolen money from a man, or otherwise inflicted some material injury on him, I can easily calculate the amount of harm done, or the sum that I possess unjustly, and so I can find out without difficulty what restitution I must make, unless, indeed, I have committed repeated rogueries in all kinds of ways, and on all sorts of people who are unknown to me, and have continued doing so for many years, as is often the case in buying and selling and in other business transactions; but even then I need only have a firm purpose of making restitution; the only real difficulty I have to overcome, is that of conquering my greed of gain, and giving up freely all that I have unjustly acquired. And when I have once made that firm resolution, there are a hundred ways in which I can make due restitution, and fulfil my obligation, without putting myself to shame. If I know who the rightful owner is, I can make restitution to him secretly through my confessor; if I do not know, and have no hope of ever finding out who he is, I can give to the poor what I possess unjustly. But under all these circumstances, it is quite different with regard to making reparation for injuries inflicted on the fair fame of others.

**First, I must know what reparation I have to make.**

For, in the first place, the reparation must be in proportion to the amount stolen, or to the injury committed; that is, I must give back as much as I have stolen, and make good all the harm I have done. But who can find out that proportion in the matter of injury inflicted on another's character, so as to be able to say: so much and no more have I taken away from that person's good name? You have, for instance, said of that lawyer, which was not yet publicly known, that he took bribes from the opposing party; that he spun out suits as long as possible, so as to make more by them; that there is no use in going to him, unless with a full purse, etc. You have said of that neighbor, or man of business, that he cannot be trusted, and that he cheats people, as you know by experience; of that doctor, that he knows nothing, that he is always drunk when visiting a patient, etc; of that young girl, that she makes herself too common, that you saw her one evening acting improperly, etc.; of that official, that he has acted greatly against his employer's interest; of that servant, that he or she is unfaithful, and takes things secretly out of the house, that you would not have such people in your employment, etc.

**For, generally speaking, any-**

Now, what you say in that way to another, or to two or three people, they tell afterwards to others, and these latter spread it

*Injury caused by Defaming another's Character.* 367

still further, so that the evil report against your neighbor soon becomes known to a great number. Sometimes a dog goes quietly along the street, doing no harm to any one, when suddenly some mischievous boys begin to shout and to throw stones at him; at once the whole neighborhood is in an uproar, and every one runs after the poor animal; the other dogs run out of the houses, even the little lap-dogs are not to be held back, and though they are afraid to join in the pursuit, they add to the confusion by barking with the others. Thus a whole crowd of people rush after the poor dog; some beat him with sticks, others throw stones at him; one says he must be mad, another, that he has severely bitten a child, a third, that he has stolen some meat in the neighborhood. Meanwhile the poor dog's only fault is his misfortune in meeting the mischievous boys who occasioned the whole uproar. So it is also with the unfortunate, and sometimes completely innocent man, who comes across some ill-tongued person. That lawyer, that business man, that official, that young girl, that servant; wherever they go, they have a bad name, and everybody speaks against them. And how did that come to pass? They came across some mischievous boys; some one, who, either through malice or loquacity, related something bad about them, which he either heard, or saw, or merely suspected them to be guilty of; the report was spread from one person to another, from one street to another, until it became the talk of the town. See, O ill-tongued man, what mischief you have done by your imprudence! You are to blame for it all; you were the first to cause your neighbor's reputation to suffer, and no matter how many have helped to spread the report, the origin of it is to be traced to you; and of those who have heard it, some have attached perhaps but little faith to it, others were more credulous in believing it, while others again have, on account of it, lost all respect for the person about whom you spread it. Now, if you wish to atone for your fault, you are bound in conscience to restore your neighbor's good name with all those people to whom you have defamed it, and in proportion as you have defamed it to each one, so that he will enjoy just the same good reputation as before; provided that it is possible for you to make such reparation, and that your neighbor's good name has not already been restored by others. But who does not see that it is almost an impossibility to do this? For you would have to find out how far the uncharitable report has spread, how people have accepted it, and how far they have believed it; and you would have to go to each and every one of those people

thing injurious to another's character is spread abroad.

and persuade them to have their former good opinion of him whom you have maligned. But, you ask, how can I do that? Nevertheless, according to the teaching of theologians, you are bound absolutely to do it, if you wish to make reparation for the harm you have done by your slanderous tongue. And this, I say, is the obligation which is so hard of fulfilment, that it is never properly fulfilled.

Secondly, I must find out what I have to restore, on account of the material loss caused by my spreading the evil report.

But there is still another difficulty, another obligation, you have to attend to. And what is that? Besides the loss of character you have occasioned, you may also have been the cause of a loss in business or other material concerns to those you have maligned. That lawyer may have lost his clients, as people are afraid to trust him any longer in any matter of importance; that man of business has lost credit, his customers abandon him; that doctor is no longer employed, as people are afraid to trust him; that young girl might have married well, but now no one will have anything to say to her; that official is dismissed; that servant cannot find a place any more. Count up now, if you can, the amount of injury you have done in each case. All this you are bound to make reparation for, if you possibly can, if you wish to make full atonement before God and man for what you have done. But how difficult that is! It is almost an impossibility; for, how can one find out the exact amount of harm done by slander to a neighbor's character and to his worldly prosperity?

Thirdly, I must resolve to use all available means to make reparation.

Suppose now that you have calculated exactly all the injury you have done your neighbor's character, and the amount of loss you have caused him to suffer in his business; are you still really determined to make full reparation? Then, if what you have said of your neighbor is false, all theologians agree in saying that you are bound to contradict it before every one to whom you said it, and in whose estimation your neighbor's character has suffered in consequence; and you must say to each one of them: what I told you of so and so, is not true; it is a lie. But if they refuse to believe your retraction, you are bound to confirm it with an oath, if necessary, although your own honor suffers, and you are put to confusion thereby. If what you said is true, but not yet publicly known, you are bound to do all you can to restore your neighbor's character before all those in whose presence you have injured it. For instance, if you really think you can do any good thereby, you might say: I did so and so a great injury when I spoke of him in that way; do not believe it;

people often say through thoughtlessness more than they ought. Or else you must speak in that man's praise whenever you get a chance, until you have completely restored his good name. And what a difficult thing it is to make up one's mind to do this! How one must fight against, and do violence to, one's inclinations! But what will it be when, in addition to that obligation, there is also another, namely that of making good all temporal losses caused by slander? It is hard enough to have to part with money that one has acquired unjustly, and there are many who deliberately renounce their hopes of Heaven, and choose hell, rather than do it. But what an iron resolution it must require to disgrace one's self, to swallow one's own words, and to acknowledge one's own guilt, besides making reparation for the material losses caused! Many and many a slanderer there is in the world; but you will hardly find one in a hundred, who makes reparation as he ought, for the injury done his neighbor's good name. And you must confess that this is literally true, my dear brethren. How many have you not heard during your lives speaking ill of others, and injuring their reputation more or less seriously? But can you remember even one who came back to restore his neighbor's character? In spite of the numbers of confessions in which people accuse themselves of slander, there is hardly ever a case in which due reparation is made.

Finally, suppose that you think to yourself, as every good Christian who values his soul, must think: no matter what it costs, I will not lose my soul, but will bring it safely to God in Heaven, and therefore I will do my very best to make reparation for the injury I have inflicted on my neighbor's good character, and to make good all the material losses he has suffered thereby, although by doing so I disgrace myself and lose my own honor. What a brave and Christian resolution that would be! But now I ask you: how are you going to do it? When you have done all in your power to restore your neighbors' good name with all those before whom you have defamed it, and who heard the evil report from you; are you still sure of succeeding? especially if what you have said is true, and if many have already heard it? You will say: I have wronged so and so by my thoughtless talk; I am very sorry for it; you must not have a bad opinion of him on account of what I have said, etc. But what will you effect thereby? If you say that to a pious and sensible man, he will think that you are doing quite right in acknowledging your fault, and in trying to make due atonement

Fourthly, the good name must be really fully restored, after due efforts towards that end have been used.

for it ; but he will not on that account lose the bad opinion he has formed of the person whom you have slandered; he will think there must be some ground for that opinion, or else you would contradict your slander even on oath. If you say it to other talkative people, they will give you the same answer that the high-priests gave to Judas when he brought back the thirty pieces of silver, saying: "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood;"<sup>1</sup> but they answered him: "what is that to us? look thou to it."<sup>2</sup> You will begin to praise the man you have defamed, and to speak well of him whenever you can. Quite right; that is one of the best means, under such circumstances, to make reparation for the injury inflicted. But what a difference there is to us mortals between hearing our neighbor praised, and hearing him slandered! You found people enough to believe the slander; will you be likely to find as many to believe the praise? And will they be as ready to believe the praise, as they were to believe the slander? We easily forget what is praiseworthy in others; but if we hear anything to their disadvantage, we remember it a long time. The evil report that you originated is now in all probability spread abroad, and they who hear you speak in praise of the person you have defamed will hardly be so quick in spreading the good report, as the bad one. However that may be, you will never succeed in so completely restoring your neighbor's good character, that some of the slander will not stick to him more or less.

Therefore it is most difficult, nay almost impossible, to make complete atonement for the sin of slander.

See now how difficult, nay almost impossible it is to make due reparation for the injury inflicted on your neighbor's honor, and to make that atonement for your sin which is, absolutely speaking, required; how difficult it is to resolve to make a reparation of the kind; how impossible it is, humanly speaking, to know how much reparation one is bound to make, and how almost impossible it is, in spite of all one's efforts, to make complete reparation. Oh my God, in what a labyrinth those talkative and scandalous tongues of ours involve us! How easy it is to get into it; how difficult to get out of it! The word falls from the lips without any trouble; but what great art is required to retract it! With reason does the Wise Preacher compare the slanderous tongue to a venomous serpent: "If a serpent bite in silence, he is nothing better than backbiteth secretly."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Peccavi, tradens sanguinem justum.—Matth. xxvii. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Quid ad nos? tu videris.—Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Si mordeat serpens in silentio, nihilominus habet, aut occulte detrahit.—Eccles. x. 11

Some serpents bite so quickly, that one hardly feels the fatal wound at first; in the same way a slanderous tongue inflicts a fatal wound on a man's good name, without the sufferer being able to tell how, or by whom, he is injured. There are serpents so venomous that, once their poison is infused into the blood, nothing but amputation of the injured limb will save the person whom they have bitten. The same may safely be said of slanderous tongues. Once they have poured out their venom, it is almost impossible to heal the wound they have inflicted, that is, to restore the reputation they have ruined. Moses, in order to convince King Pharaoh that he was sent by the true God, threw his rod on the ground, and it was instantly changed into a serpent; but when he took the serpent into his hand, it became a rod again. Pharaoh's magicians tried their skill in the same way, but not with the same success; they changed their rods into serpents, but with all their art, they could not change the serpents back into rods. There you have a specimen of your art, O slanderous and evil-tongued people! By your uncharitable talk, you cause your neighbor to lose his good reputation, and to appear in the eyes of others like a loathsome serpent; but you are utterly unable to restore the good name you have taken away, and to make full reparation for the injury you have done his honor. Such is the case; and therefore the Holy Ghost warns us by the wise Ecclesiasticus to be careful to avoid the vice of slander: "Take heed lest thou slip with thy tongue, and thy fall be incurable unto death."<sup>1</sup>

What is he then to do, my dear brethren, if there be any such here present, who knows that he is guilty of having inflicted a serious injury on his neighbor's character? On the one hand the sin will not be forgiven him, unless he is firmly resolved to make full reparation for the wrong he has done, as soon as possible; on the other hand, as we have just seen, the difficulty of making this reparation verges almost on the impossible, when the evil report has once been spread abroad. What hope of salvation then can there be for such a man? Must he despair? Must I say to him what Father Alphonsus de Castro once said to a nobleman, who accused himself of having said publicly in company that he had sinned with a certain noble lady, whose name he mentioned, although what he said was quite false, as history avers? "Away with you! You are

Still, no one need despair of salvation.

<sup>1</sup> Attende, ne forte labaris in lingua. . . . et sit casus tuus insanabilis in mortem.—  
Ecc. xxviii. 30.

lost!"<sup>1</sup> said the confessor to him, knowing well that the nobleman could never bring himself to retract his own words in the same company, and to confess, even on oath, that he had told a lie; and the event proved that the confessor's fears were justified. Must I, too, launch forth the same thunderbolt against all slanderers, and say to each one of them: away with you! You are lost! Your confession will not avail you! there is no help for you? No; things have not gone so far as that yet. If you are quite certain that you have injured your neighbor's honor, and injured it seriously, and that you knew that you were doing wrong when you were speaking against him; then you must relate the whole matter, with all its circumstances, to an experienced confessor, who is able to advise you, and he will tell you what to do, and will help you out of the difficulty.

The first circumstance which frees from the obligation of making reparation.

Meanwhile, as far as the injury done to your neighbor's honor is concerned, I must tell you, in order to relieve your mind somewhat, and to give you a little consolation, that there are many circumstances in which we are not obliged to make reparation for the injury which we think we have done our neighbor's honor (mind, my dear brethren, that I am speaking of the injury done to his honor alone; for it is a different thing altogether, with regard to the material loss we may have caused him). In the first place I am not bound to make reparation if I have just reasons for thinking that they, who heard me speaking ill of my neighbor, did not believe me, or did not look on what I said as dishonorable to him. Sometimes, too, there are people to be found, who are publicly known as being apt to say anything that comes into their minds, without any regard for the truth: no sensible man would believe what such people say. Again, when they who are under the influence of violent anger utter all sorts of calumnies against their opponents, in such a way, that it is evident they are speaking out of the bitterness of their hearts, out of hatred and vindictiveness, it is clear that no sensible man will believe what they say. Or if a person speaks ill of another before people who, whether through simplicity or through wickedness, think little of the vice that the other is accused of, and look on it as no dishonor; or if our neighbor's character is impugned in the company of pious people, who, as good Christians, ought to put the best interpretations on everything they hear, and therefore refuse to believe anything prejudicial to another's good name; in all these cases, there is no

<sup>1</sup> *Reprobus es; facesse!*

doubt that he who has spoken ill of his neighbor is guilty of sin, but, as a general rule, he is freed from the obligation of making reparation. And why? Because he has not really injured his neighbor's honor in the estimation of those who were listening to him. A thief wishes to steal; to that end he places the ladder against the window of a house, climbs in during the night, and breaks open the chest, but finds nothing, so that he has to go back empty-handed. He has committed a theft in desire and intention, and has therefore sinned grievously against God and his neighbor; but he is not bound to restitution, because he has not actually stolen anything, or injured any one's property. And so it is, too, with those who, through wantonness, wickedness, hatred, or talkativeness, try to injure their neighbor's character; they commit a grievous sin; but since, under the circumstances mentioned above, no one believes what they say, they have not really injured their neighbor, and are therefore not bound to make reparation.

Secondly, I am not bound to make good my neighbor's injured character, if he of whom I have spoken uncharitably has publicly justified himself and proved his innocence, or has otherwise regained his good name in that particular matter in which I have spoken ill of him. Thus, it often happens that a servant, a man of business, or an official is accused of some grievous violation of duty, although afterwards his innocence is clearly proven; in a case of that kind I am not bound to make further reparation; just as a thief is not bound to make restitution if the lawful owner has succeeded in getting possession of his property again. Thirdly, if I have revealed a secret and disgraceful crime of my neighbor, and the same vice afterwards comes to be publicly known, not through me, nor through those to whom I revealed it, but in some other way, I am freed from the obligation of making reparation; because he is publicly dishonored, and has thus lost his right to his good name. Much less am I bound to make reparation, if his crime was already known to only a small number of people; because he had already lost his good name before I spoke of him. Fourthly, suppose that two women or two sworn enemies are quarrelling; they growl and snarl at each other like dogs; they hurl at each other all the abusive epithets they can think of, without caring whether they are true or false, and thus they publicly disgrace themselves before a crowd of people. The question now is, what are they to do, to restore each other's good name? This theologians

Second,  
third, and  
fourth cir-  
cumstances.

generally answer by saying, that they sin grievously by using contumelious expressions towards each other; but since they both suffer the same amount of injury, neither is bound to make reparation to the other.

Fifth, sixth,  
seventh,  
and eighth  
circumstances.

Fifthly, if a long time has elapsed since the slander was uttered, so that there is a moral certainty that it has fallen into oblivion, and that no one thinks of it any longer, I am freed from the obligation of making reparation; for when people forget the slander, they are as if they had never heard it, and time itself has restored my neighbor's injured character. Nay, in a case of that kind, I am bound to keep silent, so as not to remind people of what they have forgotten, and to avoid doing my neighbor further harm by my efforts to make reparation to him. Sixthly, I am freed from this obligation, if I foresee certainly that all my retractions, excuses, praises, and other means that I am ready to make use of, will have no effect, and that people will put no faith in them. Again, I am excused if I cannot make reparation without endangering my life. The same is to be said, if they to whom I have spoken ill of my neighbor are dead, or have gone away to such a distance that I cannot retract my words in their presence, and that the fact of their knowing what I told them can no longer be prejudicial to my neighbor. Seventhly, if I have not committed a sin before God by my uncharitable talk, as is generally the case with pious people who inadvertently let fall a word now and then, that is injurious to their neighbor, theologians generally say that I am not bound in that case to make reparation, if I cannot do so without grave inconvenience, unless I have publicly told a lie against my neighbor, in which case I am bound to retract it. Meanwhile, every one who is in the habit of speaking thoughtlessly of the faults of others, is bound under pain of sin to correct that bad habit, and to restrain his tongue. Eighthly, I am freed from the obligation of making reparation, if he whom I have slandered renounces his right (supposing that he can conscientiously do so) and does not exact any retraction from me. As far as I am personally concerned, my dear brethren, if any one has spoken ill of me, I forgive him from my heart, and he need not go to the least trouble to make reparation, provided what he has said is injurious to my personal honor alone, and not to the holy Order to which I belong. Finally, there is no obligation to make reparation, if it is morally impossible for me to make it, and to restore my neighbor's good name; thus, as in the case of men-

*Injury caused by Defaming another's Character.* 375

tioned already, if I have published another's secret crime, and it is now known to a number of people, generally speaking, it would be morally impossible for me to find out all who have heard of it, and to restore my neighbor's good name in the estimation of every one of them; so that I must be satisfied with speaking well of him whenever I can, especially before those in whose presence I first spread the bad report about him. And since I cannot restore his character fully, I must all the more deplore the sin I have committed, because my mischievous tongue has done my neighbor an injury, that I am now quite unable, though ever so willing, to make reparation for.

From all this, my dear brethren, it is evident that we must carefully avoid speaking ill of our neighbor, and that, if we wish to save our souls, we must restrain our tongues whenever his faults and failings are made the subject of conversation in our presence. That is the reason why I am now speaking on this subject for the second time; namely, that we may have a deep and lasting horror of a sin that is so grievous, and so difficult to atone for. "Take heed," is my final warning, in the words of the Holy Ghost, both to you and to myself, "take heed lest thou slip with thy tongue, and thy fall be incurable unto death." Ah, keep a guard on your tongue, that it may not lead you to a mortal fall, from which you can never properly rise again! Yes, I will profit by this warning in future (each one of you, my dear brethren, can repeat mentally with me what follows by way of conclusion.). Woe to you my tongue if you should betray me into uttering a word against my neighbor! With my own teeth will I take vengeance on you! Dear Christians, with whom I shall afterwards enter into conversation, I beg of you, one and all, if you hear a single word escaping me against my neighbor's honor, admonish me at once freely, and tell me to hold my tongue, and not to speak in that way, no matter what confusion you put me to by doing so.

And Thou, O Jesus, who hast said: "Forgive and you shall be forgiven,"<sup>1</sup> if I have often, through malice, hatred, envy, or thoughtlessness spoken against the honor of my brethren and sisters, and against the charity I owe them, and if the evil has already gone so far (as is, alas, only too often the case) that I cannot now make full reparation for it; what am I to do? I have no resource left, but with heartfelt sorrow to beg Thee and my neighbor to forgive me. Yes, O Lord, I am sorry! All you

Therefore we must be very careful not to speak ill of others.

Conclusion and prayer to God for pardon of the sins committed by speaking against our neighbor's character.

<sup>1</sup> Dimittite, et dimittimini.—Luke vi. 37.

whom I have offended in this way, forgive me, for God's sake, for the sake of Him to whom we pray daily: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." And I, O Lord, lay at Thy feet, and give over to Thee all the reparation that may perhaps be due to me from those who have assailed my good name; I forgive them from my heart, and demand no restitution from them. But do Thou forgive the sins that I have committed in this way against my neighbor; I beg of Thee to do so, by the bitter gall wherewith Thy sacred tongue was tortured on the Cross, in order to atone for and to correct the sins of our tongues; and I implore of Thee to keep a restraint on this slippery tongue of mine, that I may never again fall into sins that are so grievous and so difficult to atone for. I will do my best to guard against them; do Thou help me. Amen.

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*SIXTY-SIXTH SERMON.*

**ON THE MANIFOLD WAYS OF DEFAMING OUR NEIGHBOR'S CHARACTER, AND ON THE EXCUSES THAT ARE GENERALLY MADE FOR THIS SIN.**

Subject.

1. Injuring the good name of others is a very common sin, and it is committed in many different ways. 2. It is a sin that is thought little of, and that people try to excuse in different ways.—*Preached on the seventh Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

*A fructibus eorum cognoscetis eos.*—Matth. vii. 16.  
"By their fruits you shall know them."

Introduction.

Those false prophets, who are dressed in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves, are like those detractors and calumniators, who, with smiling countenances and every outward show of friendship, outrage Christian charity in their conversation, and take away from their neighbor the best and most valuable thing he has, that is, his good name. I have already spoken of the malice of this sin, and the difficulty of atoning for it. Ah, dear Christians, beware of those false prophets, those

ravening wolves, and pay no attention to what they say! "By their fruits you shall know them." You will find out what they are, by what they talk of; but you will be compelled almost to avoid society altogether, if you wish to keep away from those who malign their neighbor; so common is this vice, and so little do people generally make of it! There you have the subject and the division of this instruction.

**Plan of Discourse.**

*Injuring the good name of others is a very common sin, and it is committed generally in many different ways; the first part. It is a sin that is thought little of, and that people try to excuse in different ways; the second part. These excuses are of no avail. Both parts will be in the form of a catechetical instruction.*

O Divine Master, teach us to understand the wickedness and danger of this vice, that we may always be on our guard against it! This we beg of Thee through the intercession of Mary Thy mother, and of our holy angels guardian.

There are many forms of illness that the human body is subject to, which can cause it to die a natural death; but human ingenuity has also invented many ways of depriving people of life by violence, and it is still occupied in devising others. Into how many different forms are not steel and iron wrought for that purpose? Knives, halberds, swords, spears, axes, javelins, and darts are all deadly weapons with which one can cut and pierce both near and at a distance, so as to destroy life at once. The art of gunnery can hardly be carried to greater perfection. What an enormous weight can be hurled to a distance by cannons and mortars! What fearful havoc is caused by mines, bombs, and hand-grenades! How many are shot down by pistols and muskets, as if death were too slow otherwise, and had to be urged on to seize his prey!

There are many ways of taking away a man's life.

Still, my dear brethren, I know not but that slanderous tongues have nowadays still more numerous ways and instruments of depriving others of their moral life, that is, of their honor and good name. St. Thomas reckons up eight chief ways in which the fair fame of others may be attacked; and it is a rare thing to find one who does not sin in one or other of them. The first is, when one falsely relates something bad and disgraceful of another. This is the worst form of defamation of another's

Still more numerous are the ways of taking away one's moral life, that is, one's good name; first, second, and third ways.

character; because, besides the injury it inflicts on the fair fame of one's neighbor, it has also the malice of a grievous falsehood, which it is exceedingly difficult to make proper atonement for. The second is, when one relates something bad of another that is true indeed, but is not yet publicly known; that is a sin that violates flagrantly the right that every one has to his good name, as long as his faults are secret. The third is a common trick of slanderous tongues, and it consists in making a great crime out of a small fault, and in always causing it to appear far worse than it is in reality. For instance, a man happens to be guilty of some slight breach of trust, or to be caught in the act of committing a trifling theft; he is at once put down as a thief. He who has once been guilty of a sin of impurity is spoken of as being completely addicted to that vice. He who happens, unintentionally, to take a trifle too much drink is at once set down as a drunkard. In the same way, too, if a man lets fall a word inadvertently against his neighbor, he is considered a slanderer. All that is very wrong; there is a great difference between committing a sin once, and being in the habit of committing it. As the saying goes, one swallow does not make a summer. He who has told one lie does not deserve to be called a liar; he who has once given way to anger must not therefore be called a passionate man. Servants are especially apt to sin in this way by talking of what goes on in the house, and attributing to a whole family a fault of which one member alone is guilty. For instance; the master alone has the habit of cursing and swearing; but the servants make it appear that the whole family is addicted to the same habit; it is fearful, they say, to be in that house; there is nothing but profane language heard in it from morning till night; there can be neither luck nor grace in a house like that, etc. Thus the whole family is suspected of being given to using bad language. The mother alone may be rather too indulgent to her children or to one of them; oh, the servants say, there is no Christian training in that house; the children can do as they please; nobody pays the least attention to them; thus the whole family is made to suffer unjustly. The wife alone may be of a sour, quarrelsome disposition, so that she is very severe with the servants when they do anything wrong; oh, the latter say, there is neither peace nor rest in that house; I cannot stand it for another year. Evil tongued people that you are! why must strangers know what goes on in the house? And if you are bent on defaming your

*Manifold ways of Defaming one's Character.* 379

neighbor's character, at least let the innocent go free, for they are not to blame for the faults you speak of.

A fourth and still more wicked manner of injuring the character of others consists in attributing wrong motives and intentions to them. As I have elsewhere explained, these motives and intentions are supposed to be gathered with sufficient certainty from a person's least movement, from his words, his actions, his behavior, and even his dress, so that they can be made the subject of conversation. See, these evil tongued people say, how often that young man, that young woman, that neighbor, that priest goes to that house; he or she cannot mean any good by it; we can easily imagine what goes on there. That person is very generous in giving alms to the poor; but we know why; he does not always do it for God and his soul's sake. That wife, that daughter, always appears at church in grand style; it is something else besides devotion that brings her there. I lately heard those two young people talking together, and I knew by their laughter what was going on. Did you not notice how so and so behaved, when that person came into the room? I can easily guess what he was thinking of. One can know by merely looking at that man, that he is not good. And in the same way even works of piety are falsely interpreted, and are made to appear vices. Now is it not real diabolical malice thus to judge from uncertain outward signs of a man's inward disposition, which is known only to himself and to God, and to make them the subject of talk? Still, it is unfortunately only too common a vice amongst scandal-mongers, who are constantly busying themselves with and criticising the affairs of other people.

The fifth manner of maligning one's neighbor is still more common, and it consists in not speaking directly from one's own experience against the character of others, but in relating what one has heard to their disadvantage. Thus people say: I have heard so and so of that person on good authority; queer things are said of him; he is accused of having committed this or that crime. This is one of the most venomous kinds of defamation, because they who hear it believe that it is publicly known, and they will therefore have no hesitation in spreading it farther, so that it is the same as if one were to make known his neighbor's disgrace in every country, by sending the news of it in letters through the public mails. Sixthly, I injure my neighbor's character by confirming a report that is prejudicial to him; thus, a person remarks to me that he has heard something bad about so and so,

The fourth way.

The fifth and sixth ways.

but that he does not know whether to believe it or not. Oh yes! I answer, I too have frequently heard the same thing. In that way I confirm the report, and strengthen the bad opinion that he whom I am talking to has of my neighbor. Or, by contradicting and endeavoring to disparage what is said in praise of another, as people often do through hatred, envy, or pride; thus something praiseworthy is related of one who is absent; oh, I say, with evident marks of displeasure, you do not know the man as well as I do; otherwise you would not talk in that way of him, and you would soon change your opinion; or else, I am surprised indeed to hear that of him, I did not think he was capable of behaving so well; now I see that, as the fable says, a tortoise may catch a hare; or else I say, it is not true; people praise that man without reason, and the half of it is gross flattery; or else, so say those who are dependent on him, and who wish well to him; but I know better what sort of a man he is.

The seventh, eighth, and ninth ways.

Seventhly, I can injure my neighbor's honor, and that grievously, by keeping silence; thus, when he is praised, I say nothing, although, as all those who are present know, I am well acquainted with him; or else I assent to what is said, in such a way as to show that I believe quite the contrary; or I answer somewhat in this style: I dare not say all I know; I do not wish to speak ill of any one; I want to leave every man to himself; God forbid that I should malign my neighbor. In this way a deeper wound is sometimes inflicted on another's good name, than if the fault of which he is guilty were told out plainly, because those who are present imagine him to be guilty of some far more grievous offence, which I do not wish to speak of. Eighthly, I can injure my neighbor's fair fame by outward signs; for instance, certain vices are spoken of without any one being directly accused of them; I press my neighbor's foot, or his arm, or make some other sign to show that I know him to be guilty. Even during a sermon, when a certain case is explained, if I look or smile at a certain person, with such an expression as to make it evident that I am referring to him what the preacher is saying, it is the same as if I said out openly: that suits you, there is something for you. I sin in the same way by remarking after the sermon, that so and so got his share to-day; it is a pity that certain persons were not present, as they might have heard something that would do them good. Further, one can defame his neighbor even when giving good advice; thus parents sometimes say to their children: see, my son, you must not be like

that other boy; people say so and so of him; nor like our neighbor, who has spent all he has on drink; nor like that other person, who is suspected of theft and has lost all credit in consequence. Be careful, my daughter, to avoid the fate of that other girl, who allowed herself to be so shamefully betrayed; do not make yourself as common as that young woman, who talks to every one. In God's name! what have those examples to do with your warning? Can you not admonish your children to avoid vice and to practise virtue, without at the same time revealing the faults of others, and injuring their good name?

Finally, the character of another may be injured even by praising, or pitying him. Olaus writes of some dealers in the black art, who had the power of bewitching little children by praising and caressing them. Oh, they would say to the mother, what a beautiful child you have in your arms! and at once the child would commence to waste away until at last it disappeared like a shadow, and no one could tell what became of it. Slanderous tongues are skilled in a similar art. In order to give more force to the poison wherewith they intend destroying their neighbor's reputation, they first commence to praise him. Thus they say: such a one is a good, sensible, and honorable man, and he is esteemed by all who know him; I cannot understand how he could have committed himself so shamefully in that matter. What a pious, holy person that is! who would think that he would have acted in that way! I am sorry for that man; if he had not that fault, he would be a splendid character, etc. Is not that ruining a man's honor by dint of praising him! Nay, says St. Bernard, this vice is so subtle, that even pious people often inflict grievous injury on their neighbor's fair fame, under the appearance of charity and a holy compassion. "You may see them" he says, "uttering slanderous words with troubled countenances."<sup>1</sup> Alas, they sigh, I am sorry to hear such things of the poor man! He is one of my best friends. I wish he had not gone wrong. If he had only followed my advice! How often have I not warned him to be more careful! In that way things are often made public, that no one was aware of before, by the person who thus gives expression to his or her pity.

And who would not believe what such people say? They must be persuaded of the truth of it, or they would not be so loud in their expressions of charitable compassion. These, according to St. Augustine, are the tongues from which David

The tenth way.

Which is the most crafty way of defaming another.

<sup>1</sup> *Videas vultu mesto emitti maledictionem.*

### 382 *Manifold ways of Defaming one's Character.*

prayed to be freed, when he said: "Deliver, O God, my soul from the sword; my only one from the hand of the dog." <sup>1</sup> But why should David, who had killed with his own hand a fierce lion, fear the bite of a dog? Yet, my dear brethren, a raging lion is sometimes less to be dreaded than a crafty dog. And why? Because, when you see the lion coming, you run away, or try to defend yourself; but there are dogs that will come up to you in quite a friendly manner, without barking, and before you know what they are about, they have bitten you. In the same way, if I hear a man talking out boldly against his neighbor, I think at once that he is influenced by hatred, envy, anger, or malice, and I am inclined to put little or no faith in what he says; he is a raging lion. But he who first speaks in praise of his neighbor, and then, with sighs of apparent pity, relates something injurious to his honor, is like the cunning and treacherous dog; I cannot defend myself against the bad opinion he inspires me with about my neighbor; I have good reason for believing that what he says is true, and thus the honor of my neighbor has received a mortal wound in my estimation.

injuring the character of others is a very common sin.

Ah, my dear brethren, how many ways have been invented of injuring the character of others! And that alone should suffice to convince you that there must be a great number of people in the world who are addicted to this vice; some through wickedness, others through hatred and spite, and others again through sheer love of talk. With reason does St. Jerome say that "there are very few who are altogether free from the vice of speaking injuriously of their neighbor;" <sup>2</sup> for it is such a subtle and treacherous vice, that even they who have been so fortunate as to have conquered all other vices, are at length caught in this last snare of the devil, defaming their neighbor, and that, too, without fear or shame. Why is this? In my opinion, it is because people are accustomed to look on it as no great harm to speak ill of others, so that they try in every possible way to excuse it from sin; or rather they do all they can to prevent themselves from being considered slanderers. But their excuses are of no avail, as we shall see in the

#### Second Part.

The first excuse, why many con-

God forbid that I should slander my neighbor, or bring disgrace on him! I have certainly told some things about him, that are

<sup>1</sup> Erue a framea, Deus, animam meam; et de manu canis unicum meam.—Ps. xxi. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Pauci admodum sunt, qui detractioe renuntiant.—S. Hieron. Ep. 14. ad Melan.

*Manifold ways of Defaming one's Character.* 383

not to his credit; but I did not speak out of hatred, anger, or envy; I had not the least wish to injure his good name; what I said came in the ordinary course of conversation, and my only object was to pass away the time. This is generally the first and at the same time the lamest excuse of all. There is no doubt that most of the harm to the good name of others is done in that way. People must have something to talk about, and they bring under discussion a person who is absent, and tear him to pieces, as if they could find no more interesting subject of conversation than that. If you cannot talk of anything else, you should hold your tongue, and hear what the others have to say. You maintain that you had no bad intention; but what has that to do with it? In any case, you have injured your neighbor's reputation by your wicked talk. If I spoke of your faults and failings to others, would you be satisfied if I told you afterwards that I had no bad intention in doing so, and that I was only helping to keep up the conversation? If a thief steals your money in your absence, and then tries to excuse himself by saying that he had not a bad intention in what he did, that he was only trying to pass away the time, and that, as the opportunity offered, he availed himself of it; would you be satisfied with that? I do not and cannot believe it. In the same way, your intention does not excuse you, when you have actually injured your neighbor's honor by your talk.

sider  
slandering  
as not sin  
ful.

There are others who have slandered their neighbor with a really bad intention, and they allege a still more frivolous excuse, that shows them to be very ignorant; others, they say, have spoken badly of me, and no one can blame me if I pay them back in their own coin. What nonsense! He who has taken away your good name has certainly done very wrong, and, if what he has said was not before publicly known, he is bound in conscience before God to make reparation; but it is not lawful for you on that account to commit a similar sin. Did you ever hear or read that it is lawful? Is that the teaching of St. Peter, who says in his first Epistle: "Not rendering evil for evil, nor railing for railing, but contrariwise, blessing; for unto this are you called, that you may inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile."<sup>1</sup> Yes, you

The second  
excuse.

<sup>1</sup> Non reddentes malum pro malo, nee maledictum pro maledicto, sed e contrario benedictentes; quia in hoc vocati estis, ut benedictionem hereditate possideatis. Qui enim vult vitam diligere, et dies videre bonos, coerceat linguam suam a malo, et labia ejus, ne loquantur dolum.—I. Pet. iii. 9, 10.

think, but there are few who observe that. I know there are; and so much the worse! There are precepts enough of that kind in the Christian law and in the gospel of Jesus Christ, that very few pay any attention to, and for that very reason there are few who lead a Christian life as they ought, and the saying of Our Lord is true, that "many are called, but few chosen." That man, you say, has taken away your good name. But what then? Do you regain your good name by injuring his? By no means, for in addition to the loss that he has caused you, you will now be looked on as one who is so possessed by the spirit of revenge that he is unable to master it, and has therefore slandered his neighbor. That is a fine name for you to gain, is it not? But supposing even that you could regain your reputation by injuring his, who has made you judge in your own cause? God has appointed superior authorities to whom you may have recourse, if you want your wrongs redressed; but if you seek to redress them in an unlawful manner, He will have to punish you for so doing.

The third  
excuse.

But I am certain of what I said; I saw it with my own eyes, or I heard it from one who would not tell a lie. This is the third excuse; and they who allege it betray themselves by openly declaring that they are guilty of defaming their neighbor. You say you have seen it, or heard it from a trustworthy person, and therefore that you know it to be true. Does that give you a right to reveal your neighbor's dishonor to one who has not yet heard of it? Hear what St. Thomas says: "a detractor is one who speaks, not against the truth, but against his neighbor's character."<sup>1</sup> It is true that he who falsely attributes a crime to his neighbor is guilty of a greater sin, called calumny; but he who makes known a private crime of his neighbor is guilty of the sin of detraction. Not only the Gospel law, but the light of reason alone, which teaches us not to do to others what we do not wish them to do to us, is sufficient to show how futile that excuse is. If your mother, or sister, or wife, or daughter, had done something disgraceful, and some one of the neighborhood comes to know of it, would you be satisfied if he were to relate it to others, and to spread it about the town, simply because he is certain of what he says? Certainly not; and why then do you try to justify yourself by the same idle excuse?

Fourth and  
fifth ex-  
cuses.

I was not the first to speak of it, it had already been made known by others. Such is the fourth excuse. And if you are not

<sup>1</sup> Detractor vocatur, non quia de veritate, sed quia de fama proximi detrahit.

the first who has committed the sin of detraction, but the second, third, fourth, fifth, or sixth, then, although you are not the spring from which the stream of defamation flows, yet you are the channel by which it is spread about. It was already known, and had become public talk. Such is the fifth excuse. But very often people only imagine that; they hear a thing from two or three individuals, and at once jump to the conclusion that every one knows of it. In that way you can easily make a thing public, which was before known only to a few. Even if it were public talk, you still act, and it can hardly ever be otherwise, against Christian charity, by reminding others of your neighbor's dishonor. It is the great God Himself who is really offended by the sin that the latter has committed; perhaps He has forgiven that sin already, because your neighbor has repented of it; and if so, He will never remember it for all eternity, as He Himself has expressly promised 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."<sup>1</sup> Why should you, who have not been offended by your neighbor, try to keep alive the memory of his sins. And very often, by doing so, you sin against justice; for it may happen that the fault you speak of has been forgotten through lapse of time, or that your neighbor has, by amending his life, regained the good name he had lost by that fault. To speak of it again is therefore not only contrary to Christian charity, but also to justice; as if, for instance, I were to say in the presence of others: the grandfather of such and such a one was publicly executed as a thief, in such a country; or, his grandmother was burned as a witch.

The sixth excuse consists in saying that they were only common, low people who were defamed. Common, low people! Their souls are just as precious, and perhaps more beautiful than yours, in the sight of God; they may be as great before Him, as any king or prince in the world; and do you dare to take away their good name? People of lowly condition are often most sensitive in what concerns their honor; they are not blessed with riches and worldly wealth, but they do not on that account wish to part with their good name. It would be another matter if they belonged to the lowest dregs of the populace, who have already lost their good name, or who do not care to possess one;

Sixth and seventh excuses.

Si autem impius egerit poenitentiam ab omnibus peccatis suis, quae operatus est, . . . omnium iniquitatum ejus, quas operatus est, non recordabor.—Ezech. xviii. 21, 22.

for where no honor is, honor cannot be taken away. But since I cannot be always certain that this is the case, it is a dangerous thing to say anything bad even of these, particularly if it is hitherto unknown. There are others, again, who maintain that what they said of their neighbor was of no consequence, as it was only a slight fault of his they spoke of. Well, if so, then you have committed a small sin; and is that of no consequence? But in this matter we must not ask whether the fault spoken of is great or small in itself, but whether we notably injure our neighbor's good name and reputation by speaking of it. By disclosing even a venial sin of another, we can inflict a grievous wound on his honor, according to his position and station. For instance, if I say of a priest who has hitherto been looked upon as very pious and perfect, that he is a liar, or a sensual, worldly man, I injure his character grievously, because he is sure to lose the esteem of others on account of what I say. On the other hand, if I said of a soldier that he fought a duel, or blasphemed, or got drunk, etc., these, although they are grievous sins, would occasion little, and sometimes no loss at all of honor to him. And why? Because among people of his class such things are not reckoned disgraceful, and are often even made a boast of. The same is to be said of other vices which in some countries, among people of a certain position, are no longer looked on as disgraceful; thus, in Germany, to say of an ordinary layman that he was drunk, could hardly be a grievous detraction; for who would think anything of that? Alas, that I should have to say so! There is another reason also why it is dangerous to speak of even the small faults of our neighbor; because, as experience proves, the story is carried from one to another, and something is added to it each time, until at last it grows into a serious detraction; just as, when in winter you roll a small ball of snow from the top of a mountain, it continues to increase in size until it reaches the bottom.

Eighth and  
ninth ex-  
cuses.

I told it to only one friend in strict confidence, and begged of him not to say a word to any one about it. Such is the excuse that many allege; but what a vain one it is! If what you did was lawful, your friend has the same liberty, and he can tell it in strict confidence to a third, the third can tell it to a fourth, and so it goes on; for why should they have less freedom than you? and thus your neighbor loses his good name with many, without any sin being committed by those who took it away. The raindrops fall first on the roofs of the houses, and then into

the guttering, whence they are carried into the sewer; there they unite and flow in a stream along the street. So it is with detraction; it is carried from one to another; each one relates it in confidence; listen, my friend, he says, and I will tell you something, but you must keep it to yourself. And before you have time to look around, the secret is made public. But, you add, he to whom I have told it in confidence is a pious, prudent, sensible, and God-fearing man, there is no fear of his speaking about it. Even if that is the case, do you look on it as a small matter to deprive your neighbor of the esteem of such a man? You think it a greater honor to be held in respect by a sensible and pious man, than to enjoy the esteem of a hundred people of indifferent character; so that by injuring your neighbor in the eyes of one good man, you cause him more suffering, and do him a greater wrong, than if you had maligned him to a hundred people of a different stamp.

But, some will ask, may I not complain to my friend, and say to him: so and so has wronged me, or robbed me; he will not restore what belongs to me; he has led my child astray? No, I answer; you may not speak in that way, while the matter is still unknown. Why should your friend know of it, when it is not in his power to help you? And, you ask again, can I not then warn my neighbor, or my good friend, so that he can protect himself and his children from harm, when I know privately that there is reason for him to be on his guard? For instance, I say to him: keep your eye on that servant, I have noticed that he is not always to be trusted; do not allow your son or your daughter to go into that house; there is nothing good to be learned there, as I know well. If a person asks my advice as to whether he should engage that servant, marry that person, or lend money to a certain individual, may I not give him my opinion, and say to him, if I know that such is really the case, because I have seen or heard it: that person is not suited to you, I would advise you to have nothing to do with him or her? Oh, that is a different matter altogether; the sin of detraction consists in unjustly making known the private faults of our neighbor; but in the instances mentioned you have a just reason for speaking of them, and you do so, not with the intention of defaming your neighbor, but solely through a good and upright desire of putting your friend on his guard. There is not the least doubt that what you do is quite lawful; but you must be careful not to say more than is necessary, and to see that it is

A few  
questions  
are answer  
ed.

kept secret. Again, is it not lawful to speak ill of one in a general way without mentioning his name? That depends; if there is no danger of any one being suspected, there is no detraction; otherwise it would be unlawful to speak in that way. Thus it would not be right for me to say: a religious belonging to that Order, that monastery, or a member of that family has sinned in such and such a way, etc. For thereby the whole Order, or monastery, or family would be disgraced, and be looked on with suspicion, and besides, people would be curious to know who the culprit is. In a word, it is always dangerous to speak of the faults of others.

Conclusion  
and warn-  
ing against  
this sin.

Therefore let each one of us make a firm, unalterable resolution with St. Augustine, that nothing which is in the least prejudicial to our neighbor's character shall ever be mentioned by us, either in few words, or in many, or by signs, or gestures; we must not inquire whether a certain thing is grievously or slightly injurious to another, nor whether a certain fault is private or public; it ought to suffice to know that to speak of such things is contrary to the charity we owe our neighbor, whom we are bound to love as ourselves. Therefore, O God, I will not interfere with any one, that I may study earnestly to be in Thy sight what Thou wishest me to be! I shall keep my tongue in check by the thought of that strict judgment, in which Thou wilt ask me what I have done myself, not what others have done. Therefore I beg of Thee with Thy servant David: "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, and a door round about my lips;"<sup>1</sup> that I may never say anything but what is to Thy honor and glory, and that, when I have to speak of others, I may only speak in their praise, for with them I hope and desire to praise and glorify Thee forever. Amen.

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### SIXTY-SEVENTH SERMON.

#### ON THOSE WHO HEAR UNCHARITABLE TALK.

##### Subject.

1. How they sin who deliberately listen to uncharitable talk.
2. How they must act, who hear such talk against their will, so as not to sin.—*Preached on the eleventh Sunday after Pentecost.*

<sup>1</sup> *Pone, Domine, custodiam ori meo, et ostium circumstantiæ labiis meis.*—Ps. cxl. 3.

Text.

*Surdos fecit audire, et mutos loqui.*—Mark vii. 37.

“He hath made both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.”

Introduction.

O dear Lord, Thou hast restored speech to the dumb, and hearing to the deaf; still easier would it be for Thy Almighty power to render dumb those who have the gift of speech, and deaf those who can hear! Yet I will not and dare not ask Thee to work a miracle of that kind, and to make any one deaf and dumb; but I do wish that many were for a short time unable to speak, or to hear; nay, there are not a few whose souls would profit much if they were deaf and dumb, so many sins do they commit by speech and hearing. Would it not be better for those talkative people to be altogether dumb, than to injure or destroy their neighbor's honor and good name by their wicked tongues? Would it not be better for those curious ears to be completely deaf, than to listen with pleasure to uncharitable talk? Certainly it would be much better for them to lose tongue and ears, than to lose their souls. I have already said enough, my dear brethren, of those who sin in this exceedingly dangerous matter by talking against others; may God grant that what I have said may help them to amendment in that respect! They who listen to such uncharitable talk must now have their instruction; for they must know whether and how they commit sin, and how they ought to behave under such circumstances. These two points I will explain in this instruction, and thus make an end of this subject.

Plan of Discourse.

*How they sin who deliberately listen to uncharitable talk; that I shall explain in the first part. But when they hear such talk against their will, how are they to act, so as not to sin? That I shall explain in the second part. Tongues, be careful never to injure any one by uncharitable talk! Ears, keep yourselves closed to such talk! Such shall be the conclusion.*

That we may take it well to heart, and fulfill it, do Thou, O Jesus, preach to our ears and hearts, to which end we beg Thy light and grace through the intercession of Mary and the holy angels guardian.

According to the old saying, the receiver makes the thief; if Uncharitable talk is so

common,  
because  
there are so  
many who  
are willing  
to listen to  
it.

there were no one willing to buy stolen goods, no one would have the opportunity of offering them for sale. Much more does this saying hold good on the subject of which I am now speaking; for if no one were willing to listen to uncharitable talk, slanderous tongues would soon be reduced to silence, and in a short time an end would be put to this detestable vice. But, alas, as St. Paulinus says, what cannot be sufficiently deplored is the fact that there are only too many who are ready to listen to slander against their neighbor. "Therefore," he says, "this vice is so common, and so many are subject to it, because nearly every one is willing to encourage it by listening."<sup>1</sup> There are few who have such courage and zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, that, like St. Chrysostom, they would venture to put a stop to an uncharitable discourse, if commenced in their presence, or even to go away, or at least to testify their displeasure at it; much less to say out boldly: if you have anything praiseworthy to tell me of the absent person I will listen to you with pleasure; but I do not want to hear anything prejudicial to my neighbor's honor and good name; or else to say: what is it to me, that so and so has acted in that way, that that man is a usurer, that servant stupid, that merchant unjust; that that woman is given to idleness, that young girl to vanity, that young man to drunkenness and impurity? We have not to look after the shortcomings of others, but our own, for which we shall be responsible at the judgment-seat of God. O holy St. Chrysostom, would, that we all had that courage and constancy! How soon would not slanderous tongues be silenced! But that is generally where the fault lies. People listen to them, and listen to them with laughter or smiles of approval. Some do so through hatred and envy, which they secretly nourish in their hearts against those who are spoken ill of; others, who are subject to the same vices, listen because they are glad to find that they have companions in their wickedness; others again listen because it fills them with a vain self-complacency to find that they are better than their neighbors, in as much as they are not subject to the same vices; human respect makes many listen, for the sake of pleasing the person who is talking uncharitably; and finally, the greater number of listeners are attracted by curiosity, for they wish to hear something new, so as to be able afterwards to relate it to their friends.

<sup>1</sup> Hoc ideo malum celebre, et ideo in multis fervet hoc vitium, quia pæne ab omnibus libenter auditur.—S. Paulin. Ep. 14. ad ca.

And the malice of the sin committed by all those who listen deliberately to uncharitable talk consists, first, in this, that they give the slanderer the occasion of committing sin, and approve of and encourage him therein, by listening with pleasure, instead of preventing him from offending God. "If," says St. Jerome, "you listen to a detractor with pleasure, you encourage him in his detraction; he strikes the spark, you prepare the hearth on which the fire is to burn."<sup>1</sup> Two demons, says St. Bernard, are present in every company where a conversation is carried on about the faults and failings of the absent; the detractor, who speaks, has a demon in his mouth, who moves his tongue and helps him to go on talking; the listeners have each a demon in their ears to keep them open, so as to hear the conversation with pleasure. Both parties commit sin, as all theologians agree; but which of them commits the greater sin, St. Bernard does not venture to decide. Hear what he writes to Pope Eugenius: "Whether it is more damnable to detract, or to listen to detraction, I cannot easily determine."<sup>2</sup> The first sins by injuring his neighbor's honor and good name in the estimation of the listener; the latter sins, because he gives the former occasion to continue the uncharitable conversation. Such in effect was the answer once given by a sensible man to a certain tale-bearer, who came and told him that his enemy had said something against him. If my enemy, said the former, had not found in you a ready listener, he would not have ventured to make so free with my good name; therefore, if either of you has committed sin by that conversation, it is you certainly who are most to blame for it.

The malice of listening to such talk with pleasure consists, first, in giving an occasion for slander.

Besides that, the listener shares in the guilt of the sin committed by the detractor; for, as the law of Christian charity and justice forbids me, under pain of sin, to injure my neighbor's reputation in the esteem of others, it binds me also to keep a good opinion of him as long as I can; so that, as long as his fault is private, and not publicly and certainly known, I do him wrong, if I form a bad opinion of him. But that is exactly what I do, when I listen with approval to an uncharitable conversation. Nay, it may happen sometimes that the detractor himself commits only a small sin, or even no sin at all, through ignorance or inadvertence, since he has not the least intention of injuring his neighbor's good name by the remarks he makes; while the

Besides, the listener partakes in the sin of the detractor.

<sup>1</sup> Si vultu hilari audis detractorem, tu illi das fomitem detrahendi; ille ignem excutit, tu substernis igniarium.

<sup>2</sup> Detrahere aut detrahentem audire, quid horum damnabilius sit, non facile dixerim.—S. Bern. l. 2. de con. sid.

listener, who knows and adverts to the unlawful and uncharitable character of the conversation, offends God grievously.

A still greater sin is committed by those who, by asking questions, etc., give occasion for detraction.

Now, if this is true of all those who listen to such conversation with pleasure, how grievously do they not sin, who, by asking questions, directly furnish others with the occasion of speaking against their neighbor? How grievous the sin must be that is committed by those inquisitive people who are always meddling with the affairs of others, and who never rest until they find out everything that is going on? There are certain hunting dogs, whose only business it is to find out where the game is, and then to bark as a signal to the huntsman, who immediately comes and shoots the game. They who are so fond of prying into their neighbor's faults and defects, are like those dogs, and, according to the words of the Holy Ghost by the Wise Man, "he that seeketh after evil things shall be oppressed by them."<sup>1</sup> They ask all kinds of questions, and fish for information in every possible manner, until they find out what goes on in that house, that family, that street, or between those friends and relatives; but if they hear anything good and praiseworthy of another, they pay no attention to it, for it is not that they are looking for. Pliny, writing of trees and plants, says that there are certain plants that are good for nothing but to make brooms of.<sup>2</sup> The same may truly be said of those prying people; they are good for nothing but to sweep up filth and impurities, that is, to find out their neighbor's faults and failings. Thus, for instance, they say in the course of conversation: there is a queer report about so and so; have you heard anything about it? I wonder what it can be. Or if any one inadvertently lets fall a hint against his neighbor's character, they are not satisfied until they have found out the whole affair. Go on, they say; tell me all about it; you need not be afraid that I will speak of it; I will tell you afterwards why I am so anxious to hear it, etc. Or they begin to praise some one who is absent, in the presence of a person who, as they know, cannot bear him, their object therein being to induce that person to talk against the other's character, and to say things about him that he otherwise would never have thought of.

The worst amongst those are they who try to get such in-

The worst of these meddling people are they who, with apparent friendliness, ask servants and little children all kinds of questions about what goes on at home. How are you getting on? they say; are you satisfied with your situation? Have you not a

<sup>1</sup> Qui autem investigator malorum est, opprimetur ab eis.—Prov. xi. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Scops tantum natu.—Plin. l. 16. c. 26.

very good master or mistress? Who was at your house yesterday? What was he doing there? and so they go on, until the unsuspecting child or the discontented servant tells them everything they wish to know. "What do I gain," asks St. John Chrysostom, "by knowing that my neighbor is a bad man? Is it not on the contrary a great evil and loss to me to have found that out?"<sup>1</sup> For I have caused those whom I have questioned to commit sin, and I have committed sin myself by my curiosity; because, as it is unlawful to make known the private faults of another, so also it is sinful to try to find out what those faults are. The servant or the child commits a mortal sin against charity and justice by relating anything that is apt to bring grievous dishonor on the family; and of course I commit a much more grievous sin by being the occasion of their offending God. You are guilty of theft, whether you yourself steal your neighbor's property, or encourage another to do so; nay, your sin in the latter case is worse, on account of the additional guilt you incur by leading another into sin; so that, if I give occasion to another to injure my neighbor's good name, I am bound in conscience to make due reparation. That is all I gain by my impertinent curiosity. Is it worth my while then, to go to such trouble to find out the concerns of others, although I have in reality no business to meddle with them?

formation out of innocent children and servants.

Ah, my dear brethren, as the Holy Ghost warns us by the wise Ecclesiasticus, "hedge in thy ears with thorns, hear not a wicked tongue."<sup>2</sup> You should not listen to it, and much less should you give it occasion to speak. But, you will ask, who can avoid hearing uncharitable talk? He who wishes to do that, would have to shut himself up in his room, and never go out; for, in spite of ourselves, we are often obliged to listen to things that are injurious to our neighbor's character, and there is no chance of making uncharitable people hold their tongues. What is then to be done under such circumstances, so as not to sin against God or my neighbor? This question I will answer in the

Exhortation to be deaf to all uncharitable talk.

### Second Part.

I acknowledge that, since it is such a common thing in the world to talk about the faults and failings of others, no matter how careful we are, we can hardly avoid hearing some talk of that kind; and therefore, as I said in the introduction, I could

It would be very desirable that we were all deaf when uncharitable talk begins.

<sup>1</sup> Quod mihi lucrum, si didicero, quod ille sit improbus: Nonne maximum nocumentum ex hoc et extrema jactura?

<sup>2</sup> Sepi aures tuas spinis, linguam nequam noli audire.—Ecl. xxviii. 28.

wish that we were often deprived of hearing for a time, or that we had that special grace which, as Cassian writes, was conferred on the holy Abbot Machetes. This holy man was filled with joy whenever he was present at a conversation about God and holy things, and no one listened with more attention, or spoke more eloquently than he. And if some indifferent matter, that was neither good nor bad in itself, was spoken of, merely for the purpose of innocent recreation, and to the glory of God, there was no one who could contribute more than he to the general amusement; but if a single word was let drop that in the least affected his neighbor's good name, he at once fell into a deep sleep, and could not be awakened until the uncharitable conversation had ceased. Those who knew the holy man used frequently to test this gift of his; if he were walking, or working, or otherwise so engaged that sleep under ordinary circumstances was impossible, they would commence to talk about their neighbor, and the Abbot at once, no matter what he was doing, would fall asleep. I could wish, I say, that a similar grace were given to those inquisitive people, who are inclined to fall asleep when anything holy and profitable to their salvation is spoken of, but who are all attention when anything is said against their neighbor's good name. I could wish that Christian charity would work a similar miracle on all those who happen to hear uncharitable conversation unexpectedly. But my wish is in vain; as long as we have ears, and they are in a healthy state, so long must we hear whatever sound is made, whatever words are pronounced aloud near us.

What to do  
in order not  
to sin by  
listening.

What are we then to do when an uncharitable conversation is commenced in our presence, against our will? The Holy Ghost tells us that, my dear brethren, in the words I have already quoted, "hedge in thy ears with thorns." By thorns, which pierce and wound, are here meant the fraternal admonitions and reproofs we should administer to those who speak against our neighbor's character, in order that they may cease talking uncharitably, and that we may have no part in their sin. But, you may ask, are we then always bound in conscience to administer a reproof of that kind? Certainly, I answer; but we must do it very modestly, and in different ways according to circumstances. This reproof may be given by words, or by silence, or by mere signs. For he who speaks against his neighbor's character is either one of your own household, over whom you have authority; or he is a stranger, but of lowlier condition than

you; or he is your equal; or, finally, of superior condition.

If he is subject to you, then there is no doubt that you are bound to use, for the honor of God and your neighbor, the authority that God has given you, and to command the detractor to hold his tongue. This obligation especially concerns fathers and mothers, who hear their children or servants speaking ill of others; because they are, as I have elsewhere proved, bound in conscience to look after the spiritual welfare of the members of their households. If I saw a thief breaking into another man's house, although the latter is a perfect stranger to me, and I could prevent the robbery by a few words, but refused to speak them, there is no doubt that I would act against the law of Christian charity; much more grievous, then, would be my violation of that law, if I allow another to rob my neighbor of his good name, although I could prevent him from doing so by a few words.

If the detractor is subject to our authority.

But if the detractor is not subject to you, although he is of lower condition than you, the law of fraternal correction binds you; but you must administer the reproof in a friendly and courteous manner. For instance, you might say: let us talk of something else; I know you have no bad intention, still, there is always danger in speaking of such things, as one is apt to say what he will be sorry for afterwards; and so on. If the detractor is equal to you in condition, you are not always bound to correct him in that manner; but you must try to put a stop to the conversation in such a way as not to offend him. Thus, if I were present at such a conversation, I might excuse the person spoken of and say: at all events he is an honorable man, she is a respectable lady, etc.; we must not believe everything that people say; there is so much of that kind of talk going about, that one can hardly know whether it is true or not; if everything that people say were true, we should be all thieves and rogues. Or I might say: we have all our faults, what is the use of talking of those of others? And perhaps the best way of all would be to speak of something else to whoever is next to me, so as to turn the conversation into another channel; for instance, I might ask what news there is in the papers, whether the war between England and Spain will likely come to an end soon, and so on, no matter whether my question chimes in with the conversation or not. Again, if the uncharitable talk is carried on at table, I might say: oh, what is the use of us sitting here like this? Let us fill our glasses again; and so I might begin to make a noise or to provoke the others to laughter; and although

If he is of lower or of equal condition.

he who was speaking may notice that I am interrupting him, it is no matter; for, if he is a sensible man, he will acknowledge afterwards that I have acted rightly. Plutarch writes that Alcibiades, who was a very wise man amongst the ancient Greeks, when he heard that some people were spreading bad reports about him, cut off the tail of a very fine dog that he had recently bought, and allowed the animal to run about the town in that state. Some of his friends were very much displeased that a man of his wisdom should play such childish tricks; but Alcibiades told them that his only object was to give the people something to say about his dog, that they might hold their tongues about himself. "Let them speak," he said, "about Alcibiades' dog, as long as they cease to tear Alcibiades himself to pieces."<sup>1</sup> From this we may see that every one who loves his neighbor as himself, may easily interrupt and change an uncharitable conversation, by suggesting some other topic, no matter what. Thomas More, the English Chancellor, was well skilled in this art; whatever company he happened to be in, if the talk was turned on the failings of others, he would at once interrupt it, and make some such remark as this: every one can say what he pleases, as for me, I maintain that this house is very well built, and that the architect knew his business well.

If he is  
of a higher  
condition.

Finally, if the detractor is of a higher position than you, what are you to do? It would hardly become you to admonish or correct him; and if you try to interrupt the conversation, you must do it very delicately and cautiously; otherwise that plan will not be successful. A good way might be to absent one's self a while from the company, if it can be done without attracting notice, until the uncharitable conversation is at an end; but very often that cannot be done. What course is then to be adopted? Naturalists tell us that the dolphin hears, although he seems to have no means of hearing, as he has no ears. That is just what one must do, when his superior commences to talk uncharitably of others; he must act as if he had no ears; that is, he must not show by his outward behavior, or by the least sign, or word, or by laughing or smiling, that he takes pleasure in such conversation; but he must sit quite still and silent and serious, so as to let every one see that it is very displeasing to him. "The north wind driveth away rain," says the Holy Ghost by the Wise Man; "so doth a sad countenance a backbiting tongue."<sup>2</sup> Such is also

<sup>1</sup> Loquantur de cane Alcibiadis, modo Alcibiadem desinant lacerare.

<sup>2</sup> Ventus aquilo dissipat pluvias, et facies tristis linguam detrabentem—Prov. xxv. 23.

the meaning of what St. Jerome says: "if you listen to a detractor with an averted and serious countenance, he will learn not to be too ready to say what he knows is not heard with pleasure;"<sup>1</sup> for, as no one goes willingly into a house in which he knows he is not welcome, so no one will care about protracting a conversation that he knows to be displeasing to those who are listening. "If you act otherwise," continues St. Jerome, "you show yourself to be either a false brother, or a cowardly friend, to the person whose good name is attacked."<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine was such an enemy of all uncharitable discourse, that he caused a tablet with the following inscription to be inserted in the wall over his table, so that all might be able to see it: "He who takes pleasure in speaking ill of the absent, must know that he dare not present himself at this table:"<sup>3</sup> It happened once, as Possidonius relates, who was present on the occasion, that several bishops were at table with Augustine, when some of them forgot the inscription on the tablet, and began to speak rather freely of the absent; but Augustine at once reprovèd them. "My brethren," said he, "either the tablet must be taken away, or you must change the conversation, or else I will go to my room."<sup>4</sup> It is related of John the Almoner, Patriarch of Alexandria, that if he heard any one speaking ill of others, he reprovèd him gently, or else changed the conversation; if, in spite of this, the other continued the uncharitable conversation, John kept silence, but he wrote the man's name down in a book, and when he had left, told his servant never to admit him again. There can be no doubt of the truth of what St. Jerome says, "where there are none to listen, there will be none to detract."<sup>5</sup> "Happy he," says St. Paulinus, "who so arms himself against this vice, that no one will dare to speak ill of others in his presence!"<sup>6</sup>

Finally, if we, against our will, hear something bad, that we did not know before, against our neighbor, how are we to act? "Charity covereth all sins,"<sup>7</sup> is the warning given us by the Holy

We must not be too ready to believe defraction, when we hear it

<sup>1</sup> Quodsi facile subtristi et aversa detractorem audias, discet ille non libenter dicere, quod didicerit non libenter audiri.

<sup>2</sup> Sin aliter agis, ostendis te illius, cui detrahitur, aut falsum fratrem, aut timidum amicum esse.

<sup>3</sup> Quisquis amat dictis absentium rodere famam, Hanc mensam vestitam noverit esse sibi.

<sup>4</sup> Domini fratres! aut illa tabula refigenda est, aut vos sermones istos desinetis, aut ego ad cubiculum facesso.

<sup>5</sup> Ubi desunt audientes, non inveniuntur detrahentes.—S. Hieron. ad cel.

<sup>6</sup> Beatus est, qui ita se contra hoc vitium armavit, ut apud eum detrahere nemo audeat.

<sup>7</sup> Universa delicta operit charitas.—Prov. x. 12.

Ghost. If any one speaks ill to me of a dear friend of mine, I at once think to myself that what he says is not true. And this should be the first effect of Christian charity; namely, not to be too ready to believe the uncharitable things that are said of others, according to the admonition of the wise Ecclesiasticus: "believe not every word."<sup>1</sup> Remember that there is no doubt that plenty of talk of the kind is carried on almost everywhere, and therefore do not let anything you hear interfere with the good opinion you have of your neighbor. Besides, it is a gross injustice to judge and condemn one who is absent, and who cannot defend himself. "We must hear the other side,"<sup>2</sup> is a well-known axiom of jurists, whenever an accusation is brought forward against a third party. But if the authority of the detractor, or the proofs he brings forward, force me to believe that my neighbor has done wrong, then, according to the law of Christian charity, I must put the best interpretation on everything, and excuse my neighbor, in thought at least, since I cannot be sure that his intention was bad; or, at all events, I must have a heartfelt compassion for him, since his good name is thus torn to pieces. Imagine you see a number of dogs surrounding a hare, and tearing it to pieces; your own natural instincts will incline you to pity the poor animal, although it is only a dumb brute; should you not then feel pity for your poor brother or sister in Jesus Christ, with whom you hope one day to enjoy the happiness of Heaven, when his or her good name is so ruthlessly attacked by wicked tongues?

Much less should we speak of it afterwards, but rather keep it secret.

Another thing the law of Christian charity requires from all who hear uncharitable conversation, and that is, that they keep it to themselves, and do not speak of it afterwards. The wise Ecclesiasticus, after having warned us to hedge round our ears with thorns against detractors, adds: "and make doors and bars to thy mouth,"<sup>3</sup> so that what you have heard may not escape you again. "Hast thou heard a word against thy neighbor," he says elsewhere, "let it die within thee, trusting that it will not burst thee."<sup>4</sup> Be not like those talkative people who imagine they must choke, if they do not at once tell to others everything they hear. "At the hearing of a word, the fool is in travail, as a woman groaning in the

<sup>1</sup> Non omni verbo credas.—Ecl. xix. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Audiatur et altera pars.

<sup>3</sup> Et ori tuo facito ostia et seras.—Ecl. xxviii. 28.

<sup>4</sup> Audisti verbum adversus proximum tuum? commorietur in te, fidens, quoniam non te dirumpet.—Ibid. xix. 10.

bringing forth a child. As an arrow that sticketh in a man's thigh, so is a word in the heart of a fool." <sup>1</sup> No, you must not be like that; "hast thou heard a word against thy neighbor, let it die within thee." You will notice, my dear brethren, that Ecclesiasticus does not say that you must keep the word you have heard against your neighbor locked up in your breast like a malefactor in prison; but you must let it be like a dead man in the grave. And why? Because the prisoner, no matter how carefully he is guarded, may find an opportunity to escape; but a dead man, even if his grave were opened, could not come forth; his body must remain where it was placed. A prisoner may show himself to others by looking out at the window, or at least he can make his voice heard; but a dead body is unable to do either; it has neither life nor speech. Therefore the detraction we have heard must remain buried within, not like a prisoner in his dungeon, but like a dead body in the grave. Let it die within thee, so that you must not reveal it by the least sign, nor complain about it to your friends, as many are in the habit of doing. Oh, they say, how disgusted I was to-day! I was in company with so and so, and they commenced to talk about such and such a one, and to tear him to pieces so unmercifully, that I wished I had remained at home. No, I say again; "hast thou heard a word against thy neighbor, let it die within thee."

I conclude this subject, my dear brethren, by reminding you again of the warning of the Holy Ghost, and begging of you, for Christ's sake and your eternal salvation, "keep yourselves therefore from murmuring, which profiteth nothing, and refrain your tongue from detraction."<sup>2</sup> Guard against that dangerous vice of speaking ill of others, which it is so easy to fall into, and so difficult to cure; and let us all agree unanimously, for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, to do our best to put a stop to that sin which is the cause of such ruin. And how are we to do that? We must never speak of the faults and failings of the absent, and thus we shall also put a stop to the sins that others might commit by listening to uncharitable conversation with pleasure, as I have already explained; we must avoid the society of those whom we know by experience to be given to that kind of talk; and if we happen to hear any of it, we must, with a holy

Conclusion  
and exhortation to  
avoid all detraction,  
either by  
speaking or  
listening.

<sup>1</sup> A facie verbi parturit fatuus, tamquam gemitus partus infantis. Sagitta infixæ femoris carnis, sic verbum in cordi stulti.—Ecclesi. xix. 11, 12.

<sup>2</sup> Custodite ergo vos a murmuratone, quæ nihil prodest, et a detractone pariete lingue.—Wis. i. 11.

zeal, and laying aside all human respect, do what we can to put a stop to it, either by administering a fraternal reproof, or by testifying our displeasure by our silence.

Resolutions  
and means  
to carry  
his into  
effect.

For my part, the thought of the strict judgment of God shall place in future a curb on my slippery tongue, so that I shall never again offend in this way, by the least word, that judgment at which I shall have to give an account, not of what others have done, but of what I have done myself. That terrible trumpet-call, "Arise ye dead, and come to judgment," which is to summon me and others forth, out of our graves, before the judgment-seat of Christ, shall be as a door and a bolt to my ears, so that I shall not desire to know anything about my neighbor's faults and failings, until the Judge of the living and the dead is pleased to make them public, in the sight of Heaven and earth. And you, from whom I may in future hear anything against my neighbor's good name, do not think the worse of me if, according to my obligation and the law of Christian charity, I interrupt your conversation and disapprove of it. It is for the good of your own souls to be prevented from indulging in such dangerous talk, and committing a sin against charity; and it is for my own salvation that I will disapprove of that sin, and refuse to have any part in it. My soul is far too dear to me, for me to lose it in such a miserable way, and I love my God too well to transgress His law; for I wish to do His holy will under all circumstances, and to love Him constantly with my whole heart. So it shall be, O God worthy of all love! Give me Thy grace thereto. Amen.

# ON CURSING AND SWEARING.

SIXTY EIGHTH SERMON.

ON THE DEPRAVITY OF CURSING.

Subject.

1. Cursing and swearing are a foolish and hellish kind of language, that is highly unbecoming a Christian. 2. Of all wicked language, it is that which gives the most scandal.—*Preached on the sixth Sunday after Easter.*

Text.

*Haec locutus sum vobis, ut non scandalizemini.*—John xvi. 1.  
“These things have I spoken to you, that you may not be scandalized.”

Introduction.

We have seen in the sermon of last Sunday, that there are many Christians who do not really wish that their prayers should be heard. But would to God, my dear brethren, that this were the greatest fault! For, what a shameful, hellish kind of prayer is in daily use even amongst those Christians, who, while others are praising God, and imploring his blessing, have their mouths filled with imprecations, and seek to draw the divine malediction down on earth. To-day I must endeavor to oppose the Word of God to that abominable language, which is unfortunately so common among all classes of people, and is such a fruitful source of scandal; so that they who are still free from this vice may not be influenced by the bad example of others, nor learn to speak in the same wicked way; thus, as Christ says in to-day's gospel, “these things have I spoken to you, that you may not be scandalized,” and that they who are already addicted to this bad habit may at once correct it.

## Plan of Discourse.

*Cursing and swearing are a foolish and hellish kind of language, that is highly unbecoming a Christian, as I shall prove in the first part. Of all wicked language, it is that which gives the most scandal, as I shall prove in the second part.*

I could wish now that my voice were like thunder, and my words like lightning, not to curse and swear, but to banish that horrible vice to the abyss of hell, whence it came. Thou, O my Lord and my God, canst effect this; for Thou hast said by Thy Prophet Sophonias: "Then I will restore to the peoples a chosen lip, that all may call upon the name of the Lord."<sup>1</sup> Enlighten our understanding, we beg of Thee through the merits of Thy Mother Mary and the holy angels who are always praising Thee in Heaven, that we may learn how detestable the vice of cursing is, and may labor with a holy zeal to extirpate it.

We know by  
a man's  
language  
what coun-  
try he be-  
longs to.

By the language that a man speaks, we generally know what country he belongs to; if we hear a stranger speak Spanish and nothing else, we conclude that he is a Spaniard; if he speaks nothing but Italian, we know that he is a native of Italy. If he speaks French, we know at once that he is a Frenchman; whereas he who answers him in good German, is no doubt a German. When Peter was in the hall of Caiphaz the high-priest, in spite of all his protestations to the contrary, he was at once known to be a disciple of Christ, and was convicted of a lie; for the servant said to him: "even thy speech doth discover thee,"<sup>2</sup> and betrays thee at once as a Galilean.

The lan-  
guage of the  
country of  
the elect is  
the praise of  
God.

Now, my dear brethren, you can draw the conclusion yourselves. If you wish to know what country many Christians belong to, you have only to notice the language they speak; from that you will find out where they come from, where they were born and bred, and what country they belong to. I do not allude now to England or the Netherlands, or any other country here on earth; but you can find out in the way I have mentioned whether they belong to the land of the angels above, or to that of the demons below; to Jerusalem, the peaceful city of the elect of God, or to Babylon, the city of confusion, where lost souls dwell; to Heaven, or to hell. Do you wish to try the plan I have suggested? You will find it an unfailling one. Take notice, I say, of the language they use. St. John, who often

<sup>1</sup> Tunc reddam populis labium electum, ut invocent omnes in nomine Domini.—Soph. iii. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Et loquela tua manifestum te facit.—Matth. xxvi. 73.

heard it, describes the language of the angels and saints in Heaven, as we read in the Apocalypse. "And I beheld and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the number of them was thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: the Lamb that was slain is worthy to receive power, and divinity, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and benediction . . . I heard all saying: To him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb, benediction, and honor, and glory, and power for ever and ever."<sup>1</sup> And all that stood around said, Amen. In the fourth chapter he tells us that he heard the same language from the four and twenty ancients, and the four living creatures. "And they rested not day and night, saying: Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty."<sup>2</sup> We read in the seventh chapter how he saw the elect: "I saw a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and tribes, and peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne; and they cried with a loud voice, saying: Salvation to our God who sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb."<sup>3</sup> "After these things," he says in the nineteenth chapter, "I heard as it were the voice of much people in Heaven saying: alleluia, salvation, and glory, and power is to our God."<sup>4</sup> "And a voice came out from the throne, saying: give praise to our God, all ye His servants; and you that fear Him, little and great. And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of great thunders, saying, Alleluia. Let us be glad, and rejoice, and give glory to Him."<sup>5</sup> Thus, my dear brethren, you see that the language of the angels and the elect in Heaven consists in praising, honoring, and blessing God.

And what sort of a language do the wicked speak in hell? The language of the

<sup>1</sup> Vidi, et audiui vocem angelorum multorum in circuitu throni; et erat numerus eorum millia millium, dicentium voce magna: Dignus est Agnus, qui occisus est, accipere virtutem, et divinitatem, et sapientiam, et fortitudinem, et honorem, et gloriam, et benedictionem . . . omnes audiui dicentes: Sedenti in throno, et Agno: benedictio, et honor, et gloria, et potestas in sæcula sæculorum.—Apoc. v. 11, 12, 13.

<sup>2</sup> Requiem non habebat die ac nocte, dicentia: Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus Dominus Deus omnipotens.—Ibid. iv. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Vidi turbam magnam, quam dinumerare nemo poterat, ex omnibus gentibus, et tribubus, et populis, et linguis, stantes ante thronum, et clamabant voce magna, dicentes: Salus Deo nostro, qui sedet super thronum, et Agno.—Ibid. vii. 9, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Post hæc audiui quasi vocem turbarum multarum in cælo dicentium: Alleluja: Salus et gloria et virtus Deo nostro est.—Ibid. xix. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Et vox de throno exiit, dicens: Laudem dicite Deo nostro, omnes servi ejus, et qui timetis eum, pusilli et magni. Et audiui quasi voce turbæ magnæ, et sicut vocem tonitruorum magnorum, dicentium: Alleluja. Gaudeamus et exultemus, et demus gloriam ei.—Ibid. 5, 6, 7.

country  
of the re-  
probate is  
cursing and  
blasphemy.

Quite a different one from that of Heaven. They howl like dogs in their rage; they gnash their teeth with anger; they curse the hour of their birth; they curse their fathers and mothers, the God who created them, the devils who torture them, and the companions of their misery with whom they must live in eternal hatred and enmity. Such is the language of hell, and it consists of nothing but curses, imprecations, and blasphemy. "He put on cursing like a garment," says David, speaking of the reprobate, as the commentators assure us, "and it went in like water into his entrails, and like oil in his bones. May it be unto him like a garment which covereth him, and like a girdle with which he is girded continually,"<sup>1</sup> so that nothing can fall from his lips but cursing. Therefore, at the last judgment, the reprobate will receive from Jesus Christ, when He is passing sentence on them, no other title but that of accursed: "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire;"<sup>2</sup> there you can curse as much as you will.

Therefore  
the peace-  
ful, who  
bless God,  
are fellow-  
countrymen  
of the elect  
in Heaven.

Now I would have no difficulty in deciding, if I were asked to do so, what country men belong to, and what sort of people they are. If I find a patient, peaceful, and meek Christian, who, like his Lord and Master Jesus Christ, never allows a biting word to fall from his lips; who, like the patient Job on the dung hill, does not sin with his lips when bearing the troubles and trials of life, but is always satisfied with the will of God, and repeats in his heart that song of praise, "blessed be the name of the Lord;"<sup>3</sup> who, if he hears others talking wickedly, answers them mildly, like the elder Tobias, "speak not so; for we are the children of saints, and look for that life which God will give to them that never change their faith from Him;"<sup>4</sup> who, with St. Paul, can say truly, "we are reviled, and we bless; we are persecuted, and we suffer it; we are blasphemed, and we entreat;"<sup>5</sup> if I find, I say, a man of that kind, and you ask me what country he belongs to, I can say without further inquiry that his tongue betrays him; the beautiful language he speaks makes it evident that he belongs to the country of the

<sup>1</sup> *Induit maledictionem sicut vestimentum, et intravit sicut aqua in interiora ejus, et sicut oleum in ossibus ejus. Fiat ei sicut vestimentum, quo operitur, et sicut zona, qua semper præcingitur.*—Ps. cviii. 18, 19.

<sup>2</sup> *Discedite a me maledicti in ignem æternum.*—Matth. xxv. 41.

<sup>3</sup> *Sit nomen Domini benedictum.*—Job i. 21.

<sup>4</sup> *Nolite ita loqui, quoniam filii sanctorum sumus, et vitam illam expectamus, quam Deus daturus est his, qui fidem suam nunquam mutant ab eo.*—Tobias ii. 17, 18.

<sup>5</sup> *Maledicimur, et benedicimus; persecutionem patimur, et sustinemus; blasphemamur et obsecramus.*—I. Cor. iv. 12, 13.

angels, the kingdom of the elect, the dwelling-place of the children of God; in a word, to Heaven.

But if, on the other hand, I find one (and I will not have far to go to look for him; for unfortunately the streets, and lanes, and houses, and rooms, are full of them) who at the least word of contradiction, or if a dog howls, or his horse or his ox refuses to go the right way, or if his work is too hard, or an undertaking fails, or his servant is not ready at once when required, or his son or daughter does not obey even the least sign of his, or when there is any difference at home between husband and wife, or when the least inconvenience has to be borne;—if I find one who on such occasions has his mouth filled with curses, May the devil take you! May the lightning strike you dead! Go to the devil! Plague take you! May you break your neck! (Forgive me, innocent souls! I do not wish to teach you to curse, and you have only too many opportunities otherwise, of hearing such expressions), what am I to think of a man who uses language of that kind! Ye angels, who are always with us, what do you think of it? Did that man learn such language from you? Oh no, they will answer; he is no countryman of ours; we know him not; his wicked speech betrays him. “You are of your father the devil,”<sup>1</sup> said Christ formerly to the Pharisees; and the angels might say the same thing nowadays to those who are addicted to cursing; for it was the devil who taught them that wicked habit.

But they who are given to cursing are fellow-countrymen of the reprobate in hell.

The demons themselves approve of that hellish kind of language; these are our pupils, they say; they have acquired as great skill in speaking as the reprobate do in hell; so that, if we were even to forget our own language, we might learn it from them, when they come to us; we are always ready to dance to music of that kind. The devil was once seen sitting at the open window of a house, holding in one hand a long sheet of paper full of notes, while with the other he kept on beating time like the leader of an orchestra, laughing all the while and showing signs of extraordinary joy, and crying out, “well done! Bravo! go on!” What was going on in the house? There were four people living in it, who were adepts in cursing, the husband and wife, the son and the mother-in-law. There was nothing to be heard from them, from morning till night, but oaths and imprecations. They had just begun breakfast, and because the son was too greedy, and had taken too much on his plate, the mother

At which the devils rejoice; shown by an example.

<sup>1</sup> Vos ex patre diabolo estis.—John viii. 44.

cried out to him: "may the first bit you eat choke you!" The father followed suit, saying, "plague take you;" and last of all came the mother-in-law, who wished that he would swallow a thousand devils. This was the music that so delighted the evil spirit, that he could not help expressing his joy, and doubtless he considered that he had secured four skilled musicians for his hellish orchestra, which always played tunes of that kind. Alas, how many Christian houses there are in which, if we could see the devil in visible form, we should find him exulting with joy at the cursing and swearing that are continually to be heard therein!

Therefore they bear about them a mark of reprobation.

Unhappy wretches that you are! It is only too easy to see what country you belong to! You may be as pious and holy as you like in other respects; you may visit the churches, and pray, and sing the praises of God like angels; but you will be none the better for it; there are too many false notes in your attempts at heavenly music; you speak the language of the angels too badly to deceive any but men; God you cannot deceive thereby. You evidently learned a far different language, so that, no matter how you act in other respects, I say to you as the servant said to Peter: "Surely thou also art one of them; for even thy speech doth discover thee."<sup>1</sup> Truly you are of the number of the reprobate, for your speech shows that you belong to hell. There is not the least doubt that, just as they who are always blessing and praising God are written in the Book of Life, according to the testimony of David, "such as bless him shall inherit the land,"<sup>2</sup> so, on the other hand, they whose mouths are filled with oaths and curses are surely marked as being of the number of the reprobate, according to the testimony of the same Prophet, "such as curse him shall perish."<sup>3</sup> Thus your sentence is already pronounced, and you yourselves have ratified and confirmed it, since your wicked tongues prove that you are fellow-countrymen of the damned, companions of demons, and precursors of Antichrist; your speech doth discover you.

From this we see that cursing is utterly unbecoming a Christian.

How shameful! How disgraceful for a reasoning being, a Christian, a Catholic, a brother and member of Jesus Christ, redeemed by the precious blood of the meek Lamb, and an adopted child of God, to accustom himself to the use of such hellish language; to speak as the damned do; to make him-

<sup>1</sup> Vere et tu ex illis es, nam et loquela tua manifestum te facit.—*Matth.* xxvi. 73.

<sup>2</sup> Quia benedictentes ei hereditabunt terram.—*Ps.* xxxvi. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Maledictentes ei disperibunt.—*Ibid.*

self the comrade of devils, and to bear about the evil spirit constantly in his heart, in his mouth, and on his tongue! What a shame, what a disgrace that is! Is that then the end that we are to work for, although God has created us for the sole purpose of praising, blessing, honoring, and loving Him? Is that the wish that we daily send forth to God in Heaven, when we say the Lord's prayer: "Hallowed be Thy name"? Does that diabolical language harmonize with the solemn promise we made to God in Baptism as Christians, to renounce forever the devil and all his works, and to devote ourselves, body and soul, and tongue especially, to the praises of God? The first member of the body that God takes possession of in Baptism is the tongue; for when a child is brought to the church to be baptized, the priest does not at once pour the water on its head; no, he first places the blessed salt on its tongue, to show that he whose name is enrolled among the servants and followers of Christ must use his tongue only to praise God, and to promote the divine glory. And must this consecrated tongue be now so shamefully dishonored, by being used for cursing and swearing, and by being lent to the devil to speak his language? And God, who takes such care of His servants, that He has promised to consider as done to Himself, what is done to the least of them, must He now hear His adopted children calling down imprecations on each other's heads, worse than Turks and heathens, and dishonoring Him more than even the demons and lost souls in hell do by their curses and blasphemies?

If I heard a Turk or a heathen cursing and swearing at his neighbor, I should be horrified, and should think that such language is unfit for a reasoning being to use; yet at the same time I should have to admit that it is to a certain extent excusable before God in a blind idolater. "For if my enemy had reviled me, I would verily have borne with it;"<sup>1</sup> as the Lord Himself says by His servant David. But you, O Christian, My well-known friend, you who were born in the house of God, in the true Church of My Son, you who are fed at the Sacred Table with the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, which so often touch your tongue, you who are bound to have one heart with the Heart of Jesus; you, I say, O Catholic Christian, whom I have bound to My service as with cords, by heeping on you, in preference to so

Who is a  
friend and  
a child of  
God.

<sup>1</sup> Quoniam, si inimicus meus maledixisset mihi, sustinuissem utique. Tu vero, homo unanimes, dux meus, et notus meus, qui simul mecum dulces capiebas cibos.—Ps. lrv. 13, 14, 15.

many others, countless benefits; you whom I have placed amongst the people whom I call "a chosen generation, a kingly priest-hood, a holy nation, a purchased people;" whom I have purchased to the sole end, "that you may declare His virtues, who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light;"<sup>1</sup> you to make common cause with the demons and the reprobate, to help to spread the language of hell through the world, and to utter curses and imprecations against My creatures; that I find altogether intolerable. You act like a dog that barks at and bites the child of its master, at the very moment in which the latter is giving him a piece of bread. Christians! what do you mean by using such abominable language? Are you then so anxious to belong to the reprobate, even before your time comes to join them? Are you firmly resolved on going to hell? Then wait at all events until you die. You will then be able to swear and curse, and blaspheme for all eternity, and will not that satisfy you? Why then should you be so anxious to anticipate in this life the miserable state of eternal damnation? Ah, would to God, my dear brethren, that we could banish out of the whole land all who are addicted to this evil habit, so that our ears would no longer be offended by hearing such abominable language amongst Christian people! But what am I saying? I am afraid, if we did so, not half the people would be left in the country, so common is this vice! And where could they be sent to? Some special place should have to be created for them, because the whole world is full of them. And this is what is most to be deplored in this evil habit of cursing and swearing; that, namely, it is increasing daily, and infecting souls that were hitherto innocent. Therefore I say that this vice gives almost more scandal than any other sin of the tongue, as I shall now prove in the

### Second Part.

Cursing gives more scandal than any other kind of bad language, because most people are inclined to imitate it.

In the strict sense of the word that language is called scandalous, which gives or can give others an occasion of sin. Now I firmly believe that, although there are other sins of the tongue which are far worse and more sinful in themselves, yet there are none which give more occasion to evil than the sins of cursing and swearing. I must acknowledge that impure talk is a real poison and a contagious pestilence; yet there is this to be said

<sup>1</sup> Vos autem genus electum, regale sacerdotium, gens sancta, populus acquisitionis, ut virtutes annuncietis ejus, qui de tenebris vos vocavit in admirabile lumen suum.—I. Pet. II. 9.

for it, that it puts itself to shame and destroys its own influence for evil; because he who has even a remnant of decency left must blush for shame if he hears such conversation; thus very often the silence of those around him closes the mouth of the impure man, and puts him to shame, so that conversation of that kind cannot be carried on always openly in town or country. But who does not see and experience daily how quickly cursing, no matter how horrible it is, is learnt? The young learn it from the old, and that without shame or scruple, and without any one being astonished, much less shocked at it. Wherever you go, from morning till night, you may hear horrible imprecations from the soldier on guard, the peasant in the field, the tradesman in his workshop, the boys in the streets, and shopkeepers at their business. So common is it, that people are ashamed of it no longer, and it is considered as something to be proud of, when one is a master in the art of cursing. To such an extent has the evil increased, that it is no longer looked on as sinful, or as sufficient matter for sorrow and repentance, much less for a purpose of amendment. I have done nothing, people say, but cursed a little; and who can help that? Did it happen every day? asks the confessor. Oh yes, is the answer. And is there nothing else? No, nothing else. Alas, is not that enough? Far too many sins have you thereby committed. And yet many a confessor has to puzzle himself, and get all his theology together, and take different circumstances into consideration, before deciding that he has sufficient matter for absolution for the one sin of cursing only, although there is no doubt that in itself it is matter enough. And why so? Because the habit is of such long continuance; it has lasted from youth upwards; it has so often been made matter for confession, and there is no sign of amendment yet, nor is there much hope of amendment in future. So little is made of it, that it has become general and common all over the country.

Even little children, (and who would believe it, if he had not Even little children. experience of it?) almost before they are able to speak plainly enough to ask for a piece of bread and butter, and certainly before they know how to make the sign of the Cross, or to say the "Our Father," sometimes know how to curse and swear, and, when they get into a passion, to call down all sorts of imprecations on those who vex them. Pliny writes that a child was once born in Rome with all its teeth perfect, and that the people were thunderstruck at this prodigy, and looked on it as a bad omen.

But what was there to wonder at? Nowadays enough children of that kind come into the world, who have sharp teeth on their lips and tongues even before they have the full number of teeth in their upper and lower jaws, and who know how to curse long before they have learned their prayers. Nay, what an abominable and fearful sin! sometimes they curse their own parents, or at least give vent to their anger against them by secret murmurs and ill wishes. But after all, that is not surprising; the poor children hear nothing else at home. Their fathers curse, their mothers curse, their brothers and sisters, and servants, and neighbors curse; in a word, they hear nothing else. What then can the poor little ones do, but talk as they hear others about them talking, the whole day long? If my father and mother speak that way, they think, and my brothers and sisters, and every one else in the house, there cannot be any great harm in it; it must be a common way of speaking amongst people. So that those young lambs follow the rest of the flock without shame or scruple, firmly believing that they are doing right. I remember well how it was with many of my school-fellows in my young days. During the school term, the fear of the rod kept them quiet, so that they did not dare to curse or swear, at least openly, through fear of being reported and punished; but when the holidays came on, then the cursing commenced; they used to set to and vie with each other in profanity, and it was looked on as a disgrace not to be able to curse as well as grown-up people. One wished to be as good as the other, and thus to show that he was no longer a child, and that he was at liberty to say what he pleased.

Therefore  
 woe to those  
 who curse.  
 on account  
 of the scan-  
 dal they  
 give.

See, my dear brethren, to what an extent this abominable language prevails. So general is the scandal given by wicked and profane tongues, that this vice is no longer looked on as shameful and is left as a legacy to one's children and children's children, and is thus handed down to posterity. With reason does the prophet David compare such foul-mouthed people to open sepulchres, from which an effluvia arises that poisons the atmosphere around. "Their throat is an open sepulchre," he says; "with their tongues they acted deceitfully; the poison of asps is under their lips." And of whom does he say this? Of those whose "mouth is full of cursing and bitterness."<sup>1</sup> Ah, dear Saviour, proclaim again unceasingly to all

<sup>1</sup> Sepulchrum patens est guttur eorum: lingua suis dolose agebant; venenum aspidum sub labiis eorum. Quorum os maledictione et amaritudine plenum est.—Ps. xlii. 3.

those who are addicted to cursing and swearing, that woe Thou hast denounced against the “man by whom the scandal cometh!” A twofold woe to him who by his profane tongue helps to introduce and spread the scandal in a community! For if in the judgments of men he is looked on as an incendiary who, by not watching his own fire carefully, is the cause of a widespread conflagration; how will it be with him who is caught in the act of setting fire to other people’s property? But that is what those foul-mouthed people do every day. They are not satisfied with uttering curses themselves; they must teach innocent souls to follow their example, and thus they spread the inextinguishable fire of a bad habit, not only in their own families, but in the whole neighborhood. Woe to them when their angry Judge will call them to account, and inflict vengeance on them for the souls they have stolen from Him, and made the prey of hell!

And woe, twenty times woe to you parents, fathers, and mothers, who are given to cursing and swearing! Every time you make use of such bad language you commit not merely one sin, but as many sins as there are children or servants listening to you, who thus learn from you to speak in the same hellish manner.

Woe especially to parents who have the habit of cursing.

Ah, parents, woe to you, I say again, whether you are in earnest, or not, with your curses and imprecations! You should, at all events, remember that you are the occasion of much sin to others. Think of this, I implore you, and think of it often; this one consideration alone, of the harm you do those under your care, should make your hair stand on end with horror. Poor unfortunate children, how I pity you when you are taught such lessons by your own parents; when those who have given you temporal life deliver you over to eternal death! Is that the example, O Christian parents, that you must give your children, in order to encourage them to fear God and to practise virtue? God has entrusted them to you as His own beloved children by adoption, and He has laid on you the strict obligation of bringing them up with the greatest care for His honor and glory, and of teaching them how to know, praise, and bless God, and how to fear and love Him above all things; but you, instead of instructing them in this Christian language, teach them daily to use wicked and profane expressions, that they would never dream of using, if they did not hear them from you; you teach them, not to praise and bless God, but to curse and swear. God has entrusted your children to you, that by your teaching, and good

example, and careful training you may bring them up to dwell in the land of the angels, in the eternal kingdom of Heaven, there to praise and bless their Creator forever; but you prepare them from their very cradles to become companions of demons in the land of lost souls, where they will curse and blaspheme their Creator forever. You teach them the language of hell, even before they are sent thither. What a fearful account you will have to render! If it is better for him who gives even the least scandal to have a mill-stone tied round his neck, and to be sunk in the depths of the sea, as Christ Himself, the Infallible Truth, says, what an abyss must yawn to receive you, who hang a stone of scandal round the necks, not of strangers who have nothing to do with you, but of your own children and children's children, to whom you hand down as an heir-loom the hellish habit of cursing and swearing!

An eternal  
malediction  
is in store  
for those  
who have  
the habit of  
cursing.

Innocent Job! in the midst of the most fearful trials, thou didst not once sin with thy lips, as the Infallible Truth testifies of thee: "In all these things Job sinned not by his lips, nor spoke he any foolish thing against God;"<sup>1</sup> and yet thou didst fear that thy tongue would condemn thee before thy Judge: "If I would justify myself, my own mouth shall condemn me."<sup>2</sup> Alas, what reason they now have to fear that condemnation, whose tongues are always uttering profanity and imprecations! What will become of them, and of those, too, who by their pernicious example drag others on to imitate their own bad habit? But there can be no doubt of it; their own impious mouths will condemn them, and although they may be able to justify themselves in other respects, their sentence is already pronounced by the Prophet David: "He loved cursing, and it shall come to him."<sup>3</sup> He need not trouble himself about it; what he loves shall fall to his lot, when that terrible Voice shall thunder forth in the valley of Josaphat: "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels;"<sup>4</sup> that is, for those who take sides with the devil during their lives. Then will he look for a blessing, but will not find one for all eternity. "He would not have blessing, and it shall be far from him."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In omnibus his non peccavit Job labiis suis, neque stultum quid contra Deum locutus est.—Job i. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Si justificare me voluero, os meum condemnabit me.—Ibid. ix. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Dillexit maledictionem, et venit ei.—Ps. cviii. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Discedite a me maledicti in ignem æternam, qui paratus est diabolo et angelis ejus.—Matth. xxv. 41.

<sup>5</sup> Nolit benedictionem, et elongabitur ab eo.—Ps. cviii. 18.

Ah, my dear Christians, let us not deserve such a terrible curse! Conclusion to avoid cursing and to correct the habit of it. If any of us here present have been guilty of cursing, let us give it up once for all by a good confession and a firm purpose of amendment. But those who are still in the habit of indulging in profane language I address in the words of Tobias already quoted: "Speak not so, for we are the children of the saints." Give up that foul and unseemly language; remember that we are Christians, children of God, brethren and co-heirs of Jesus Christ, and that we belong to the society of the saints in Heaven. Do not allow the devil to boast of having set up in Christian houses a place where he can enjoy himself, and of being invoked by the children of God more frequently than they invoke their God and Creator. I beg of all who have any authority, for the sake of that honor and glory that we owe to God, and of their own souls, to unite together in a holy bond, and show that they are true Christians, by doing all in their power to stamp out that vile and unchristian language which is so prejudicial to the divine honor. This can and, with the help of God, will be done, if superiors keep a watchful eye on their subjects, masters and mistresses on their servants, and parents on their children, and if they are determined to allow none of those under their care to use profane language, and not to permit any fellow-countryman of the demons to enter their houses. Besides that, they must put a stop to cursing by sharp reproof, threats, and punishment. If you cannot stop it in any other way, do what St. Chrysostom advises, "strike the profane man on the mouth, and sanctify your hand by the blow."<sup>1</sup> As St. Francis Regis was once crossing the market-place on his return from a sick-call, he heard some women quarrelling and cursing each other in fearful fashion; filled with a holy zeal, he stooped down and, taking up a handful of mud, flung it with all his force at the mouth of one of the women, so that he forced her to hold her tongue. Turn out of your houses the servants who refuse to give up that bad habit. Thus, by fulfilling that obligation which binds under pain of sin all you who are superiors, you will in a short time make your homes the dwelling-places of angels, in which nothing that savors of hell will be heard, and in which the only language used will be that of the angels; thus you will begin to do here, what we all hope to do in eternity in the heavenly Jerusalem, where we shall constantly sing Alleluia, praised and blessed be God for ever and ever. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Contere os ipsius, et manum tuam percussione sanctifica.

**SIXTY-NINTH SERMON.****ON THE MALICE OF CURSING.****Subject.**

1. Cursing is a sin, and in itself a grievous sin. 2. It is a grievous, and at the same time a most injurious sin.—*Preached on Pentecost Sunday.*

**Text.**

*Audivimus eos loquentes nostris linguis magnalia Dei.*—Acts ii. 11.

“We have heard them speak in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.”

**Introduction.**

A teacher like that can make very skilful orators in a short time. To-day the Apostles of Christ, who were hitherto afraid to open their mouths, begin all at once to speak in divers tongues. What is this? cried out the Jews and heathens in astonishment. Are not those who are speaking all Galileans? And yet each one of us hears them speak the language of our own countries. A teacher like that can make very holy orators in a short time. The Apostles used to speak in a far different style; Our Lord had to bear with their murmurs and complaints, their quarrels and strifes as to who was the greatest among them. Nay, they even lent their tongues to the demon of cursing when they asked Our Lord that fire should be sent down from Heaven to consume the city that had refused to receive them: “Lord,” they said to Him, “wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from Heaven and consume them?”<sup>1</sup> Peter had even sworn that he knew not Our Lord; “he began to curse and to swear that he knew not the man.”<sup>2</sup> But now all of a sudden we hear nothing from them but the praises and wonderful works of God. “We have heard them speak in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.” And what wonder was it after all? They were filled with the fire of divine love, and they could not speak but as the Holy Ghost inspired them. O Divine Teacher! Holy Spirit! Descend upon us also, and

<sup>1</sup> Domine, vis dicimus, ut ignis descendat de cœlo, et consumat illos?—Luke ix. 54.

<sup>2</sup> Cœpit detestari, et jurare, quia non novisset hominem.—Matth. xxvi. 74.

change the tongues of the perverse world! How many different kinds of speech may we not hear nowadays, which are inspired not by Thee, but by the spirit of evil! My dear brethren, I am alluding now to that wicked language against which I began to speak last Sunday, and mean to speak to-day too; it is an abominable and, alas, at the same time a common language, known to great and small alike; namely, the wicked habit of cursing and swearing on the least provocation; it is a language which is altogether opposed to the Holy Ghost, who is a Spirit of patience, meekness, peace, charity, and union; and he who is accustomed to use that language can be certain that he is not ruled by the Spirit of God, but by the spirit of evil; for it is the scandalous and hellish speech of the reprobate, as I proved in the last sermon. Still, because it is unfortunately so common, people make little of it, and look on it as one of those every-day faults, which do not merit much attention. Therefore, although they accuse themselves of it in confession, they do not make earnest efforts to amend; whereas if they looked on it as a great sin, they would hardly indulge in it so freely. To correct this false opinion, I shall now show that it is really not a trifling vice, and therefore he who is guilty of it must, in order to make a good confession, sincerely repent of and amend it.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*Cursing is a sin, and in itself a grievous sin; as I shall show briefly in the first part. It is a grievous, and at the same time a most injurious sin; as I shall prove in the second part.*

O Holy Ghost, give strength and efficacy to my words by Thy grace; we beg this of Thee through the merits of Thy Virginal Spouse Mary, and of our holy angels guardian.

That cursing is a sin, in spite of the fact that many think little of it, is so evident a truth, that it would be a waste of time to prove it. And what kind of a sin it is the infallible word of God shows clearly by the holy Apostle St. Paul, when he warns the Christians at Rome: "Bless them that persecute you; bless and curse not;"<sup>1</sup> and the reason of that warning he gives afterwards in his Epistle to the Corinthians: "Do not err," be sure you do not deceive yourselves on this point; "neither idolaters, nor adulterers, nor the effeminate, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor railers shall possess the kingdom of

Proved from  
Scripture  
that cursing  
is a grievous  
sin.

<sup>1</sup> Benedicite persequentibus vos: benedicite, et nolite maledicere.—Rom. xii. 14.

God.”<sup>1</sup> From these words of the Apostle, St. Thomas and all theologians conclude that cursing in itself and of its own nature must be a mortal sin; for it is reckoned amongst those vices that are certainly grievously sinful, such as idolatry, adultery, theft, drunkenness, and so on; and in any case, since the Apostle says that it excludes from Heaven, it must necessarily be a mortal sin, unless the smallness of the harm that one wishes his neighbor thereby, or inadvertence, or surprise of passion, which deprives the will of its proper freedom, excuses it and changes it into a venial sin.

It offers a  
grievous  
insult to  
God.

And to come to the root of the matter, if we consider the insult offered to God by cursing, and the harm it does Christian charity, who will dare to say that it is only a venial sin? Hear, O profane man! you wish, through anger and displeasure against your domestics, through envy against your neighbor, through hatred and vindictiveness against your enemy, that he should break his neck, or die suddenly, or be struck by lightning, or be possessed, or carried off by the devil, and so on; you know better than I what your favorite curses are; but do you know what guilt you incur thereby in the sight of God? You arrogate to yourself the office of judge, which belongs to Him alone; for you pass sentence on your fellow-man, and desire that the evil you mention should befall him. But this is not the worst, although it is bad enough. What office do you then leave to your God? I tremble for you, when I think of it. I am almost stricken dumb with fear and horror, before I dare to say what it is. You make the Lord God your executioner, who is to carry out the sentence you have pronounced, and to inflict on your neighbor the punishment you have invoked on him, because you are unable to inflict it yourself. And yet you say that cursing is a venial sin, and that it need not be made much of? But perhaps you think I am too severe, and that I am merely putting forward an opinion of my own. Hear what St. Augustine says, from whom I have taken that opinion: “It is certain that the judge does not put a malefactor to death; he says to the executioner, slay; and the latter fulfils the command. And you, when you say to the Lord, slay my enemy,” strike him dead, or let the devil carry him off, “you make yourself judge, and ask God to be the executioner.”<sup>2</sup> What an insult to the great God! what pre-

<sup>1</sup> *Nolite errare: neque idolis servientes, neque adulteri, neque molles, neque fures, neque avari, neque ebriosi, neque maledicti regnum Dei possidebunt.*—I. Cor. vi. 9, 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Certum est, quod ju-lex homo per se ipsum non occidit; judex dicit: occide, et tortor occidit. Et tu, quando dicis Domino: occide inimicum meum te facis judicem, et Deum queris esse tortorem.*—S. Aug. *Serm. 1. de S. Steph.*

sumption on the part of a miserable mortal! and yet you imagine that your cursing is only a small fault! You have been guilty of it times without number, perhaps from the moment you were first able to speak, and you have felt neither shame nor scruple on account of it; you are still guilty of it every day, when things do not go according to your wish; do you think it a small sin to act thus insolently towards the Almighty, and to transgress so flagrantly the first and most important commandment, "thou shalt love the Lord thy God," and honor Him with all thy heart?

Besides that, is it a small sin to act in direct opposition to that other fundamental law, which, according to the words of Christ, is like to the former, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself?" This love you violate, and grievously, when you curse your neighbor and wish that some great misfortune, such as sudden death, or being carried off by the devil, the bare thought of which happening to yourself would make you quail, should befall him. Merely to rejoice in secret at your neighbor's grievous misfortune, the mere wish that some serious calamity should happen your greatest enemy, that is already a grievous sin against the charity we owe to all men, a truth that no one has as yet ever doubted. How can it then be a lesser sin to say openly to your neighbor that you desire that the evils you wish him in your angry and vindictive heart should really come upon him?

And is  
grievously  
injurious to  
fraternal  
charity.

There is a question amongst theologians as to whether or not it is lawful to curse the devil. A simple-minded man might be inclined to laugh at this, and to wonder that learned men should puzzle their brains and waste their precious time in solving such a useless question; for, he would think, the question answers itself; what can it matter to the evil spirit, who, as our greatest enemy, seeks only our destruction, whether we curse him or not? He is already accursed, and will remain so forever. But hear what theologians say about it. In the first place, they maintain, the devil may be considered as a creature, and as one who possesses a created nature; secondly, he may be considered as the cause of many natural evils and misfortunes, which God permits him to afflict us with, as for instance when, as people say, he brings on storms at the desire of wizards and dealers in the black art; thirdly, as a torturer who is incessantly occupied in tormenting the reprobate in hell; and fourthly, as a wicked spirit, rejected by God, hardened in wickedness, and filled with a bitter, unrelenting hatred of God and of our souls. Now the

It is not  
even lawful  
to curse the  
devil.

answer to the proposed question is this: if the devil is cursed in this last named sense; if, for example, one were to say—away from me, accursed spirit! cursed be your evil suggestions! no sin would be committed, and such expressions would sometimes be even praiseworthy and advisable during temptations, because then one curses his wickedness and the snares he lays for souls, or at all events approves of and ratifies the curse already pronounced against him by God. But considering him in the three other capacities mentioned, it is not lawful to curse even the devil, as he is a creature, possessing a created nature, and St. Thomas says, “a curse uttered against a creature, as such, attacks God himself;”<sup>1</sup> nor is it lawful to curse him as the cause of temporal misfortunes, calamities and sickness, and much less as a tormentor of lost souls. And why? Because, just as the malefactor must not curse the executioner who stands with drawn sword ready to cut his head off, inasmuch as the latter acts by the authority of the judge, and fulfils the sentence pronounced by the justice of man, so it is not lawful to curse the devil, who sometimes, by divine permission and arrangement, punishes men on earth, and who tortures the wicked in hell as the executioner of the divine justice.

How much more unlawful, then, to curse a human being!

Now, if that is the case, my dear brethren, if it is not lawful to curse even that most wretched and wicked spirit, who is the cause of so much evil in the world, and who seeks to ruin our souls eternally, then I am necessarily forced to conclude that it is still less lawful to curse the earth, or the work we have to do, or the dumb beasts we make use of, although that sin is committed often enough through anger and impatience; because these things are harmless creatures of God, and cannot do us any injury, since they have not reason. What a terrible sin it must then be to curse a reasoning being like ourselves, who has been ransomed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, who is a Christian, a brother of Christ, an adopted child of God, and an heir to the kingdom of Heaven, and whom we are bound to love as ourselves! What a terrible sin it must be to call down imprecations on one's own domestics and children, on one's wife or husband, and, most terrible of all, on one's own father or mother! What a fearful sin it is, I say, no matter what annoyance they may cause us! For, wicked as a human being may be, still he is not a devil; he still has a claim to and a hope of Heaven; and even if he were a devil, it would not be lawful to curse him. No, I repeat, in the

<sup>1</sup> *Maledictio creaturæ, in quantum creatura est, redundat in Deum.*

words of St. Paul, "do not err;" do not deceive yourselves, nor flatter yourselves with the belief that cursing is only a small matter; "railers shall not possess the kingdom of God." Therefore it is manifest that a wilful, deliberate, and grievous imprecation is a mortal sin. And it is equally manifest that it is a most injurious sin, as I shall show in the

### Second Part.

The habit of cursing, which is so common, is injurious to him who is guilty of it, to him against whom the curses are uttered, and even to the whole community in which such a wicked habit prevails. The first proposition follows necessarily from what we have already seen; because he who curses deliberately and grievously forfeits his right to Heaven and condemns himself to hell. Is not that harm enough? Yet it is an effect common to every mortal sin, although not produced in the same way. Oh ye proud, avaricious, unjust, unchaste, vindictive, gluttonous, and intemperate sinners, how foolish you are to renounce your God and the eternal joys of Heaven, and to choose hell with its unending torments for the sake of a breath of honor, a miserable temporal profit, a momentary, brutish pleasure, a vain point of honor, or a sensual gratification! Yet in some respects you have more to excuse you than those who are given to cursing. And why? Because you have, at least in imagination and in outward appearances, some profit and advantage from your sin; you have the money you desire, or the sensual gratification, or the honor, or satisfaction you seek for; and to our weak and perverse nature these things seem desirable, especially under the pressure of temptation or occasion, which draws us on with a gentle violence, dims the light of reason, and gains the consent of the will, which is already inclined to evil, so that even the wisest, humblest, and holiest men have sometimes yielded to such pressure. When you are burning in the flames of hell (Oh, woe to you if it should come to that!), you can at least look back on your lives, and assign the cause of the torments you are suffering. You may think, although it will be a poor consolation for you, that, if you are burning in those fierce flames, if your flesh is tormented unceasingly, it is because you have sinned against the divine law, and defiled your body by indulging in sensual pleasures. If you are made a laughing-stock of demons, you know that it is because you have tried by unlawful means to gain honor and authority amongst

Cursing is most injurious to him who is guilty of it.

men while on earth. If you are condemned to eternal poverty and misery, it is because you used unjust means to acquire wealth, that you might enjoy the comforts of life. If you now gnash your teeth in rage and despair, it is because you insisted on taking revenge on your enemies. If you now suffer the pangs of hunger and thirst, if for all eternity you will not have even a drop of water to cool your tongue, if your food is sulphur and your drink serpents, it is because you sinned grievously by gluttony and drunkenness. Thus, at all events, you know for what you sinned and deserved hell; you have, as the saying is, something for your money. Such was the answer that Abraham gave to the rich glutton, when the latter cried out to him: "Have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, to cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame." "Son," was Abraham's reply to him, "remember that thou didst receive good things in thy life-time, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." <sup>1</sup>

without  
being of the  
least use to  
him.

But you, who sin so often every day by curses and imprecations, what will you have to say for yourselves in hell fire, except that you have sinned, and nothing more? For what profit, or pleasure, or honor, do you gain by cursing? None at all, as you must acknowledge. Like mad dogs, you attack your fellow-men in your anger, and thereby poison your own blood, and fill your entrails with bitter gall. This is the pleasure, the joy, the delight you find in cursing; and what have you gained by it? When you have exhausted your profane vocabulary, you are less masters of the passion that caused you to use it, than if you had acted or spoken with Christian meekness and patience. Is your pain or your trial lessened by your wicked language, or have you been relieved from the pressure of misfortune? Your sufferings are just the same as before; you have the same trials, the same calamities to bear. Nay, they are worse than before; because those whom you have cursed in your anger have answered you in the same wicked strain, and thus increased your bitterness. This is the profit, this the advantage you have gained! And in addition to that you have, like other sinners, condemned yourselves to hell, where you will one day have to acknowledge that you have simply exchanged one suffering for

<sup>1</sup> *Miserere mei, et mitte Lazarum, ut intingat extremum digiti sui in aquam, ut refrigeret linguam meam, quia crucior in hac flamma. Fili, recordare quia recepisti bona in vita tua, et Lazarus similiter mala: nunc autem hic consolatur, tu vero cruciaris.*—Luke xvi. 24, 25.

another, nay, that you are suffering eternal torments there, because you suffered temporal trials here. O foolish sinners, who seek hell in that way!

Besides the great injury you do yourselves, there is also that which you inflict on those you curse. In the Book of Leviticus we read the command given by God: "Thou shalt not speak evil of the deaf;"<sup>1</sup> that is, thou shalt not curse them. And what merit have the deaf in the sight of God, that He should have published a special law in their favor? They cannot even hear the curse, nor know whether they are praised or abused. Talk to a deaf man, and pay him all sorts of compliments with a smiling countenance, and then, without changing your expression, abuse and curse him in the vilest terms, after the style of the old comedies; he will think you are complimenting him all the time, and will bow and scrape in his best style in acknowledgement to you. It seems then as if it can do a deaf man no harm to curse him, and yet God has expressly forbidden it. Why, my dear brethren? We must understand this command in a moral sense, so that its first meaning is, you must not curse any creature that has neither sense nor reason, as they do who, for instance, curse the cards or the dice when they are unlucky at play (and I wish that I could say of the habit of gambling what Our Lord said on the Cross at the termination of His Passion, "it is consummated:" there is no more of it!), and, when things do not go as they wish, give vent to their ill-feeling by cursing their work, the weather, or their dog, their ox, or their horse. And why, asks St. Thomas, do you curse those creatures? They do you no harm; they are not to blame for causing you annoyance. They are deaf creatures, and do not understand, so that when you curse them, you ill-treat and do them wrong.

In the second place, by the deaf are understood those who bear most resemblance to people who are devoid of hearing, such as little children, and those who are morally deaf, such as obstinate servants, disobedient sons and daughters, and others who refuse to listen to good advice. Now there are some masters and mistresses who, if their servants do not at once obey their least sign, curse them in a most fearful manner. There are parents even, who curse their little infants when the latter are restless at night. And how foolish they are in doing so! Because all these are deaf creatures, and cannot understand what is said to them. Finally, all men, no matter who they are, are deaf as far as curs-

He wrongs  
the crea-  
tures he  
curses.

And the  
human  
beings to  
whom he  
wishes evil

<sup>1</sup> Non maledices surdo.—Levit. xix. 14.

ing is concerned, for they pay little attention to it, and look on it as a blank cartridge, that merely makes a noise, but cannot hurt them. Yet God commands us not to curse the deaf. And why? I ask again. If people pay no attention to it, it cannot do them any harm. No matter; the curse may have a bad effect on them, and injure them. This is what God Himself says by the wise Ecclesiasticus: "give not to them that ask of thee room to curse thee behind thy back," to wish evil to thee, even in thy absence! "For the prayer of him that curseth thee in the bitterness of his soul shall be heard; for he that made him, will hear him."<sup>1</sup> Thus you see, my dear brethren, that, although the words and evil wishes of him who curses his neighbor are not able to bring down misfortune or calamity upon him at once, yet very often God hears the curse, and allows the misfortune to befall the person cursed, in order to show how He abhors that hellish language, and how He wishes to deter all men from the use of it.

The curses of parents against their children have a special efficacy.

The curses of parents against their own children have received from God a special efficacy, as we learn from Ecclesiasticus: "The father's blessing establisheth the houses of the children; but the mother's curse rooteth up the foundation."<sup>2</sup> God allows that, in order to confirm and ratify the authority of parents, whom He has placed as His viceroys over their children, to inflict on the children the punishment they deserve for having provoked their parents to anger by obstinacy, disobedience, and want of filial love, and also to punish the parents themselves by the grief and affliction they feel at seeing that their curses are not without effect. If we were able to trace those effects, and to point to the evils and misfortunes that the curses of parents bring down on their children, we should behold many a sad and lamentable sight.

Proved by examples.

We should see how ten children were so affected by a constant trembling of the body and chattering of the teeth, that it never left them day or night, sleeping or waking; and St. Augustine tells us that he himself saw those children in his own episcopal city. How were they reduced to such a miserable plight? By a single curse. Their mother, a widow, had to suffer a great deal of annoyance from them on account of their obstinacy; on one

<sup>1</sup> Non relinquo querentibus tibi retro maledicere: maledicentis enim tibi in amaritudine animæ exaudietur deprecatio illius; exaudiet autem eum, qui fecit illum.—Ecc. iv. 5, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Benedictio patris firmat domos filiorum: maledictio autem matris eradicat fundamenta.—Ibid. iii. 11.

occasion, when they were running boisterously about the room, she lost patience with them, and cursed them, saying: may you never have rest or repose your whole lives long. Hardly had the words left her mouth, when her wish was fulfilled; they began at once to tremble and shake all over their bodies, so that they became a terrible example to the whole country. We should see children dragged out of their houses and devoured by wolves, as another mother saw her little daughter, a child of eight years, seized by a fierce wolf, that carried her off to its cave to be devoured by its young, because the mother, whenever she was angry with her child, used to say to her: may the wolves devour you! We should see children becoming possessed by the devil, so that they had to be bound with chains, as Surius relates, in the life of St. Zenobius, of a mother who cried out to her two sons, because they would not stop dancing about the house: dance, until the devil dances in you! In a moment the evil spirit, who is only too ready to come, even without being invited, took possession of them, and they became raving mad, so that chains enough to bind them could hardly be found. The same author tells us of a little girl, who, having been beaten by her mother because she had broken a pitcher, refused to come to table when her mother called her. Come here and sit down, said the mother; but the girl, in a sulky humor, turned her back and refused to obey; well then, said the mother, stay where you are, and eat until you swallow the devil! At once an enormous fly came buzzing about the room, and though it was driven off repeatedly, yet it returned again, and as the child opened her mouth to eat the first bit, it entered into her, and she was thereupon possessed by the devil. Our Father Drexelius gives countless similar examples in the 26th chapter of his work "Orbis Phaëton." So true is it that a parent's curse "rooteth up the foundation."

O children, learn from this how you should honor, fear, and love your parents! See that you never give them occasion for anger by disobedience or obstinacy; especially when you know that they are in the habit of cursing. But you, fathers and mothers, to you I must again deliver a special warning; avoid that wicked and dangerous language by which, instead of benefiting your own souls and the souls and bodies, too, of your children, you do them the greatest harm. Yes, you say, but I have often cursed my children, and I have never seen any bad effects follow. What? Is it then your intention to go on curs-

Thus children and parents are both punished.

ing until your bad wishes in regard to your children are realized, so that your sorrow and repentance for the evil you have caused will come too late? O my God, if every curse were at once fulfilled, what would become of us all? Hardly one of us but would have a broken neck, or would be struck by lightning, or would be given over to the devil! It is through Thy goodness, O God, that Thou dost not always hear our curses! But what do you mean by that excuse? Do you know perhaps what are the hidden decrees of divine Providence? Who knows what secret and to us as yet unknown evils have been caused by your imprecations? If your children are sickly and delicate, or disobedient, or obstinate, or wicked, so that they cause you daily annoyance, is not that punishment enough? And it is perhaps the punishment and the effect of the curses you have so often uttered against them from their very cradles up to the present day. "Their children wicked, their offspring is cursed," says the Holy Ghost in the Book of Wisdom; as if He wished to say: the mouths of the parents are always filled with imprecations; what wonder is it then, that a curse should fall on the children? "Their offspring is cursed."

The habit of cursing is injurious to a whole community.

But I have spent too much time talking of parents, my dear brethren; cursing is injurious not only to children and to others against whom it is uttered, but also, so widely does the evil extend, even to the innocent. The punishment it draws down spreads insensibly over the whole neighborhood, or town, or community, or country in which the detestable habit prevails. Therefore the Psalmist says of those who are addicted to it: "The poison of asps is under their lips;"<sup>1</sup> a poison that destroys everything it touches, and inflicts deadly wounds that are unnoticed at first. We are sometimes surprised that one country is less blessed by God than another, and that it is punished more severely by wars, pestilence, and famine. But if we take the trouble to trace those evils to their source, we shall find what they are to be attributed to. Emperors even have traced some calamities to the prevalence of certain vices. "Famine, earthquakes, and plagues afflict a country on account of blasphemy."<sup>2</sup> I have no hesitation in saying that many parts of Germany feel the pressure of the hard times, on account of the prevailing habit of cursing. For what grace or blessing can be expected in a

<sup>1</sup> Nequissimi filii eorum; maledicta creatura eorum.—Wis. iii. 12, 13.

<sup>2</sup> Venenum aspidum sub labiis eorum.—Ps. xlii. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Propter blasphemus et fames et terræ motus et pestilentie fiunt.

house, a town, or a country in which all, great and small, young and old, men and women, have their mouths full of imprecations? Therefore St. John Chrysostom (O golden-tongued orator! would that thou wert here in my place in this pulpit, to impress thy advice on all here present!) advises all those who hear any one cursing, to stop him at once, because he may otherwise be the cause of some general misfortune. "Let us stop their mouths," he says, "and close those poisonous fountains, that the city may be relieved from the evils which oppress it."<sup>1</sup> Woe to those families in which there is any one addicted to this most injurious vice! Thus, my dear brethren, we see that cursing is the cause of many and grievous misfortunes. I know well the empty excuse that people bring forward to try to lessen their guilt: I have no bad meaning in what I say; I curse only to frighten others; I do not think of what I am saying when I am in a passion; I curse only through habit, and I am sorry for it afterwards; and so on. But all these lame excuses have nothing to do with the matter; much less do they make cursing lawful or innocent. I will speak more particularly of them on another occasion.

I conclude with the words of St. Paul, already quoted, "Bless, and curse not."<sup>2</sup> Let us all unanimously resolve, once for all, to give up that shameful, scandalous, diabolical, and most injurious habit; and let us determine to avoid and to repent of that sin which brings neither profit nor pleasure, and is the cause of great harm. If we are bent on losing our souls, let us, at all events, not lose them for the sake of such a wretched and profitless vice. O dear Lord and God, we do not wish to lose our souls; we desire, and will do our best to come to Thee in Heaven, and therefore we are sorry for all our sins, and especially for the sins that we have so often committed by the shameful habit of cursing. Pardon us, O Lord! and do not allow the innocent to suffer on account of this vice of ours. If Thou art resolved to punish, Thou hast now prostrate at Thy feet those who, with contrite and humble hearts, acknowledge their guilt! We sincerely promise to amend our lives. Do Thou, O God of goodness and mercy, confirm this resolve of ours, for Thou art the only one who can rule and govern our tongues, those slippery members which, as St. James says, no man can keep in check by his own unaided power. Give us all then the grace to use our tongues in

Conclusion and resolution to amend this injurious habit.

<sup>1</sup> Obstruamus eorum ora, et tanquam fontes mortiferos occludamus, ut penitus evaescant mala, quæ civitates comprehenderunt.

<sup>2</sup> Benedicite, et nolite maledicere.—Rom. xii. 14.

blessing, and to Thy honor, praise, and glory, and instead of cursing our fellow-men when they cause us annoyance or injury, to learn to say with Christ our Saviour, "Peace be with you;" instead of cursing animals and senseless creatures, to say, go in God's name; instead of cursing in trials and difficulties, to say, "Thy will be done; blessed be the name of the Lord;" and instead of all cursing and swearing, which is the language of the reprobate in hell, to accustom ourselves now to speak the language of Thy elect, which consists in nothing else but loving, praising, and blessing Thee, O great God, worthy of all love, with Thy holy angels, forever. So shall it be! Praise be to Jesus! Amen.

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*SEVENTIETH SERMON.*

**ON THE NECESSITY OF CORRECTING THE HABIT OF CURSING.**

**Subject.**

1. The habit of cursing must be corrected; no excuse to the contrary is of any avail. 2. It can be corrected, for there are means enough of correcting it.—*Preached on Trinity Sunday.*

**Text.**

*Docete omnes gentes, baptizantes eos in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti.—Matth. xxviii. 19.*

"Teach ye all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

**Introduction.**

According to the command of Our Lord Jesus Christ, all apostolic functions in His Church must begin in the name of the Blessed Trinity. "Teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Nearly all the Sacraments are administered in the same name. "I confirm thee with the chrism of salvation in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," such are the words the bishop uses in conferring Confirmation. When the priest is giving absolution in the Sacrament of Penance, he says: "I absolve thee from thy sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." The same name is invoked at the beginning of Mass, and at the beginning of a sermon. All Christians make the sign of the Cross in this name when

they pray; and, according to the exhortation of St. Paul, all the thoughts, words, and actions of every day of our lives should be sanctified by this most holy name. But, alas, how perverse the Christian world is in this respect nowadays! For once that we hear the name of God, we hear that of the devil twenty, a hundred times. There are many Christians of whom we have good reason to believe, at least if we consider the language they use, that they begin and end all their actions in the name of the devil, so accustomed are they to make use of curses and imprecations. I have shown last Sunday, my dear brethren, that the imprecations in general use are sinful, and, when they express a deliberate wish that a serious evil should befall another, are in themselves grievously sinful. I will now repeat the subject of last Sunday's sermon, and also summarize the preceding sermon for the benefit of those who were not present at it. Cursing is a grievous sin, because it implies a serious violation of the law of Christian charity, which forbids us even to wish evil to our neighbor in thought, not to speak of giving expression to such a wish by using towards our neighbor offensive and injurious language; and because it offers a grievous insult to God, who is thus asked, as it were, to act the part of an executioner, and to inflict on the person against whom the curse is uttered the evil mentioned therein. Cursing is great folly and wickedness, for it is the language of the demons and the reprobate in hell. It is a sin that gives much scandal, for it is learned very easily, and is committed without shame or scruple by young and old. It is a most injurious sin, because it brings none of the profit, or honor, or pleasure, which is to be derived from other vices; its only cause is wickedness; its only fruit is the pains of hell, along with the harm done the person who is cursed, nay even the whole community. Yet they who are addicted to this habit bring forward all kinds of excuses in order to show that cursing is either harmless, or that, at all events, it is only a small fault, or that, through long continued habit, it is impossible to correct it. Those excuses I shall now refute, and I say:

#### Plan of Discourse.

*The habit of cursing must be corrected; no excuse to the contrary is of any avail; the first part. It can be corrected; for there are means enough of correcting it; the second part. They who are free from this vice may apply what I am about to say to any bad habit to which they are addicted.*

O Most Holy Trinity, give strength and efficacy to my words by Thy grace; this I beg of Thee through the intercession of Mary and our holy angels guardian, so that in future, instead of swearing and cursing, we may always have Thy holy Name on our lips with the greatest reverence.

It is a common thing for people to try to excuse and palliate sins.

To palliate sin, to excuse our misdeeds, and to try to make ourselves appear innocent, is an art in which we are all skilled, and which we have inherited from our first parents. "Where art thou?"<sup>1</sup> said the Lord to Adam, after the latter had eaten the forbidden fruit and incurred the punishment of death. How didst thou dare to touch that tree? Didst thou not know that it was forbidden thee to eat of its fruit, under pain of eternal damnation. Alas, answered Adam, I could not help it; "The woman whom Thou gavest me to be my companion gave me of the tree, and I did eat."<sup>2</sup> Thou then, O woman, art the cause of the transgression? "Why hast thou done this?"<sup>3</sup> But, she answered, I am not to blame; "the serpent deceived me, and I did eat."<sup>4</sup> If the serpent had been allowed to speak, there is no doubt that he would have made a still more plausible excuse. That is the way in which the children of Adam and Eve still try to excuse nearly all their faults. "We say," writes the philosopher Seneca of the Rome of his day, and the same words might be applied to many countries in our own time, "we say: I am not proud; but I cannot live otherwise in Rome."<sup>5</sup> A woman comes up dressed far above her condition; see, exclaims the philosopher, how proud that woman is; she dresses in a more costly style than her means allow. O no, is the answer, she is not proud; she is only conforming to the prevailing fashion. A certain individual spends large sums on banquets and entertainments; what a spendthrift he must be! Nothing of the kind, he says; "living in the city puts me under great expense;"<sup>6</sup> I must do what others of my standing do. A young man wastes his time in idle amusement, drinking, gambling, and other excesses; is the city to blame for that? "It is not my fault," he will say; "my youth is my excuse."<sup>7</sup> Thus, concludes Seneca, we always try to shirk the

<sup>1</sup> Ubi es?—Gen. iii. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Mulier, quam dedisti mihi sociam, dedit mihi de ligno, et comedi.—Ibid. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Quare hoc fecisti?—Ibid. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Serpens decept me, et comedi.—Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Dicimus: non ego ambitiosus sum; sed Romæ aliter vivi non potest.

<sup>6</sup> Non ego sumptuosus sum; urbs ipsa magnos sumptos exigit.

<sup>7</sup> Non est meum vitium; adolescentia hoc fecit.

blame; "and therefore it is very difficult for us to be cured, because we do not know that we are ailing, and the evil from which we suffer is not outside, but inside of us." 1

This is the great mistake made by those who are given to cursing and swearing. It is not my fault, they say, like the people mentioned by Seneca; I cannot help cursing; my household affairs, my neighbors, the people with whom I have to deal, they are to blame for it. That surly and drunken man, that idle, talkative woman, that ill-reared son, that disobedient daughter, that obstinate servant, who causes me such annoyance, that troublesome neighbor, who is such a torment to me; these are the people who drive me to curse and swear; and in fact I cannot get on without it. Oh no! your excuse is not worth anything; it cannot hide your wickedness. You should strike your own breast, and say, "through my fault, through my most grievous fault!" The only cause of the wicked language I use is my impatience, which prevents me from bearing the least contradiction; my pride and obstinacy, which make me insist on having the last word; my angry and revengeful disposition, which is aroused at the least opposition; my envious heart, which is filled with bitterness at anything that displeases me in the least. "The evil from which we suffer is not outside, but inside of us."

Especially the sin of cursing, and first, they try to put the blame of it on others.

It is true, say others, that I am to blame; but God forbid that I should be guilty of a mortal sin by cursing! I do not mean what I say. Sometimes, through anger or impatience, I say: may the devil take you! may you be struck dead on the spot! and so on; but I do not really wish that evil should happen the person to whom I am speaking. I talk in that way only to frighten my children when they are disobedient, or to let my servants, or others who annoy me, see that they must amend their behavior towards me. Do you mean to persuade me, then, that your cursing and swearing is to the glory of God, inasmuch as you wish to correct your neighbor's faults thereby? Doubtless you expect a great reward from God for what you have done, and when you confess at the judgment-seat that you have cursed your neighbor, your glory in Heaven will be considerably increased? Still I hardly think that you can expect to have your wicked language written down in the Book of merits. You maintain that you are not in earnest, and that you do not

The second excuse, I do not mean it in earnest, is refuted.

<sup>1</sup> Et ideo difficilius ad sanitatem venimus, quia nos aegrotare nescimus. Non est extrinsecus malum nostrum; intra nos est.

mean what you say when you curse; but who can believe that, especially when, as you admit, you curse your neighbor through anger and impatience? Your limbs tremble with passion, anger is written on your forehead and appears in your countenance, while a storm of imprecations proceeds from your mouth. Who, I ask, can believe that you are not in earnest then, that the evil wishes you utter are not meant earnestly, and that you do not intend to do any more than frighten the person you are speaking to? No, my good friend, your excuse is worth nothing.

Even if it were true, it would still be unlawful to curse.

Besides, whether you mean it or not, is it lawful for you to use such scandalous and hellish language? If I can say with truth that it is not my intention to excite others to sin by talking immodestly to them, and that my only object is to amuse them, is it right for me, in spite of that, to indulge in such unseemly conversation? No one will dare to maintain that. And do you think that the proper way to correct your children and servants is to curse and swear at them? Did you ever find that it did them any good? The fact is, they pay very little attention to it, for they are too much accustomed to it from you. You put up a straw figure in the field as a scarecrow to frighten the birds away and prevent them from eating the seed you have just planted; for a few days the birds will be afraid of it; but when they see that it cannot move from the place in which you have put it, they lose all fear, and when they have eaten their fill, they actually come to roost on the straw figure itself. No, your cursing will do your children no good; it will only make them more obstinate, disobedient and wicked; for they will think to themselves: if my parents are so godless as to curse and swear in that way, I am not bound to have any respect for them. The only fruit of your vile language will be the scandal you give them; because they will learn from your example to curse and swear as wickedly as yourself. Again, if your children or domestics excite you to anger and offend God by their misconduct, you should be all the more careful to abstain from cursing them. And why? Because they are then more apt to feel the effect of your curse, and to be punished by God, who, as we have seen in the last sermon, very often hears and gives effect to the maledictions of parents against their children. Damp wood, when laid on the fire, takes a long time to burn; but dry wood flames up at once. So it is with human beings; wicked children already deserve to be punished by God; if then their parents curse them, there is nothing more wanted to have the punishment

inflicted. There are certainly means enough to correct the faults of your children and servants in a Christian manner. Why should you have recourse to such a detestable means as that, which only makes them worse? Your excuse does not exculpate you in the least.

In most cases, say others, I curse and swear through inadvertence and habit, because I have been so long accustomed to imitate the language of other men; or else the curses escape me when I am in a passion, and I am sorry afterwards for it. Now I do not wish to make your guilt worse than it is in reality; I know that when a person, after having long been accustomed to use such wicked language, is sorry for having acquired such a bad habit, and (pay attention now to what I am saying!) does all in his power to correct and overcome it, but, in spite of all his efforts, breaks out into a curse now and then through force of habit and without adverting to what he is doing, when something suddenly occurs to vex him; I acknowledge, I say, that in such a case he could be excused from sin through a want of free will, according to the words of Ecclesiasticus: "There is one that slippeth with the tongue, but not from his heart;" or else, at the farthest, he is guilty of a venial sin. But to curse through habit without making serious efforts to amend, and to continue in that habit makes, I say with St. Thomas, the sin greater, more deserving of punishment, and less to be excused. A thief is convicted and sentenced to the gallows; hear how cleverly he excuses himself: Sir, he says to the judge, do not be so severe on me! Grant me my life this once! I acknowledge that I am guilty of the theft; but I committed it through sheer habit, for I have been accustomed to steal from my youth upwards. Oh, the judge would answer, that makes your case still worse; I would recommend you not to urge your excuse, lest, instead of being hanged, you may be broken alive on the wheel. The same principle may be applied to your long continued habit of cursing. If you were to utter an imprecation now and then, inadvertently, it would not be so bad; but when you bring forward the force of habit, as an excuse, you betray yourself and manifest your guilt to its full extent.

Third excuse: I curse through inadvertence

I curse, another says, but it is nearly always in the heat of passion. And are you blameless therefore? If you beat your wife and children savagely when you are in a passion, do you not sin seriously against Christian charity and justice? No

Fourth excuse: I curse through anger.

<sup>1</sup> Est qui labitur lingua, sed non ex animo.—Ecl. xix. 16.

doubt, it may be that, as theologians teach, a sudden fit of anger surprises the reason and lessens the amount of advertence, and consequently the guilt of the sin. Nay, sometimes the anger is so violent that in the first moment of its fury it interferes with the freedom of the will, and therefore no sin is committed. But when the anger and the cursing it gives rise to are habitual, you will never persuade a sensible man that you do not advert to what you say. You are bound to control your anger. "Be ye angry and sin not!"<sup>1</sup> is the command that God gives us by the Psalmist David; be angry if the occasion requires; but do not sin in your anger.

Fifth ex-  
cuse: I am  
sorry for it  
afterwards.

But no sooner has the curse escaped my lips, than I am sorry for it at once. That is quite right; still you have wished evil to your neighbor. I am sorry from my heart for all the sins I have committed; but unfortunately they have been committed all the same. Certainly, by a supernatural sorrow and repentance I can wash out my guilt and obtain pardon of my sins in the sight of the good and merciful God; yet I never can get rid of the fact that I have committed them. The same sorrow is to be found, with regard to any other vice, in all those who still have a conscience and who wish to save their souls; when their anger is over, their passion cooled down, their desire for revenge satisfied, and their wicked passions gratified, then they are sorry for what they have done; yet there is no doubt that they have committed sin by yielding to their evil inclinations. You have killed a man, and you are very sorry for what you have done, when you see his dead body lying at your feet; are you therefore not guilty of murder? You roll a huge stone from the top of a mountain, and when it is in full career downwards, you repent of what you have done; can you stop the course of the stone by calling out to it? By no means. In the same way, as theologians teach, the sorrow felt afterwards by those who curse others, especially their own children or dear friends, proves that they know now how wickedly they have acted; but it is not always a sign that they had not the same knowledge when they were actually cursing in their anger, or that they did not really mean what they said. Therefore, Christians, do not seek to excuse yourselves, or to palliate that abominable habit by such frivolous pretexts! You should rather devote all your efforts to using the proper means to get rid of that habit, and to banish it out of every Christian community. Without discussing the matter any fur-

<sup>1</sup> Irascimini, et nolite peccare.—Ps. iv. 5.

ther, it is clear that cursing cannot be excused from sin, that the habit of it must be amended, and that there is an obligation to that effect under pain of sin. But how am I to do that? some will say; I have become so accustomed to cursing, that I cannot give it up now. Still you can do it, if you go the right way to work, as we shall see in the

### Second Part.

I must acknowledge that it is a very difficult thing to give up at once a bad habit that one has been accustomed to for a long time; for it becomes a second nature and offers a kind of violence to the reason and the will. St. Augustine, who speaks from experience, calls it another nature, that has been, as it were, welded and riveted on to us.<sup>1</sup> The Holy Ghost, in the Sacred Scripture, seems to consider it a most wonderful thing for a sinner to give up the evil to which he has been long accustomed. "If the Ethiopian can change his skin, or the leopard his spots, you also may do well when you have learned evil."<sup>2</sup> This is the worst punishment that God inflicts on the hardened sinner, namely, to allow him to become so obdurate, that he despairs of being able to amend. And that punishment is inflicted especially on those who are given to cursing; "for the spirit of wisdom is benevolent, and will not acquit the evil speaker of his lips;"<sup>3</sup> as if to say: the Holy Spirit of God is a spirit of goodness and mercy, and for that very reason, He will not save the man who is given to cursing from the evil habit he has learned in his youth and continued in his old age, but will allow him to carry it down to the grave without repenting of it, so that he goes to hell, where he can curse for all eternity with the other reprobates. "He loved cursing and it shall come unto him."<sup>4</sup>

It is very difficult to give up the habit of cursing.

I call as witnesses of the truth of this you who are given to this wicked habit. Have you found any improvement in yourselves in this respect for years past? Must you not acknowledge the truth of what St. Augustine says, "you did it yesterday, you will do it to-day."<sup>5</sup> "For the last two, four, six, ten years, or longer, you have been in the habit of cursing, and you are as bad this year as ever you were. You have confessed it hun-

As experience teaches.

<sup>1</sup> Secundam et quasi affabricatam naturam.

<sup>2</sup> Si mutare potest Æthiops pellem suam, aut pardus varietates suas; et vos poteritis benefacere, cum didiceritis malum.—Jer. xliii. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Benignus est enim spiritus sapientiæ, et non liberabit maledicum a labiis suis.—Wis. i. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Dillexit maledictionem, et venit ei.—Ps. cviii. 18.

<sup>5</sup> Fecisti heri; facturus es hodie.

dreds of times, but there is no sign of improvement yet; you will confess it again, and I am afraid you will be no better. Each time, you will say, I have cursed, I am sorry for it; I will never do it again; but all to no purpose. He who has learned French, and no other language, in his youth, will afterwards have great difficulty to speak German, no matter what efforts he makes, so as to conceal all traces of a French accent. He who has acquired the habit of cursing in his youth, although he may now and then praise and bless God, will hardly be able to prevent himself from cursing, when anything occurs to annoy him. Therefore you, children, should be very careful not to fall into this habit, for if you do, it will stick to you for a long time.

Still it is possible, if one makes use of the proper means.

But what am I saying now? I wished to persuade you to overcome this habit, and, instead of doing that, I seem rather to agree with one of the excuses you brought forward, namely, that you cannot correct it. My dear Christians, that is not my meaning. No matter how difficult it is to give up a bad habit of long standing, yet it is not impossible; otherwise you would not commit sin by continuing to curse, because God does not require impossibilities from us. It is almost an impossibility, naturally speaking, to stop a runaway horse, when he is in full gallop; but if you can put a strong bridle on him, or throw something over his eyes, you will manage it easily enough. In the same way it is next to impossible to restrain from cursing a tongue that has been habituated to it, as long as you allow that tongue to talk freely what it has learned. You must bridle that slippery member; you must do violence to it, and use the proper means, and you will, with God's help, get the better of your bad habit.

First means: to consider what one loses by cursing.

If your sovereign, through zeal for the glory of God, and to put an end to cursing amongst his subjects, were to make a law that every one who curses must put a ducat in the poor-box each time; and if you knew at the same time that there were spies scattered over the country to see how the law was observed, and that every time you violated it, you would be fined a ducat, would it be impossible for you then to give up the habit of cursing? Not at all; and indeed a fine of a penny would be enough to induce you to conquer it immediately. I have not the least doubt that you would soon become exceedingly careful, that you would make a firm resolution every morning not to give way to cursing during the day, at least in presence of

others, and that you would bite your tongue off almost, rather than allow it to indulge in language that would cost you so dearly. And why can you not make just as firm a resolution now? Ah, great God, Thou hast published Thy command to all the world by Thy Apostle St. Paul: "Bless, and curse not."<sup>1</sup> And what punishment hast Thou threatened to inflict on those who violate it? Perhaps a fine of a ducat? Ah, listen to the words of the Apostle: "railers shall not possess the kingdom of God;"<sup>2</sup> they will be condemned to hell for all eternity. And still it appears to us almost an impossibility to conquer the habit of cursing! O you, who are addicted to this evil habit, what are you thinking of? The dread of being fined by an earthly superior, whose laws you may often transgress without his knowing anything of it, is enough to put you on your guard, to restrain your tongue, and to cure your wicked propensity; but the fear of offending God, from whom you can conceal nothing, who is present everywhere, who knows all your thoughts, words, and actions, and who threatens you with the loss of Heaven and the eternal pains of hell if you disobey Him; that fear, I say, is not able to make you give up the habit of cursing! But you do not think of such things, and therefore you continue in your wicked ways, without any attempt to amend. The first means then of correcting the habit of cursing is to remember the severe punishment it entails.

Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Saviour, seems to have given us other means also, when he cured the dumb man, as we read in the Gospel of St. Mark: "Taking him from the multitude apart," says the Evangelist, "and looking up to Heaven, he groaned, and said to him: Ephphetha, which is: be thou opened; and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke right."<sup>3</sup> Mark these words, you who are given to cursing; Christ looked up to Heaven, and sighed to His heavenly Father. If you are in earnest in your efforts to curb your wicked tongues, and to speak right in future, lift up your eyes to Heaven, and let your humble sighs and prayers ascend to the throne of God; for it is from Him that you must seek the help that you would in vain look for elsewhere. This is the advice that St. Augustine gives you: "If no man can tame the tongue; then we must have recourse to

Second means: humble prayer to God.

<sup>1</sup> Benedicite, et nolite maledicere.—Rom. xii. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Neque maledici regnum Dei possidebunt.—1. Cor. vi. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Apprehendens eum de turba seorsum, et suscipiens in cœlum ingemuit, et ait illi: Ephphetha, quod est adaperire; et solutum est vinculum linguæ ejus, et loquebatur recte.—Mark vii. 33—35.

God, who can tame it.”<sup>1</sup> If, according to St. James, no man on earth can keep his tongue in order, what are we to do? Must he who is given to blasphemy, to cursing, to detraction, despair of amendment? By no means; for, if there is no one on earth able to tame the tongue, there is One in Heaven who can do it; to Him we must fly for help, and beg of Him to keep our tongues in check. What means did the Apostles and disciples of Christ employ in order to receive the Holy Ghost and with Him the courage to sound the praises of God, although before they were afraid to open their mouths, and had on one occasion so far yielded to the spirit of cursing, that they asked Our Lord if they might not call down fire from Heaven on the city that had refused to receive them. “Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from Heaven and consume them?”<sup>2</sup> Whereupon Our Lord reproved them: “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.”<sup>3</sup> On a former occasion Peter had cursed and sworn that he knew not the man; now he can do nothing but praise and bless God, and publish His wonderful works, so that the people cried out in astonishment: “we have heard them speak in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.”<sup>4</sup> How did such a wonderful change come over the Apostles, as far as their tongues were concerned? It was the effect of their united and constant prayer; for they remained together in Jerusalem, praying to God and expecting strength from on high; all these were persevering with one mind in prayer.<sup>5</sup> Do I wish then, instead of a cursing tongue, to have one inflamed with the Holy Spirit of God? Then I must resolve every morning to avoid cursing during the day; and since I know how weak I am and how powerless to amend my bad habit, I must with childlike confidence beg of God to help me and to free me from that evil habit; and at the same time I will ask my guardian angel to remind me of my resolution whenever a sudden fit of passion is likely to provoke me to act against it.

Third means: to impose a penance on one's self.

Besides praying, I must also endeavor to co-operate actively with the grace of God. Here again we can learn from what Our

<sup>1</sup> Si linguam nullus hominum domare potest, ad Deum confugiendum est, qui domet linguam nostram.—S. Aug. Serm. 8. de verb. Dom.

<sup>2</sup> Domine, vis dicimus ut ignis descendat de celo, et consumat illos?—Luke ix. 54.

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

<sup>4</sup> Audivimus eos loquentes nostris linguis magnalia Dei.—Acts ii 11.

<sup>5</sup> Hi omnes erant perseverantes unanimitur in oratione.—Ibid. i. 14.

Lord did, when He cured the dumb man; “He put his fingers into his ears, and spitting, He touched his tongue, and said to him, ephphetha, which is, be thou opened.”<sup>1</sup> Oh, if all who are addicted to this evil habit would frequently command their tongues sternly and sharply, and enforce their command by a penance which they have asked their confessor to impose on them to that end; for instance, if they said: I command you to abstain from cursing, or otherwise not to touch a drop of wine the whole day, or not to eat meat, or to fast in the evening, or to give a certain alms to the poor, or to say a rosary, and so on; I am certain that the bad habit would soon be eradicated, and the tongue would be kept under due restraint. The threat of the rod, and the recollection of the pain it causes, are enough to make the most disobedient child submissive; the whip, well applied once or twice, can tame the most fiery horse; much more then will a severe, self-imposed penance help a reasoning being to abstain from evil. Only try it; it will certainly help, and when the good God sees that you are really in earnest in your efforts to amend, He will not refuse to help you with still more powerful graces.

Pennequin, in his treatise on Divine love, tells us of a soldier who was wont to curse most fearfully whenever he got into a passion. His confessor imposed on him as a penance that, as often as he gave way to this habit, he should prostrate himself and make the sign of the Cross with his tongue on the ground. The soldier performed his penance very exactly, and thereby saved, not only the life of his soul, but also that of his body. For, on one occasion, he got into a quarrel with some of his companions, and, as usual in his excitement, he mentioned the name of God blasphemously; remembering, however, the penance imposed on him, he at once threw himself on the ground and made the sign of the Cross; while he was thus occupied a bullet, just shot from a musket, passed over him so close as to tear the coat from his back, but without inflicting the least injury to his person. Recognizing in this an evident interposition of divine Providence in his favor, and a fruit of his obedience in performing his penance, he completely gave up the habit of cursing.

O Christians, let us imitate this soldier, if we are conscious of being addicted to cursing, or to any other sins of the tongue, and punish ourselves for the faults we commit by some self-imposed penance! In that way we shall show that we are in ear-

Shown by  
an example.

Conclusion  
and exhortation  
to have recourse to  
similar  
penances.

<sup>1</sup> *Misit digitos suos in auriculas ejus et exspuens, tetigit linguam ejus, et ait illi: Ephphetha, quod est: adaperire.*—Mark. vii. 33, 34.

nest about amending our lives, and that we are not like those who accuse themselves hundreds of times in confession of having sworn, and yet show not the least sign of improvement. What kind of sorrow they can have, and, therefore, what good absolution does them, you can decide for yourselves. But is it likely that a thief is forgiven his sins, if he continues to steal every day? Perhaps you may find those penances too severe? Yet can we do any less? should we not by right do a great deal more, when there is question of the glory of God, the salvation of our souls, the gaining Heaven, and the escaping hell? We may be long accustomed to a certain kind of food or drink, but if we find that it is dangerous to our health, we give it up at once. The man who has the habit of idling his time, or gambling, renounces it as soon as he sees that his income begins to suffer by it. Can we not then make a little effort for God's sake, and for the salvation of our immortal souls? Or, rather than do violence to our tongues here on earth, do we prefer to have to bite them in pieces in hell, through rage and despair? as St. John says in the Apocalypse: "And they gnawed their tongues for pain, and they blasphemed the God of Heaven, because of their pains and wounds."<sup>1</sup> For the words of St. Paul remain true: "Railers shall not possess the kingdom of God."

Resolution  
to amend.

Ah, may God preserve us from the folly and madness of losing our souls for the sake of cursing and indulging in a vice that can bring us neither profit nor pleasure! Let us all now make up our minds, once for all, to give up that hellish language! This very day our amendment shall begin, and we shall continue it to-morrow and every day of our lives. Do Thou, O Holy Ghost, who didst inspire the Apostles of Jesus Christ with what they had to say, and didst make their tongues able to speak nothing but the praises of God; do Thou strengthen, with Thy holy fire, and with Thy powerful grace, this resolution! Tame and purify our vicious tongues, that the language of hell may never be heard among Christians, and that all our thoughts, words and actions, may begin and end in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Et commanducaverunt linguas suas præ dolore, et blasphemaverunt Deum coeli præ doloribus et vulneribus suis.—Apoc. xvi. 10, 11.

# ON OTHER SINS OF THE TONGUE.

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## SEVENTY-FIRST SERMON.

### ON THE IMPURE TONGUE.

#### Subject.

Of all wicked tongues, there is none which sows more cockle, to the destruction of souls, than the impure, immodest tongue. Therefore every one who wishes to avoid being led into the vice of impurity should be especially on his guard against those enemies of his soul who speak impurely.—*Preached on the fifth Sunday after Epiphany.*

#### Text.

*Venit inimicus ejus, et superseminavit zizania in medio tritici.*—Matth. xiii. 25.

“His enemy came and oversowed cockle among the wheat.”

#### Introduction.

Who ever heard before of weeds being sown on cultivated ground? You husbandmen, what do you say to it? Did you ever try it? No, you answer; it is not necessary to sow weeds; they grow of themselves, and far quicker than we wish. It must have been a wicked and envious man, who did a thing like that. What we read in the parable of to-day's gospel, my dear brethren, happens only too often amongst us, to the great injury of souls. We know and experience what a number of weeds grow up in us without any labor on our part; I mean the many temptations and solicitations to evil that come from our own wicked propensities and inclinations, and that strive to cause the eternal ruin of our souls, especially in the matter of impurity; and yet there are wicked, malicious men, who deliberately sow cockle, for the still greater ruin of souls, by placing impure objects before

the eyes of others, by betraying them into sin through bad example and by impure conversation; so that they who wish to preserve chaste hearts, cannot be sufficiently on their guard. Against these latter enemies of souls, as they are the most shameless foes of holy purity, I mean to speak in this sermon.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*Of all wicked tongues, there is none which sows more cockle to the destruction of souls, than the impure, immodest tongue. Therefore every one who wishes to avoid being led into the vice of impurity must be especially on his guard against those enemies of his soul who speak impurely.*

Incarnate Son of God, we beg of Thee, through Thy Virgin Mother Mary and Thy angels, who continually praise Thee, stop all chaste ears, that they may never hear any unchaste language, and cleanse our tongues, that they may be used only to praise Thee.

No wicked tongue leads to greater sin than the impure tongue.

The ranker a weed is, and the deeper it takes root, the more does it spread itself over the ground, and therefore the greater, too, is the mischief done by sowing a weed of that kind in cultivated ground. In the same way, the more wicked a vice is, the deeper and quicker it takes root in the soul, and the more difficult it is to eradicate it afterwards; so also the greater the injury done to the soul by him who deliberately betrays another into a vice of that kind, or brings him into the occasion of it. You, who are given to cursing, which is, alas! so common, and who daily use that hellish language towards each other, what harm you do souls, and what maledictions you bring down on yourselves! Yet the chief harm is done to your own souls, which you ruin eternally; you cannot injure the innocent by all your curses and imprecations, unless God sometimes, by allowing your curses to take effect, sends them a punishment they have otherwise merited; and that He is especially wont to do, when parents curse their children, as I have elsewhere explained at length, when speaking of that wicked language. You perjurers, who so often give yourselves up to the devil by swearing false oaths, whom do you injure but yourselves? You may now and then cause your neighbor to suffer temporal loss; but you cannot hurt his soul. Uncharitable and slanderous tongues, that are given to speak of the affairs of others, and to criticise their faults, you are truly wicked and dangerous tongues; yet you attack only the good name and reputation of others; you

cannot, with all your uncharitable talk, so injure them, as to make them worse in the sight of God than they are. Tale-bearing tongues, who secretly carry stories from one to another, relating to one what another has said or done against him; how often do you not cause enmity and strife between husband and wife, brothers and sisters, parents and children, friends and relatives! Yet you cannot directly hurt their souls. Blasphemous tongues, I shudder when I think of you! You vent your anger against God and His saints, when you speak slightly and disrespectfully of them; yet the only effect your wicked language has on the minds of others is to fill them with fear and dread, lest a thunder-bolt should fall from Heaven and strike you dead on the spot. Impure tongue, you are almost the only one among all vicious tongues, that is not satisfied with destroying your own land, with bringing eternal damnation on your own soul, but you must also sow in the ears and hearts of those who listen to you the cockle, which it may take them a lifetime to eradicate; for by your impure discourses you lead many innocent souls into the greatest and most dangerous vices.

And you lead them, in fact, into that abominable vice which destroys the image of God; into that vice which, if it once becomes habitual, takes away the human heart from God, whom it should love above all things, and degrades it to the level of the unreasoning beast; that vice which so blinds the understanding, and hardens the will in sin, that it requires miracles and prodigies of grace, so to speak, to bring such a sinner to true repentance and amendment; that vice which alone opens out the broad way that leads to the commission of all kinds of sin without fear or shame, and multiplies them without number, so as to compass its ends; that vice which excites the just anger of God more than any other, so that it has often drawn down severe punishments on the world; that vice to which we, poor mortals, are already strongly inclined, so that the most of those who are lost, are lost on account of it, as St. Remigius does not hesitate to assert: "With the exception of little children, few are saved, on account of the vice of impurity."<sup>1</sup> See now into what an injurious, dangerous, and abominable vice you lead innocent souls by the filth that you mix up in your conversation.

The Holy Ghost, by the Prophet David, compares such tongues to open sepulchres: "Their throat is an open sepulchre;"<sup>2</sup>

For it leads to the vice of impurity.

Therefore it is compared to a foul sepulchre.

<sup>1</sup> Exceptis parvulis, propter carnis vitium pauci salvantur.

<sup>2</sup> Sepulchrum patens est guttur eorum.—Ps. v. 11.

and immediately after He calls on the justice of God to take vengeance on them: "Judge them O God."<sup>1</sup> Your throats are open graves, from which such a pestilential effluvia comes forth, that it must infect the souls of all present. For the heart is so closely connected with the sense of hearing, that what enters in at the ears, at once knocks at the door of the heart, while our imagination and understanding are like a mirror that represents every object placed before it; and, therefore, all the filth that impure tongues pour into the ears is represented in the hearts and imaginations of the hearers, and if these latter think of it with deliberate pleasure, they commit a mortal sin. Nothing is so dangerous and so liable to lead to sin, says St. Paul, as wicked conversation: "Be not seduced; evil communications corrupt good manners."<sup>2</sup> They are like a consuming canker, as he writes to his disciple Timothy: "Shun profane and vain babblings; for they grow much towards ungodliness; and their speech spreadeth like a canker;"<sup>3</sup> that is, they creep through the ears into the heart, and keep gnawing at it until they get it to consent to a sinful pleasure. All wicked conversation, and even unspiritual and vain talk has that effect. What mischief then must not be caused by impure tongues in the human heart, which is already of itself prone to sensual indulgence? Hence theologians agree generally in saying that it is hardly possible for any one to talk impurely in company without committing a mortal sin. "There is no one who doubts of this;" adds St. Antoninus;<sup>4</sup> either on account of the scandal given by such discourses, especially when the hearers are still innocent, or on account of the danger of consenting to a bad thought about the impure subject that is spoken of. And what is said of impure conversation is also to be understood of impure songs, which are all the more dangerous than mere conversation, as they are more apt to fill the heart with their poison, to inflame the imagination, and to fix the subject more strongly in the hearer's memory.

There are many wicked people who lead souls astray by impure songs and conversations.

And yet, alas, how common such songs and such conversation are in the world nowadays! In society, in drinking-houses, in public promenades and gardens, in workshops and dancing-houses, in the midst of all kinds of amusements, in the public

<sup>1</sup> *Judica illos Deus.*—Ps. v. 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Nolite seduci, corrumpunt mores bones colloquia mala.*—I. Cor. xv. 33.

<sup>3</sup> *Profana autem et vaniloquia devita; multum enim proficiunt ad impletatem, et sermorum ut cancer serpit.*—II. Tim. ii. 16, 17.

<sup>4</sup> *De hoc nulli dubium est.*

streets, nay, even in churches and places consecrated to God, wherever any one is to be found who indulges in an impure passion, there that disgusting language may be heard, mixed up even in what would otherwise be a becoming conversation, and sustained by all sorts of veiled allusions and similes. It seems that people imagine they can have no pleasure, nor amusement, and cannot carry on an entertaining conversation, without bringing in those filthy topics. Like unclean swine, they delight in wallowing in the mud; they are not satisfied, like other animals, with merely touching it with the soles of their feet; they must roll their whole bodies in it. There are even parents to be found, says St. John Chrysostom, who not only use such filthy language in presence of their innocent children, but actually encourage them to sing unchaste songs; whereby the children lose all sense of modesty, even before they understand the meaning of the words they use, and when they grow up they listen without shame to things that would otherwise have brought a blush to their cheeks.

What a disgrace that is! continues St. Chrysostom; we have received our tongues for the sole purpose that we may use them as instruments to praise God, to thank Him, to adore Him, and to publish His praises; yet we misuse those noble members, that have been created for such a noble end, to turn souls away from God, and to lead them into sin by impure conversation. And our tongues are so often touched and moistened with the sacred, virginal, and spotless flesh and blood of Jesus Christ! "Is it right, brethren," says St. Augustine, "that the mouth of a Christian, into which the body of Christ enters, should give utterance to a lewd song containing a hellish poison?"<sup>1</sup> Therefore St. Paul writes to the Ephesians that we must not even name impurity; "but fornication and all uncleanness, let it not so much as be named among you, as becometh saints,"<sup>2</sup> such as all Christians should be. Even if we were not raised to such a high dignity, if we were not Christians, we should still be ashamed, as reasoning beings, to defile our tongues with such filth. What a disgrace to us! we abstain as far as possible from coughing and spitting in decent company, but we do not hesitate to bespatter those who are listening to us with the mire of our impure tongues.

They are  
unbecoming  
a decent  
man, much  
more a  
Christian.

<sup>1</sup> Videte fratres si iustum est ut ex ore Christianorum, ubi Corpus Christi ingreditur, inxuriosum canticum, quasi venenum diaboli, proferatur.

<sup>2</sup> Fornicatio autem, et omnis immunditia, nec nominetur in vobis, sicut decet sanctos.—Ephes. v. 3.

Many innocent people are thereby perverted; shown by an example.

I turn away from those foul-mouthed people to express my heartfelt compassion for you, innocent souls. I pity you in truth, since you are daily led astray by unchaste language and songs! How many would still have preserved their innocence and purity, if they had not chanced to hear a wicked word from some partisan of the devil! The devil may plot the ruin of a soul for years, and try all kinds of temptations and suggestions in order to lead it into sin, all to no purpose; but a foul-mouthed man, by one impure song, may succeed in doing in a few moments what the devil could not do after years of labor. Hear what a servant of God once beheld while he was at prayer: two young boys were playing together in a room, and as they were still innocent, they did nothing immodest or unbecoming. The holy man saw countless demons going about, each with a pair of bellows, blowing into the ears of the boys; without doubt that represented the evil suggestions that come from those wicked spirits. After a little while another boy came into the room, and at once all the devils vanished, so that not one of them was to be seen. Certainly, thought the holy man, that must be a saintly youth, whose presence can thus put the demons to flight. But he was grievously mistaken; for God revealed to him that the devils went away, because they knew that the third boy who had entered the room would do more harm by his evil talk, than they could with all their suggestions. And such was really the case; for after a little while the newcomer began, according to his custom, to speak of impure things, at which the two others laughed; and before long they had learned how to desire and to do what they knew nothing of before, and would never have thought of otherwise.

Many are lost thereby; shown by an example.

May God grant, my dear brethren, that none of you here present may have to acknowledge the truth of this from your own experience; that none of you may be still carrying about the seeds of evil which have been sown in your souls by the wicked discourses of your companions! If we could go through the regions of eternal torments, and ask each of the damned what was the cause of his ruin, how many there are who would cry out with fearful imprecations: Accursed be the company that destroyed my innocence in my youth! Accursed be the language I heard from such and such a person, by which I learned evil of which I knew nothing before! You are the cause of the impure life I led, and of the eternal damnation it brought on me! Such would be the cry of that miserable young man of whom Father

Ambrose Cataneus writes; he was brought up in innocence, piety, and the fear of the Lord, but he happened to fall in with wicked companions, who sang impure songs and talked of all sorts of filthy topics in his presence. The poor young man's imagination was excited by what he heard; he could not sleep during the night, so busy was he indulging in wicked thoughts with deliberate pleasure (woe to his poor soul! for even then he was on the road to perdition). He fell asleep at last, but during his sleep he burst a bloodvessel in his chest, and was smothered by the blood that streamed from it. His parents found him lying dead in bed the next morning, and knew not where to go for consolation, unless to his confessor. Be comforted, said the latter to them, you have an angel in Heaven: I know that his is a most innocent soul, and that it cannot now be anywhere but with its Maker in Heaven. But alas, what a grievous mistake the confessor made! As he was preparing to say Mass for the young man's soul, he saw that soul bound with chains, surrounded by fire, and accompanied by two demons, who kept continually blowing into his ears through fiery trumpets, as a punishment for the pleasure he had wilfully indulged in when listening to that impure conversation, and thinking about it afterwards.

My dear brethren, if that hitherto innocent dove was thus thrust down to hell by those wicked birds of prey, who betrayed him into sin by their impure tongues, and hurled him into the jaws of the hellish wolf, what will become of those ruthless murderers of souls? If the hitherto innocent lamb is in eternal flames, do you think it likely that the ravening wolves will enjoy eternal rest? O wicked tongues, what a fearful account you will have to render, not only for yourselves and for the sins you commit by impure conversations, but also for the souls that you have betrayed into sin! Striking was the example given by Our Lord in the public street. He was surrounded by a great crowd of people, when He saw a little child passing by; some say it was St. Ignatius the Martyr, others that it was St. Martial. Christ called the child, took him by the hand, and, as St. Matthew says, "set him in the midst of them."<sup>1</sup> The people were surprised, and expecting to hear something wonderful from Him, they were all attention. Then Our Lord, pointing to the child, said in earnest tones: "He that shall scandalize one of those little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a mill-stone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the

Christ has threatened eternal woe to such tongues.

<sup>1</sup> Statuit eum in medio eorum.—Matth. xviii. 2.

depth of the sea.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, “Woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh!”<sup>2</sup> Woe, then, to you, unchaste tongues, that scandalize so many innocent souls!

Even confessors must be careful when interrogating young people.

What care even confessors are obliged to use, when interrogating young people! For if the latter accuse themselves of some sin against holy purity, the confessor must rigorously abstain from asking any questions that would be likely to excite their curiosity; so that it is far better that the material integrity of the confession should suffer through inculpable ignorance, than that young people should learn anything that might be dangerous to them. There are even so-called tables of sins in some prayer-books, that should not be placed in the hands of young and innocent people, even when they are preparing for a general confession. If their confessions are imperfect, the confessor will know how to supply what is wanting.

Even grown up people should accuse themselves of sins of impurity in modest language.

Even grown up people, who have frequently sinned against purity, and who have therefore little to learn in the way of vice, should, as spiritual writers teach, declare in very modest words, as far as they can, the nature and number of their sins, and should avoid all coarseness and indelicacy, both on account of the reverence due to the Sacrament, and that they may avoid all danger of renewing their consent to an impure pleasure. Nay, when penitents who have long lived in impurity and, having made a complete and good confession, have sincerely repented, go again to confession, it is advisable for them never again to examine their consciences on their past lives, even if they wish to make a general confession, but to let the past be buried in oblivion; or, if they wish to mention their past sins again (as is often laudably done by those who are accustomed to avoid mortal sin and who wish to excite themselves to contrition), they should do so in a general way only, saying, for instance, I accuse myself of the sins of impurity I committed in my past life.

Teachers and preachers must be very cautious in speaking of this subject.

Teachers and instructors of youth, you too must be very cautious in this respect! If you sometimes, in the books you have to explain to your pupils, come across a word that savors of impurity, say nothing about it; pass it over as quickly as possible, that you may not scandalize innocent ears and hearts! Preachers of the word of God, it is your bounden duty to chastise all vices,

<sup>1</sup> Qui autem scandalizaverit unum de pusillis istis, qui in me credunt, expedit ei, ut suspendatur mola asinaria in collo ejus, et demergatur in profundum maris.—Matth. xviii. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Væ homini illi, per quem scandalum venit.—Ibid. 7.

and to explain to your hearers the different ways in which sin may be committed, so that they may more easily avoid sin; but this one vice you must only speak of in a general way, and very cautiously. For my own part, my dear brethren, I must acknowledge that, before I began some time ago to speak of impurity, I debated with myself for a long time beforehand as to whether I should speak of it or not, and I frequently begged of my angel guardian to enable me to speak of such a dangerous subject in the most chaste manner possible, that I might not, as I told you before, wound innocent hearts by the very means I used to deter them and myself from this vice.

From this I argue as follows: if teachers, preachers, and confessors are obliged to be so careful and cautious in the fulfilment of their sacred duties, in which they seek nothing but the glory of God and the salvation of souls; what a fearful responsibility is incurred by those wicked people who wantonly speak of impure topics, and make them the subject of conversation? What an account will have to be rendered by parents who talk impurely in presence of their children, and by servants and all others who, in presence of their companions, or in any society, select unchaste subjects for conversation? Woe to that man, I say, whoever he is! If even in the sacred tribunal of Penance, in which we must confess our sins with contrite hearts, with a true detestation of our past offences, and with a sincere desire and resolution to amend our lives,—if it is so dangerous even there to speak plainly about sins of impurity, what great danger and wickedness must there not be in speaking of this foul vice in company, not with sorrow and repentance, but with laughter and pleasure; not with a purpose of amendment, but with boasting words; not with the intention of being converted to God, but for the sake of amusing one's self and others; not with modest words, but in an immodest and shameless manner? "Woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh!"

In truth, if any one is marked for eternal damnation, it is the man who is given to impure conversation. For the divine Judge will only have to condemn him, like the faithless servant in the Gospel, out of his own mouth: "Out of thy own mouth I judge thee, thou wicked servant,"<sup>1</sup> and sentence thee to the punishment thou hast deserved. It is a mark of reprobation, as the holy Fathers unanimously teach, for one to have the habit of returning easily to his former wickedness, and after confession

From this we may see the malice of those who sing unchaste songs and talk impurely in company.

They bear about them a sure sign of reprobation.

<sup>1</sup> De oro tuo te judico, serve nequam.—Luke xix. 22.

to fall again into the same grievous sins. This mark is certainly to be seen in him who is in the habit of speaking impurely, because he always falls back into sin, and bespatters every one he associates with, with his foul conversation. The second mark of reprobation is to love sin, and to find pleasure in it. There is many a one who sins through human frailty; but he knows that he has done wrong, and he is ashamed of and sorry for his grievous transgressions; but the unchaste man, who is given to immoral conversation, glories in his sins; he relates them for the purpose of making others laugh; he actually makes a boast of them; and therefore he has not sorrow, or detestation, or repentance, but affection and love for his sins. The third mark of reprobation is to act as an agent of the devil by leading souls astray, and bringing eternal ruin on the lambs of the fold of Jesus Christ. We have already seen that the impure-tongued man, by his filthy songs and discourses, leads many an innocent soul into sin, takes it away from God, and delivers it up to the devil; so that he will have to pay soul for soul. The fourth sign of reprobation is the habit of impurity. Now it is not a rash judgment to look upon him who is always speaking of impure things as addicted to that vice; for his heart and mind must be a cesspool of filth, since his mouth gives forth the effluvium of unchaste conversation. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh;"<sup>1</sup> and therefore St. Jerome says: "He is not far from committing the act, who delights to speak of it."<sup>2</sup> The fifth sign of reprobation is the profanation of the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. But what greater indignity can be offered to It, than to allow the tongue on which It is so often placed to wallow in the filth of impure talk! How many ceremonies, prayers, blessings, and anointings the bishop uses in consecrating the fingers of the priest's hand, which are to hold the virginal body of Jesus Christ! But our tongues, when the blessed salt is put on them in Baptism, are already consecrated by God Himself, as altars, patens, and chalices, to receive the sacred flesh and blood of the Son of God. Now, if a person were to take the chalice in which the blood of Jesus has been even once consecrated, and to fill it with filth, the very thought of such an enormity makes us shudder! What a fearful profanation must it not then be, to receive the bread of angels in a mouth or a tongue that is always reeking with

<sup>1</sup> Ex abundantia enim cordis os loquitur.—Matth. xii. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Non longe est a facto, qui delectatur in verbo.

impurity. Therefore he who is given to unchaste conversation has all the marks of reprobation. Woe then to that man!

But Father, they say, God forbid that we should have a bad intention, when we speak now and then in that way! Our only object is to amuse ourselves and others, and not at all to lead people into sin. Oh certainly, it is an amusement that the devil takes delight in! Your intention cannot excuse you in things that are of themselves scandalous and unlawful. But we are careful not to allow those who are still innocent to hear such conversation; when we speak in that way, we do it among ourselves, in the company of people who know as much about it as we do, so that there is no danger of giving scandal. What? No danger of giving scandal? Do you know what scandal-giving is? It means saying or doing, even with signs, anything that is of a nature capable of leading others into sin, even if it were only a sin of thought. Now, when you talk impurely and describe impure actions, how can they who are listening to you help seeing in their imaginations the abominations that form the subject of your songs or conversation? And in that way, how can they and you help having impure thoughts and desires? Is not that giving scandal? But you say that the people you talk to know as much about it as you do; if so, then you do not strive to kindle a fire where there was none before; but, at all events, you add more fuel to the fire that is already burning, so that it blazes up more fiercely and burns longer. Is not that giving scandal?

But, they say again, we do not speak in coarse terms, like drunken boors in an ale-house. We use polished language, and veil our meaning by allusions and similes, which the innocent do not understand. Truly, shameless as you are, you do not dare to vomit forth your obscenity in decent company without trying to hide its hideousness somewhat. And this is unfortunately a diabolical style of conversation that is much in vogue among ladies and gentlemen of good standing in society. But do you know what I think of it? Such artfully veiled allusions are much more dangerous, scandalous, and abominable than the coarse obscenity of the ignorant boor. And why? I have explained it before. A violent wind sometimes extinguishes a fire, while a gentle breeze fans it into a flame. In the same way, when coarse expressions are used in speaking of impure topics, the respectable man who hears them feels ashamed, and even if he has a secret pleasure in listening, he still tries to look

To no purpose do they excuse themselves by saying that they have not a bad intention.

Veiled allusions and metaphors are the most dangerous kind of impure conversation.

displeased, for the sake of outward decency; thus the other is reduced to silence, and the impure conversation comes to an end. But when similar talk is carried on by means of artful allusions and metaphors, then there is question of showing how clever one is; no one wishes to be looked on as stupid; all join in the laugh, even they who do not know what it is about; one allusion is brought forward after another, and the obscenity is protracted for hours. If an impure subject is spoken of in coarse and plain words, every one knows what is meant, without further study; but when the filth is covered by metaphorical expressions, one has to set his wits to work to find out the meaning of the speaker, and so all sorts of impure images are formed in the imagination, worse sometimes than the speaker intends; the fire of impurity burns fiercer in the heart, and the artful metaphor takes fast hold of the mind. Ah, my God, let me now cease speaking of that abominable conversation, that I may not degrade Thy sacred word! Those devil's preachers will receive, as Thou has threatened, the reward they deserve at the hands of their master!

Conclusion  
and exhortation to avoid wicked  
tongues.

Pious Christians, and especially you who are still innocent, if you wish to keep your purity untarnished, then fly, for God's sake, all company in which those wicked people appear, and all companions who say the least word that savors of impurity. If any one tries to lead you into sin by flatteries or caresses accompanied by impure songs or conversation, give him the same answer that St. Francis de Sales gave a shameless woman, who once assailed him in that way. And what was his answer? He spat in her face, and turned away from her. If you are not courageous enough, or zealous enough for the glory of God to do that, then at least show by your manner that you cannot bear to listen to unchaste conversation. The school-fellows of St. Bernardine used to relate of him that his horror of immodest talk was so well known, that if any of them were engaged in it and saw him approach, they would cry out, "be silent, Bernardine is coming."<sup>1</sup> Nor should you forget that God and your holy angel are present, and that they hear the shameful talk that is going on. The fear of God impressed St. Stanislaus with such a horror of impure conversation, that, whenever he heard anything in the least savoring of immodesty, he used to faint away, or to fall into an ecstasy; and this happened so often, that his father, who used to bring him into company in which

<sup>1</sup> Tacete ! tacete ! Bernardinus adest.

such sinful discourse was carried on for the sake of amusement, had to beg of his friends to abstain from it; otherwise, said he, my little Stanislaus will become rapt in ecstasy to such a degree, that he will fall unconscious to the ground. Christian parents, be careful, I implore you, in presence of your children! Do not, on any account, say the least thing that might tarnish their purity. Look well after your servants, and do not allow them to indulge in any conversation that might teach wickedness to your children. And if any of your domestics has an unchaste tongue, away with him or her at once out of your house! Often think what it is to have immortal souls entrusted to your care, that you may lead them to God; and what a fearful responsibility you incur, if by your negligence they are betrayed into the clutches of the devil. Let us all, my dear brethren, remember the exhortation of St. Paul already quoted: "Let all uncleanness be not so much as named among you, as becometh saints." Let us use our tongues for no other end but that for which our Creator gave them to us, that is, to praise and bless God; and let this be our only business on earth, as it will be our only occupation in Heaven. Amen.

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SEVENTY-SECOND SERMON.

ON THE LOQUACIOUS TONGUE.

Subject.

They who reveal what they should keep secret, do much mischief, and sin grievously against God and their neighbor.—*Preached on the eleventh Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

*Quanto autem eis præcipiebat, tanto magis plus prædicabant.*  
—Matth. vii. 36.

"But the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal did they publish it."

Introduction.

And so it is generally: we are always anxious to do what is forbidden, and desirous of what we cannot have. In to-day's gospel we read how Christ forbade the people to speak of the miracles they had seen Him work on the deaf and dumb; "but

the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal did they publish it." Yet in this case there was some excuse; everything that was said was for the greater glory of God, and was the occasion of the high esteem in which Our Lord was held by those who heard of the miracles He wrought. "And so much the more did they wonder, saying: He hath done all things well; He hath made both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak." By that prohibition of His, Our Lord wished to teach us not to seek the praise or esteem of men for our good actions, but to keep them secret as far as possible. But, my dear brethren, how many there are nowadays of whom one might say, with real disapprobation of their conduct, "the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal did they publish it," and that too, not to honor God, but to insult Him; not for the sake of any profit or advantage, but merely to do mischief! And who are they? We have already treated of those who are given to cursing, detraction, blasphemy, and other vices of the tongue. But there is another class of sins of the tongue that is generally barely alluded to in sermons, although it deserves to be treated of specially; and I have been long seeking an opportunity of speaking about it; I mean the sin committed by those who divulge secrets.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*Who these are, what mischief they cause, and therefore how grievously they sin against God and their neighbor; such is the whole subject of the present sermon.*

Christ Jesus, who didst enable the dumb to speak, teach us how, when, and of what to speak, and also how, when, and of what we are to keep silent. This grace we beg of Thee through the merits of Thy dearest Mother Mary, and our holy angels guardian.

The secrets  
of a man's  
heart  
belong to  
him alone.

Man has nothing in this world that belongs to him more completely than the secrets of his heart; for, after God, he is the absolute and uncontrolled master of them. He can say that his money belongs to him, yet not in such a way that it cannot be stolen or lost. His lands and gardens and meadows belong to him; but they may be laid waste in war, or destroyed in some way, or be taken from him by an adverse lawsuit. His house belongs to him; but it may be burnt to ashes. He possesses his good name; but that may be torn to pieces, and he is often compelled to bear patiently the calumnies and

backbiting of slanderous and uncharitable tongues. His bodily health, strength, and beauty, are subject to countless weaknesses and maladies; his memory and understanding become dulled by age; his sight, hearing, and other senses grow less keen as he advances in life. Any exterior actions that he performs alone and in secret he cannot keep from the knowledge of the angels and demons. The secrets of his heart are the only things that belong to him so completely, that no creature in Heaven, on earth, or under the earth can deprive him of them, or make them known against his will. No demon of hell, no angel of Heaven can find out our secret thoughts and knowledge, unless the Creator Himself reveals them, or unless they can be suspected from outward signs; such is the teaching of theologians.

This is the knowledge which God, who calls Himself "the searcher of hearts,"<sup>1</sup> has kept to Himself so strictly, that, with the exception of the few saints to whom He gave the grace of being able to read men's thoughts, He does not reveal the secrets of the human heart even to his dearest friends, or to the angels, the princes of Heaven. And this He does, in order to show us how strict is the obligation He places on every one of keeping the secrets entrusted to him, and that, if this obligation is violated, the sin committed is to be attributed to nothing but the wilful, mischievous loquacity of the person who violates it.

God has reserved to Himself the right to know them.

And, in fact, the well-being of the human race requires that a strong safeguard should be placed on the hearts and minds of men, and that there should be a strict obligation not to divulge the secrets entrusted to one's keeping. For if we could read each other's thoughts, or if we were allowed to speak freely of the secrets committed to us, what disorder there would be in the world! What would become of mutual confidence and fidelity? of honesty? of Christian charity? of justice? of friendship and intimacy? All these would disappear at once. Therefore the Almighty warns us by the wise Ecclesiasticus: "Open not thy heart to every man; lest he repay thee with an evil turn, and speak reproachfully to thee."<sup>2</sup> You must not speak to every one concerning what it would be lawful for you to speak of; how much more then are you not bound to

And that for the common good.

<sup>1</sup> *Scrutans corda.*—Ps. vii. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Non omni homini cor tuum manifestes, ne forte inferat tibi gratiam falsam, et convitietur tibi.*—Ecc. viii. 22.

keep a strict silence about what you are not allowed to disclose to others? Every one should keep those words of the Prophet Isaias constantly before his mind: "My secret to myself, my secret to myself."<sup>1</sup>

Therefore they who reveal secrets act wickedly, and the chief of them are tale-bearers.

Now, my dear brethren, what divine Providence guards so carefully, what the law of charity and justice and the common weal of the human race require to be kept strictly secret, is published by those talkative people, who do not know how to keep their tongues in check. And the chief of these are they who, when they are entrusted with a secret by a well-meaning friend, or are asked in confidence for advice, or have otherwise managed to find out their neighbor's secrets, go and tell what they have heard or learned to the other person concerned. So and so, they say, has said this of you; you think he is a good friend of yours, but you are mistaken; he told me in confidence how he means to act towards you. Or, I happened to find it out by chance; do not let on that you heard anything from me; I could not keep silent any longer about it, and felt obliged to tell you the fearful things that so and so says of you; see that you do not allow him to get the better of you, etc. In the same way they sometimes carry back to the former, what the latter has told them. Such tale-bearers and scandal-mongers have always an evil name in a community, for they sow discord between friends and neighbors, brothers and sisters, parents and children, husbands and wives; and they give rise to secret enmities, hatreds, and envy. People who were formerly on the best of terms refuse to speak to each other, and nourish desires of revenge against each other, without knowing what it was that broke off their friendship so suddenly.

They are the cause of many sins.

Great God, what a sin that is! or rather what a fountain of sins, that are committed when hatred is entertained and fraternal charity ignored! There are some birds of prey so rapacious, that they even steal away fire; when they see a fire burning, they swoop down upon it and carry off some of the blazing fuel; if it gets too hot for their talons, they let it drop, and thus often set fire to houses and farm-yards. Tale-bearers are like those birds; if they see but a single spark, that is, if they can find out anything that another has said or done against his neighbor, they run off at once to tell the latter all about it; for what they have heard seems to set their tongues on fire with impatience, so that they cannot keep quiet; thus they often

<sup>1</sup> Secretum meum mihi, secretum meum mihi.—Isai. xxiv. 16.

kindle a flame of enmity between two friends, that may not be extinguished as long as they live. Long ago the wise Ecclesiasticus spoke of the mischief done by those people: "A man that is wicked in the mouth of his flesh, will not leave off till he hath kindled a fire."<sup>1</sup> St. John Chrysostom compares them to the king's servants who heated the furnace at Babylon with brimstone and tow, and pitch, and dry sticks, so that "the flame mounted up above the furnace nine and forty cubits,"<sup>2</sup> as we read in the third chapter of the Book of Daniel.

There were people of that kind in the court of King Saul, who, instead of trying to mollify him and appease his anger when they saw that he was hostile to David, whom they knew to be innocent, enraged him still more by their calumnies, so that in his passion he tried to put an end to David altogether. That was what the latter complained of most bitterly after he had allowed Saul to depart from him in safety out of the cave. "My lord, the king," he cried to him, "why dost thou hear the words of men that say: David seeketh thy hurt?"<sup>3</sup> See how they have deceived you by their tale-bearing. Theodore Santabarenus, as Baronius tells us, was a tale-bearer too. Wishing to put the newly elected emperor Leo out of the way, he went to him, and warned him, as a true friend, to be on his guard against his father, and therefore never to go hunting without having a dagger concealed on his person, so as to be able to defend himself in case of attack. The young emperor, suspecting no treachery, followed the advice. Santabarenus then went to the old emperor Basil, and advised him to be on his guard against his son, who was plotting to take away his life, and as a proof of that he would find that Leo carried a dagger concealed about his person, when out hunting. The treacherous plan succeeded; the dagger was found and Basil became so enraged that he immediately commanded that his son's eyes should be put out, and that he should be strangled, a sentence that would have been carried into effect, had not Basil's councilors by earnest representations induced him to mitigate the severity of it.

Tale bearers are to be found in courts; shown by examples.

There are plenty of those evil-tongued people to be found everywhere nowadays, who by their tale-bearing cause disunion and enmity between the dearest friends, and the devil might

There are many such people nowadays.

<sup>1</sup> Homo nequam in ore carnis suæ non desinet, donec incendat ignem.—Ecl. xxiii. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Effundebatur flamma super fornacem cubitis quadraginta novem.—Dan. iii. 47.

<sup>3</sup> Domine mi rex. Quare audis verba hominum loquentium; David querit malum adversum te?—I. Kings xxiv. 9, 10.

well say to them what he once said to an old hag who created the bitterest hatred between a husband and wife that had formerly loved each other dearly: "you are far worse and more mischievous than I and all my companions in hell." What terrible curses are uttered in the Holy Scripture against those wicked people! "The whisperer and the double-tongued is accursed; for he hath troubled many that were at peace."<sup>1</sup> Not without reason, then, does St. Gregory count them amongst the children of Belial; for if it is true that, "blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God,"<sup>2</sup> there is no doubt that they who disturb peace are children of the devil. "Six things there are, which the Lord hateth," which He cannot bear to see in the world, as the Wise Man says in the Book of Proverbs, "and the seventh his soul detesteth,"<sup>3</sup> and utterly abhors. And what is that? "Him that soweth discord among brethren;"<sup>4</sup> that is, as commentators tell us, a tale-bearer who creates enmity and strife among others. Would it not be better for one of that character to be dumb, than to make such a wicked use of his tongue? Ah, my dear brethren, let us carefully avoid all tale-bearing! I have preferred to speak of this vice first, because it is so common, and this sermon will thus be of profit to a greater number. And you, servants, should apply to yourselves in a special manner what I have said, that you may not be too ready to carry stories out of the house in which you are employed; for thereby, besides the detraction you are guilty of, you cause hatred and dissension between neighbors and relatives. And all of us should be careful not to allow a spirit of mean adulation to induce us to run down our neighbor's character in the presence of those whom we know to be hostile to him.

There are others who reveal secrets that they are bound to keep by virtue of their office.

I address myself now to another class of loquacious people who talk too much; and they are those who reveal what they are especially bound to keep secret in virtue of their office, such as judges, lawyers, notaries, and other officials, who speak unnecessarily of what goes on in their consultations, or meetings; saying, for instance: so and so proposed this, and the proposition was accepted or rejected; one man favors this party, another that; the business has reached a certain stage. etc. And

<sup>1</sup> Susurro et bilinguis maledictis; multos enim turbabit pacem habentes.—Ecl. xxviii. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Beati pacifici, quoniam filii Dei vocabuntur.—Matth. v. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Sex sunt, quae odit Dominus, et septimum detestatur anima ejus.—Prov. vi. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Eum qui seminat inter fratres discordias.—Ibid. 19.

sometimes those revelations are made to the person about whom or against whom the meetings or consultations have been held. How unjust, how sinful that is! Reason alone is enough to show that it is utterly unlawful, and that it can occasion much evil.

For if that were allowed to go on, no one would have the courage to speak according to his conscience, or to make known his opinion according to his duty. Oh, if one would only be certain that all who are engaged in similar consultations were like St. John of Nepomuc, and would rather die than reveal the secrets entrusted to them; if all Christians were at least like the heathen philosopher Euripides, who, when some one said to him that his breath was bad, replied, "I can quite believe it, since so many things have died in my mouth;"<sup>1</sup> meaning thereby that he was very careful never to reveal a secret; if all were as upright as that Metellus who, if any one asked him to divulge a secret, used to answer: "If I thought that my under-garment was capable of doing as you ask, I should tear it off my body and burn it;" if, I say, we were all like that, then indeed would justice be always impartially administered, and much wrong-doing would cease! But as it is, one must think and reflect a good deal before saying yes, or no, and must weigh his words instead of considering the justice of the case in hand. Why? Because one knows not whom to trust; there are spies and traitors everywhere, and every word you speak may be made publicly known almost as soon as you have said it. But who is the traitor? Ah, that is a question not so easily answered! You may ask it often enough, like the Apostles at the Last Supper; but you will be none the wiser. Still the traitor is there. Consequently, if any delicate matter is proposed for consideration, people are inclined to shrug their shoulders, to look at each other, and to say nothing, although they have just cause, and are willing enough to express their opinion; often, indeed, through fear of treachery, they say yes, when, if they spoke according to conscience, they would say no. Thus justice is not observed as God, conscience, and the law require.

Hence it often happens that an irreparable injury is done. For sometimes, if a good, conscientious Christian gives an honest opinion against some powerful man, he has to suffer afterwards for having done so, when some tale-bearer has carried the story to the person concerned. We read in the Book of Exodus

So that  
Justice is not  
observed.

So that often  
a grave  
injury is  
done one's  
neighbor.

<sup>1</sup> Ita multa in ore meo computruerunt.

that a remarkable instance of this occurred to Moses. The latter went on one occasion from the court of King Pharaoh, in which he had been brought up by the King's daughter, to visit his countrymen, who were so sorely oppressed by the Egyptians. "He saw their affliction," says the Holy Scripture, "and an Egyptian striking one of the Hebrews, his brethren."<sup>1</sup> This act of injustice seemed intolerable to Moses, and on the one hand his anger impelled him to punish the aggressor, while on the other he was afraid that, if he did so, he might lose favor at court, and involve his brethren in his own punishment. Therefore he looked around carefully to see if any one was watching, "and when he had looked about this way and that, and saw no one there, he slew the Egyptian and hid him in the sand."<sup>2</sup> Could the thing be done more in secret, my dear brethren? Could any one imagine that it would ever be made known, since the only one present, besides Moses himself, was the Hebrew whom he was defending, and it was to the interest of both of them to say nothing about what had occurred? Certainly, Moses thought that the whole affair was buried with the dead Egyptian; and yet he very soon found out to his sorrow that the contrary was the case. For the next day he went out, and finding two Hebrews quarrelling, he tried to make peace between them; but one of them said to him sulkily, "wilt thou kill me as thou didst yesterday kill the Egyptian?"<sup>3</sup> Moses was surprised to hear that any one knew of what had occurred so secretly, and he began to fear for his own safety; "Moses feared, and said: How is this come to be known?"<sup>4</sup> And let me too ask, my dear brethren, how it could come to be known? It was through the Hebrew whom Moses defended; he related the matter in confidence to a friend of his, that friend told another, and so the story at last came to the ears of the King. "And Pharaoh heard of this word, and sought to kill Moses," who had to fly to save his life; "but he fled from his sight, and abode in the land of **Madian**, and sat down by a well."<sup>5</sup> Such was the misfortune in which Moses was involved by a loquacious tongue. If the Hebrew had held his peace, Moses would have had nothing to

<sup>1</sup> Viditque afflictionem eorum, et virum Aegyptium percipientem quemdam de Hebraeis fratribus suis.—Exod. ii. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Cumque circumspexisset huc atque illuc, et nullum adesse vidisset, percussit Aegyptium abscondit sabulo.—Ibid. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Num occidere me tu vis, sicut heri occidisti Aegyptium?—Ibid. ii. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Timuit Moyses et ait: Quomodo palam factum est verbum istud?—Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Audivitque Pharaoh sermonem hunc, et querebat occidere Moysen, qui fugiens de conspectu ejus, moratus est in terra Madian, et sedit juxta puteum.—Ibid. 15.

fear. It is just the same in our own days. There is many an honest man, who means to do his duty to God and to his neighbor by giving a conscientious opinion, and who is ousted out of his position and forced to come down in the world by some mischief-making tale-bearer.

Thus it happens, too, that the greatest and most important undertakings come to naught, and even whole communities suffer; because frequently the prosperity and welfare of a whole province or kingdom depend on certain secrets being strictly kept. Yet it is an unusual thing for a government to be altogether free from traitors. Favianus Strada, in his famous *History of the Netherlands*, quotes a letter written by Margaret, then Regent of the Austrian Netherlands, to Philip II., King of Spain, to this effect: Is it possible that among your majesty's privy councilors there are some so imprudent as to make known state secrets, either by word of mouth, or by writing; or so wicked and faithless as actually to declare them to your majesty's enemies? Nearly all the letters I have written to you for the last two years are, I am assured, in hostile hands at the present moment; with what disadvantage to the kingdom, I leave your majesty to imagine. Therefore I beg of you, in future to burn my letters as soon as you have read them." But all Margaret's caution was of no avail; for a certain individual boasted sometime afterwards that everything the King said, whether in public or in private, was made known to him without delay in the Netherlands. So hard is it for one to protect himself against treachery!

And even a whole community.

What a disgraceful thing that is! The ancient Romans, in making their libations to their idols, used a vessel so constructed that it could not stand upright, and whatever it contained had to be poured out at once. A talkative man is like that vessel; he opens his mouth so often and so wide to talk, that whatever is poured in at his ears flows out at once; he cannot keep to himself a single thing he hears, but must tell it immediately. In the Book of Ecclesiasticus we read how the Holy Ghost speaks of such a man: "At the hearing of a word the fool is in travail, as a woman groaning in the bringing forth a child;"<sup>1</sup> and again: "As an arrow that sticketh in a man's thigh, so is a word in the heart of a fool."<sup>2</sup> He who has an arrow sticking in his body, has no rest until it is pulled out. Tie anything

This loquacity is very disgraceful, especially in a man.

<sup>1</sup> *A facie verbi parturit fatuus, tamquam gemitus partus infantis.*—Ecc. xix. 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Sagitta infixæ femori carnis, sic verbum in corde stulti.*—*Ibid.* 12.

to the tail of a cat or a dog, and the animal will run about until it gets rid of it. So the loquacious man, when he has heard a secret, is on thorns, until he has told it to some one who will be glad to hear it. In the same chapter Ecclesiasticus says: "Hast thou heard a word against thy neighbor, let it die within thee."<sup>1</sup> This advice is followed in too literal a sense sometimes by talkative people; that is, they deal with secrets, as they would under certain circumstances with one who has just died. Sometimes it happens that when a person is dying, his father, or mother, or the priest alone is present; hardly has the breath left him, when word is sent to his friends and relatives, the church bell is tolled, and the body is laid out for all the neighbors to see. In the same way a secret dies with those loquacious people; that is, they tell all they know about it at once. What a disgrace it is, I repeat, for a man especially, to have so little control over his tongue! No one will trust him in any important business, nor will people dare to speak of any weighty matter in presence of one who has the reputation of not knowing how to hold his tongue, and of being a betrayer of secrets. What a disgrace that is for a man!

Men of that kind are put to shame by women; shown by an example.

People generally say that it is not safe to trust a secret to a woman, for she will not be able to keep it. I know not whether there are any grounds for that saying; but I must say, in defence of women, that there is, at all events, one fact to prove that they are not all untrustworthy. Laertius tells us of a brave woman at Athens whose fame has descended to posterity. She knew an important secret that Hippias, the Tyrant, was very anxious to hear, and that he tried to worm out of her by every possible means, both personally and by his most skilful councilors; he had recourse to flatteries, caresses, promises, and bribes, but all to no purpose; the brave woman kept her secret with the utmost determination. At last the tyrant lost patience, and said to her; I will make you confess all you know; he then ordered the fire and the rack to be prepared in order to extract the secret from her by torture; but the heroic woman said to him: "Do what you will, you will never compel me to say a word of what I cannot disclose without breaking my faith to one who trusted in me;" and thereupon she bit a large piece off her tongue, and spat it into his face: "she spat out her tongue in the tyrant's face that she might not be forced to let out the secret."<sup>2</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> Audisti verbum adversus proximum tuum? commoriatur in te.—Ecc. xix. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Linguam in tyranni faciem expulit, ut expueret vocem.—Laert. L. 36. c. 5.

Athenians erected a pillar in her honor, with the inscription: "By her virtue she rose superior to her sex."<sup>1</sup> And nowadays we might well add that the heroic silence of this woman puts many a man to shame, and that, too, in a matter in which every one is bound to act a manly part, and not allow himself to be compelled by fear of torments, or through a desire of currying favor with others, or through a spirit of adulation, or through mere talkativeness, to disclose secrets that he is bound as a matter of duty, and often under oath, to keep to himself.

But, I might well say to such people, if you are so fond of hearing your own voices, and find it so hard to hold your tongues, then why do you not speak when duty requires you? Why do you not give your opinion honestly according to conscience and justice? But we might cry out to them as Christ did to the dumb man in to-days gospel, at the top of our voices: "Ephpheta: be thou opened," without getting them to say a word! They are like those dogs that bark at and bite their master's friends, but keep quite still when thieves break into the house. As the Prophet Isaias says, "they are dumb dogs, not able to bark;"<sup>2</sup> nor do they dare to do so, although their duty requires it. Thieves can prevent dogs from barking in two ways; when they wish to break into a house, they either throw them a big piece of meat, so as to keep them busy gnawing it for some time, or else they have recourse to witchcraft to make them afraid, so that they will not dare to bark. So it is often with those who are bound to see justice administered; they become dumb dogs all at once; their mouths are stopped with a piece of meat, that is, their hands are filled with bribes; or else fear, or human respect, or the dread of incurring some great man's anger, reduces them to silence. Meanwhile, if a good and conscientious Christian speaks out fearlessly according to justice, they cannot keep silence about him; his opinions and judgments are at once made known to him against whom they have been pronounced, and who has the least right to know anything about them. Is that right, or just, or becoming a Christian? Therefore, I say again, if you must speak, speak when your duty requires, and hold your tongues when you cannot speak without doing mischief. If public vices and abuses are to be corrected and abolished; if your servants, or children, or wives require chastisement or admonition, in order to urge them to do good,

They are also dumb and refuse to speak when duty requires them.

<sup>1</sup> *Virtus superavit sexum.*

<sup>2</sup> *Canes muti, non valentes latrare.—Isa. lvi. 10.*

or to abstain from evil, that is the time for you to speak; then you may open your mouths to some purpose. But when you have pledged your word, or your duty and obligation, or the law of God and justice require you to keep a secret, then is the time for you to be silent; then you must say: "my secret for myself, my secret for myself."

Conclusion  
and exhortation  
to speak and  
to be silent  
at the  
proper time.

In conclusion, I wish you and myself the same benefit that Christ conferred on the dumb man, as we read in to-day's gospel: "And the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke right." O my dear brethren, what a beautiful, but rare art it is, to know how to speak properly at all times! Let us try with all possible diligence to learn it, to keep a guard over the tongue, that dangerous member, from which so much evil and sin proceeds daily, and never to say anything against the honor of God or the charity we owe our neighbor. If we are entrusted with a secret; if we see or hear anything privately of our neighbor, which we ourselves would not wish to be made known if we were the persons concerned, or which might be the cause of mischief; oh, then let us rather, like that heroic woman, bite off our tongues, than let the least word fall that might betray the secret! Let us daily beg of God, who alone can govern our tongue: "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; and a door round about my lips,"<sup>1</sup> that not a word may proceed from me without being first examined to see if it is such as I ought to speak; so that, for the rest of my life, it may be said of me with truth: "he spoke right." Amen.

*Another Introduction to the same sermon for the 24th and last Sunday after Pentecost, when the feast of the Presentation of the B. V. Mary is celebrated thereon.*

#### Text.

*Beati qui audiunt verbum Dei, et custodiunt illud.*—Luke ii. 28.

"Blessed are they who hear the Word of God, and keep it."

Blessed are they who hear the Word of God in sermons, and so keep it in their hearts, that they act and live according to it! Blessed are they who learn, know, and fulfil the law and the holy will of God! Such is the meaning of the words of the text. And may we not also say, blessed are they who hear the word of their neighbor, and keep it? they who keep secrets, and do

<sup>1</sup> Pone, Domine, custodiam ori meo, et ostium circumstantiæ labris meis.—Ps. cxl. 3.

not divulge them? For on silence in such matters, my dear brethren, a great deal depends; and the neglect of it often occasions much evil and mischief. But how few there are, even among Christians, who deserve to be called blessed in that way! How many talkative people there are, who commit even grievous sin by revealing secrets! Of these, then, who unnecessarily reveal secrets, I intend to speak to-day, for preachers generally merely allude to them in their sermons, although they stand in need of a word of special advice and exhortation. Who those people are, what mischief they do, and, therefore, how grievously they sin against God and their neighbor, such is the whole subject of this sermon. Let us speak when and how we should speak; but also let us keep secret what we cannot lawfully reveal. Give us Thy grace to this end, O God, through the intercession of that Holy Virgin, who, from her childhood, consecrated herself to Thy service in the temple, and of the holy angels guardian!

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*SEVENTY-THIRD SERMON.*

**ON THE LYING TONGUE.**

**Subject.**

1. The habit of lying is a disgraceful and hateful vice in the sight of men. 2. It is disgraceful in the sight of God.—*Preached on the third Sunday of Advent.*

**Text.**

*Confessus est, et non negavit.*—John i. 20.

“He confessed, and did not deny.”

**Introduction.**

Of all men, without exception, the Holy Ghost says: “Every man is a liar;”<sup>1</sup> not in the sense that every one must lie, or is accustomed to lie, for all lies under any circumstances are forbidden by God; but the meaning of those words is that all men can lie and knowingly violate the truth. Would to God, my dear brethren, that lying never went farther with us, than the bare possibility, and that what the gospel of to-day says in praise of St. John the Baptist, “He confessed and did not deny,” might be said with truth of us all! Would to God that

<sup>1</sup> *Omnis homo mendax.*—Ps. cxv. 11.

the spirit of falsehood had no influence over us! But, alas, what is more common than to violate truth? Most people, in fact, make a habit of it. Yet it is hateful and degrading in the sight of God and of the world, as I shall now show.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*The habit of lying is a shameful and disgraceful vice in the eyes of the world; the first part. It is a shameful and disgraceful vice in the sight of God; the second part. The conclusion will be to inspire us all with hatred and horror of a vice that is detested by God and man.*

We expect thereto Thy grace, O Jesus, through the merits of Thy Mother Mary, and of our holy angels guardian.

It is disgraceful before the world for a man to be looked on as neither truthful nor upright.

It is a great honor for a man, even in the eyes of the world, when people can say of him with truth what Jesus said of Nathanael; "Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and he saith of him: Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile;"<sup>1</sup> and when he is looked upon as an honest, upright man, whom one can trust without fear of treachery, and whose word can be relied on, because he speaks from his heart. Certainly it is a great thing for a man to have a name like that. And on the other hand, my dear brethren, there is nothing more degrading to a man, in the eyes of all decent people, than to have the name of being false, of acting deceitfully, so that one cannot trust him, or believe what he says. A name of that kind is indeed odious and detestable in the sight of all honorable men!

Liar's deserve that name.

Now the habit of lying is almost the only vice which gives a man that bad name. For a liar means one who has neither truth, nor candor, nor uprightness. But why do I speak of the habit of lying? To be caught in a single falsehood is quite enough to give one that bad name, so that he is not believed afterwards, even when he speaks the truth. If a man has lied to me once, I can never trust him again. He is like that man who, in order to be helped along the street, pretended he had a broken leg; as he was going along, he fell and, by a just dispensation of Providence, actually did break his leg; he cried out lustily for help, but no one came to his assistance; people had found out how he had deceived them, and the only answer they gave him was, "Let those who do not know you, come to your

<sup>1</sup> Vidit Jesus Nathanael venientem ad se, et dicit de eo: Ecce, vere Israelita, in quo Coius non est.—John i. 47.

assistance;” we know you too well to believe in you. Nay, so hateful is the name of liar, that people hardly like to mention it in decent company.

Even they who have the habit of telling lies, and who seldom speak the truth, cannot bear to be looked on as liars. It is considered a most grievous insult to be accused of an untruth; and people often take satisfaction for it by an appeal to arms, for there is many a one who would rather shed his blood and endanger his life, than rest quietly under such an insult. And how ashamed one feels who is convicted of a falsehood! Fathers and mothers, even if you are too indulgent to your children in other things, yet you daily warn them against the vice of lying. Be careful my child, you say, never to tell a lie; woe betide you, if I ever catch you telling an untruth; I will punish you most severely, for he who lies will also steal.

And this is one of the chief reasons why God has forbidden lying as sinful, so that even a jocose lie is never lawful, under any circumstances; that, namely, the social relations of men with each other may not be disturbed. Now these relations could not be maintained at all, if it were ever lawful to lie, because then no one could trust his neighbor, and every one would always be in dread of deceit and treachery; so that there would be an end of mutual trust and confidence. Hence, if the law of God and the law of nature did not prohibit lying, all spiritual and civil authority would be forced unanimously to prohibit it under severe penalties, for the general welfare. In ancient times the heathens, who knew nothing of God or his commandments, used to class liars in the same category as coiners of false money, as far as punishment was concerned. The emperor Claudius, as Spartianus writes, caused the dead body of a certain Pamphilus to be exhumed and to be thrown to the dogs and carrion birds, while all the property he left behind was confiscated, and his wife and children were banished, because it had been reported to the emperor that Pamphilus had been a habitual liar. Artaxerxes, King of Persia, having once convicted one of his soldiers of a falsehood, ordered his tongue to be pierced with three nails. The emperor Trajan had deposed the King of Thrace on account of rebellion, and placed the son of the latter on the throne; but because the son once told him a lie, by saying that he was coming home from school, whereas in reality he had been in the garden eating fruit, Trajan, full of anger, took the crown from him again: “you are a liar,” he

Even amongst liars.

Therefore it is forbidden by God and man.

said, "and are therefore unworthy to reign: nor is it right that Rome, the mother of truth, should have a lying son."<sup>1</sup>

Yet lying is  
a very com-  
mon vice.

O Christians! if lying were punished nowadays with equal severity, how many do you think would escape? For, hateful and hated as the name of a liar is, yet that vice is only too common amongst all classes, young and old, great and small; and to most men, especially those who lead worldly lives, we could with truth apply the words of the Prophet Jeremias, "They will not speak the truth; for they have taught their tongue to speak lies."<sup>2</sup> To conceal one's meaning in every possible way; to utter truth as falsehood, and falsehood as truth; to know how to hide one's feelings, and to speak friendly words with a heart full of falsehood and bitterness; to make grand promises which one has not the least intention of fulfilling; to hide by falsehoods the envy, hatred, vindictiveness, usury, injustice, or adultery, nay even the very lies that one is guilty of; to seek profit by lying in the public prints, in buying and selling; that, says St. Gregory, is the wisdom and prudence of the cunning world. He who is ignorant of this art, who speaks as he thinks, and acts honestly and uprightly in all things, is laughed at as a simpleton and as one who knows not the ways of the world.

Many seek  
temporal  
gain there-  
by, although  
they gen-  
erally lose;  
shown by an  
example.

Nay, so perverse are people in this respect, that, if a man has a strict regard for the truth in business matters, they consider him as one who can do very little, if anything at all, for himself. Such was the mistaken idea of those two shopkeepers of whom Cæsarius writes; they accused themselves in confession, amongst other faults, of the lies they had told in the course of business. Their confessor reproved them, and exhorted them to amendment; but, Father, said they, if we give up telling those lies, we shall soon be reduced to beggary; you do not understand our business; it is the fashion of the world nowadays to lie and deceive, and if a man sticks to the truth, he cannot hope to make much profit. What? said the confessor, do you wish to violate the truth for the sake of making a little profit? But take my advice and try the other plan for a while; I assure you, you will gain far more by truth and honesty, than by lying and deceit. The two men agreed to this, and promised that in future they would not, at all events, tell a deliberate lie. And they kept their word, too; in consequence of which they at first

<sup>1</sup> *Tamquam mendax indignus es regno; nec decet Romam matrem veritatis, habere filium mendacem.*

<sup>2</sup> *Veritatem non loquentur: docuerunt enim linguam suam loqui mendacium.*—Jer. ix. 5.

lost half their customers; but afterwards, when people found out how honest they were, they flocked to them in such numbers, that in one year the two men made more profit by truthfulness and honesty, than they did before in ten years by lying and deceit. Ah, would to God that all Christians tried the same plan! They would soon find out that more is to be made by upright dealing, than by falsehood. But, however that may be, must not prosperity come from the hands of God? And if so, how can he who offends God by lying expect a blessing on his business?

You know, my dear brethren, what happened to Giezi, the servant of the Prophet Eliseus, who tried to enrich himself by a falsehood? Eliseus had refused the rich presents offered him by Naaman, whom he had cured of leprosy, and Naaman was already on the way back to his own country, when the thought occurred to Giezi that his master was over-scrupulous not to take what was offered him, and that it would not be a bad plan if he were to try to secure something for himself. With this idea he ran after Naaman, who, as soon as he saw him coming, descended from his chariot in token of respect to Eliseus his master, greeted the servant kindly, and asked him what he wanted. "My master hath sent me to thee,"<sup>1</sup> answered Giezi, (count all the lies he told, my dear brethren; there is one of them already, for Eliseus had not given him any such commission.) saying: "Just now there are come to me, from Mount Ephraim, two young men of the sons of the prophets."<sup>2</sup> (That was the second lie, for there was not a word of truth in all he said.) "Give them a talent of silver, and two changes of garments!"<sup>3</sup> (The third lie.) But Naaman was ashamed to give so little; "It is better,"<sup>4</sup> said he, "that thou take two talents;" and he forced him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, and two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants, and they carried them before him."<sup>4</sup> Naaman then continued his journey. Giezi, full of joy at the success of his trickery, returns home; but he little knew what a misfortune was in store for him, nor what a calamity his ill-gotten treasures were to bring upon him; otherwise he would have wept, instead of re-

Proved by  
an example  
from Scrip-  
ture.

<sup>1</sup> Dominus meus misit me ad te.—IV. Kings v. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Dicens: Modo venerunt ad me duo adolescentes de monte Ephraim ex filiis prophetarum.—Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Da eis talentum argenti et vestes mutatorias duplices.—Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Melius est, ut accipias duo talenta. Et coëgit eum, ligavitque duo talenta argenti in duobus saccis, et duplicia vestimenta, et imposuit duobus pueris suis, qui et portaverunt eorum eo.—Ibid. 23.

joicing. So far he had succeeded; he stored away the silver and the clothes carefully in his house; no one knew anything of his good fortune, and his thoughts were busy about the vineyards he intended to buy, the number of servants he would have, and the choice food he could enjoy every day. Full of those thoughts, he presents himself before his master, who asks him gravely: "Whence comest thou Giezi?" He answered: "Thy servant went nowhither."<sup>1</sup> That was the fourth shameless lie he told. What? said his master, you went nowhere? And who was it that overtook Naaman, and received from him two talents of silver, and two changes of garments? And who is it that has concealed those gifts, brought by two servants, so that I might not see them? "Was not my heart present when the man turned back from his chariot to meet thee?"<sup>2</sup> This rebuff should have sufficed to put the servant to shame. But the very same reproof is given and repeated to you, O lying Christian, by God and your holy angel guardian, as often as you tell a wilful falsehood! Was not my heart present, says your holy angel, when you uttered that shameless lie? Was not my heart present? says the Almighty God; did I not see how ill your heart accorded with the words you spoke? and you were not afraid to tell a lie in My presence, and even thought to gain something by it? But wait, unhappy man. Your punishment has still to come! And so it was with Giezi, my dear brethren, for Eliseus who knew the deceit he had been guilty of, said to him: "So now thou hast received money, and hast received garments to buy olive-yards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and men-servants, and maid-servants." But see what good it will do you. "But the leprosy of Naaman shall also stick to thee, and to thy seed forever."<sup>3</sup> You will become a leper, and your children, and children's children, and all your descendants will be lepers also. Away out of my sight, lying servant, and let all liars take warning by your punishment! Thereupon he turned away, and left Giezi so overwhelmed with confusion that he had not a word to say, "and he went out from him a leper as white as snow."<sup>4</sup> If God were to punish liars nowadays by afflicting them with leprosy, or some other loathsome disease, doctors

<sup>1</sup> Unde venis Giezi? Qui respondit: Non ivit servus tuus quoquam.—IV. Kings v. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Nonne cor meum in præsentî erat, quando reversus est homo de curru suo in occursum tui?—Ibid. 26.

<sup>3</sup> Nunc igitur accepisti argentum, et accepisti vestes, ut emas oliveta, et vineas, et oves et servos, et ancillas; sed et lepra Naaman adhærebit tibi, et semini tuo, usque in sempiternum.—Ibid. 26-27.

<sup>4</sup> Et egressus est ab eo leprosus quasi nix.—Ibid. 27.

enough could not be found to attend to all the sick. Nor would there be any necessity for them to ask, on entering a house, where the sick person is. The first one they come across, the servant who opens the door, the master and mistress, the son and daughter, all would likely be found to be infected with the disease; and many a doctor would not be a whit better off than his patients. Yes, my dear brethren, there is no doubt, that, if God were to punish lying in that way, there would be a great number of sick people in the world; but at the same time the number of those who are not afraid to lie would decrease considerably. Yet, even if the Almighty, in His merciful goodness, deals gently with us in that respect, there are still greater punishments in store for those who wilfully violate the truth. For if the habit of lying gives one a bad name before the world, that is the least of the ill effects that follow from it. What should most of all deter us from this habit, is the fact that it makes man hateful to God; as we shall see in the

Second Part.

Mortal sin alone is able to draw down the divine anger on the sinner, and to make him hateful to God. Venial sins, although they displease the infinite holiness of God, do not deprive the soul of His favor and friendship, and consequently do not make it hateful to Him. Is it then my intention to class lying amongst mortal sins since I speak of it as making man hateful to God? No, my dear brethren, a lie is in itself but a venial sin, unless it is foreseen to be the cause of a great injury, or of quarrelling and strife, or of grievous harm to our neighbor's honor, or of sacrilege in the holy Sacrament of Penance, and so forth; for in any of those cases one may commit a grievous sin by a trivial lie. Otherwise, when such aggravating circumstances are wanting, a lie is only a venial sin. Yet, we find the Holy Scripture condemning wilful falsehoods so strongly, and so much more vehemently than any other venial sin, that we could almost swear that every lie is a mortal sin and most hateful in the sight of God. Hear what the Prophet David does not hesitate to say to the Almighty: "Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity; thou wilt destroy all that speak a lie."<sup>1</sup> The Holy Ghost speaks very plainly about this matter in the Book of Wisdom: "The mouth that belieth killeth the soul."<sup>2</sup> And

Lying is condemned in Holy Scripture as a vice specially hateful to God.

<sup>1</sup> Odisti omnes qui operantur iniquitatem: perdes omnes, qui loquuntur mendacium.—Ps. v. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Os quod mentitur, occidit animam.—Wis. i. 11.

again the Wise Man says: "A false witness shall not be unpunished: and he that speaketh lies, shall not escape."<sup>1</sup> St. John in the Apocalypse excludes liars from the heavenly Jerusalem: "Without are dogs, and sorcerers, and unchaste, and murderers, and servers of idols, and every one that loveth and maketh a lie."<sup>2</sup> Away with them! They do not belong to Heaven. And where must they go? "All liars, they shall have their portion in the pool burning with fire and brimstone."<sup>3</sup> And what conclusion are we to draw from all this? that every lie is a mortal sin? No; but that lying must be extremely hateful to God, and that he who is in the habit of it, being deprived of special graces by the inscrutable decrees of God, generally speaking, falls into mortal sin and loses his soul.

Because lying is opposed to the truth of God.

The reason of this is, that lying is opposed to truth, which is one of the chiefest divine attributes. David calls the Almighty "The God of truth."<sup>4</sup> "I am the truth,"<sup>5</sup> says the Son of God of Himself. "For this was I born, and for this came I into the world, that I should give testimony to the truth."<sup>6</sup> On the other hand the Holy Scripture calls the devil "the father of lies;" so that he who is in the habit of lying cannot be of God, but of the devil, as St. Ambrose says. "Be careful, beloved brethren," says the Saint, "not to lie; because they who love lying are children of the devil,"<sup>7</sup> and are opposed to the God of truth.

And is therefore never lawful.

And this is the second reason why it is never lawful to tell even a jocose lie. There is no doubt that it is forbidden, under pain of grievous sin, to take away man's life; yet there are circumstances in which I may do so, namely, if I have to defend my own life against an unjust aggressor, and have no other means of defence except killing my opponent. But not even to save my life would it be lawful for me to tell a lie. There is no doubt that stealing is forbidden under pain of grievous sin: yet under certain circumstances I may, without sin, take what belongs to another, namely, if I am in extreme necessity and have no other

<sup>1</sup> Testis falsus non erit impunitus, et qui mendacia loquitur, non effugiet.—Prov. xix. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Foris canes, et venefici, et impudici, et homicidæ, et idolis servientes, et omnis, qui amat et facit mendacium.—Apoc. xxii. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Omnibus mendacibus, pars illorum erit in stagno ardenti igne et sulphure.—Ibid. xxi. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Deus veritatis.—Ps. xxx. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Ego sum veritas.—John xiv. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Ego in hoc natus sum, et ad hoc veni in mundum, ut testimonium perhibeam veritati.—John xviii. 37.

<sup>7</sup> Quia omnes, qui amant mendacium, filii sunt diaboli.

means of preserving my life. But it never would be lawful for me to procure necessary sustenance by telling a lie. Lying is like the inside of a kitchen chimney that is blackened by the continually ascending smoke; no matter what efforts are made to whiten it, it is still as black as before. In the same way, no matter what pretexts and excuses are brought forward to make lying appear good and lawful, it still remains unlawful and forbidden under any circumstances. But, you will ask, is lying, then, worse than murder and theft, since the latter are sometimes lawful, but the former never? No, my dear brethren, by murder we mean taking away a man's life unjustly, an act that is always sinful in itself, and can never become lawful; in the same way, theft means taking away another's property unjustly, and it is always sinful, and never can become lawful. Therefore, to take away a man's life or his property unjustly is certainly a greater sin, than to tell a simple lie. What I wish to say is this: under certain circumstances God can give me the right over the life or property of another, and, in fact, He has often given that right to men; so that if I kill a man I shall not be guilty of murder, or if I take away my neighbor's property, I shall not be guilty of theft. On the other hand, God can never give us a right to tell a lie, nor can He counsel, much less command or approve of lying. There are no circumstances in which speaking contrary to one's knowledge and opinion is not a lie and therefore it must always be sinful. "A lie," says the learned Cardinal de Lugo, "is intrinsically evil, and therefore it is amongst the number of those things which are prohibited because they are bad; so that not even God Himself can dispense therein." In spite of His omnipotence, God cannot speak otherwise than according to His knowledge. Such is the general teaching of the holy Fathers and theologians; and it is as impossible for God to say what is not true, as it is for Him to cease being almighty and all-perfect. To assert the contrary is, according to Valenzia, at least rash; Lorca and Turrianus call it false and erroneous doctrine, while De Lugo says it is almost heretical. And as God can never, under any circumstances, make blasphemy or idolatry lawful, so He can never make even the smallest and most advantageous lie lawful. Therefore there should be an end of that idle complaint which is so often heard as a sort of justification for lying, that, namely, one can hardly venture to

<sup>1</sup> *Mendacium est intrinsece malum et ex eis, quæ sunt prohibita, quia mala ita ut nec Deus possit in eo dispensare.*

deal uprightly, since people are so deceitful, and one cannot know whom to trust. It is true that there is reason enough to complain of the spirit of falsehood that prevails; but we must not allow ourselves to imagine that the prevalence of a vice makes it lawful.

Even if I  
could there-  
by prevent  
a great mis-  
fortune.

It is to no purpose, then, that many say, that, by concealing the truth by a trivial lie, one can often do a great deal of good, or avert a great misfortune, or prevent himself or others from being put to public shame; and that under such circumstances lying is lawful, especially when it does no wrong or harm to others. Again, there are some who maintain that they must often tell a little lie in their families for the sake of preserving peace, for if they told the truth, they would give rise to quarrelling, dissension, and hatred, which might be the occasion of many grievous sins. Hear the answer to this objection; it is founded on the principle already laid down. If I, by telling a trivial lie, could put an end to all the wars that devastate so many countries, and are the cause of so many fearful sins, and if I could thereby restore peace to the whole world: even in that case it would not be lawful for me to tell a lie; much less, then, when there is merely question of keeping peace in a household. And if I could save my own life, or that of another by telling a lie, I must, as we have seen already, rather sacrifice my life, or that of my neighbor, than be guilty of the lie; much less, then, is lying lawful merely for the sake of some temporal profit. "It is not lawful," says the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas of Aquin, "to tell a lie in order to save another from any danger whatever."'

Or could  
bring all  
men to  
Heaven.

There is no doubt that I am obliged, for God's sake and my neighbor's, to prevent sin whenever I can; but I am not allowed to violate truth for that purpose. What a divine work it is to gain a soul! If it were necessary thereto that all men should sacrifice their worldly goods, their honor, their comfort, their lives even, they should all joyfully make that sacrifice for the sake of gaining one soul for God and for Heaven. What a great gain it would be then, and what reason I should have for attempting it, if it were possible, to convert to the Catholic faith all heathens, Turks, Jews, and heretics, nay, to make all men in a moment sure of their eternal salvation? And yet, if I could do all that by one small lie, it would not be lawful for me to tell that lie; no, I repeat it, that lie would be a sin. Such is

<sup>1</sup> Non est licitum mendacium dicere ad hoc, quod aliquis alium a quocunque periculo liberet.

the decision of the Fathers of the Council of Lateran, which was held under Pope Leo X. And the reason of it is clearly laid down by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans: "Let us not do evil, that there may come good."<sup>1</sup> Suppose, says St. Augustine, speaking against those who maintained that a lie is lawful, if thereby a great good, either of body or of soul, can be procured, suppose that there was in my house an unbaptized child in danger of death; there is no doubt that I am bound to baptize it, so as to save it from eternal loss, to make it a child of God and an heir to the kingdom of Heaven, and for that purpose I am bound to risk my life, and would do so with pleasure; but I have, as I suppose, no water at hand, wherewith to administer the Sacrament, nor can I procure any, unless by telling a lie to the porter, that he may allow me to go out for some; under such circumstances, what am I to do? Must I tell the lie? No; God forbid! I must allow the child to die without baptism and to lose Heaven, rather than knowingly violate the truth. For, what is sinful in itself, can never, under any circumstances, become lawful, even with a most holy end in view. Therefore we are not allowed to lie for the sake of furthering God's honor and glory, nor for the sake of concealing our virtues and good works from men through humility. "When you lie for humility's sake," says St. Augustine, "if you were not a sinner before, you become by lying what you wished not to be."<sup>2</sup> Let those who imagine that lying is sometimes necessary, make a note of that. I have told lies, they say, but I could not help it. It was for the sake of preventing quarrels at home, or to keep my husband from drinking too much, etc. No; it is never necessary to commit sin, and therefore it is never necessary to tell a falsehood. From this it is evident that there is no excuse for the conduct of those who order or encourage their children or domestics to lie for some trivial reason, telling them to say, for instance, that their masters or parents are not at home, and so forth; or who lie by way of a joke, or for the sake of amusement.

How different is the conduct of sincere servants of God in this respect! For they would rather die than offend God by a deliberate violation of truth. What happened to the holy Bishop and Martyr, Antimus, is well known. During the persecu-

Hence pious  
servants of  
God would  
rather die  
than tell a  
lie.

<sup>1</sup> Non faciamus mala, ut veniant bona.—Rom. iii. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Cum humilitatis causa mentiris, si non eras peccator, antequam mentireris, mentiendo effeceris, quod evitaveras.

tion in the reign of the emperor Maximian, twenty soldiers were sent in pursuit of him; they came to his house, and were received very hospitably by him, but they did not know who he was. When they had eaten and drunk, the holy Bishop said to them: I am Antimus whom you seek. The soldiers were very sorry to hear that, as they were unwilling to make a prisoner of one who had been so kind to them. We will go to the emperor, they said, and will tell him that we looked for Antimus everywhere, but could not find him. No, said the holy man, you must know that a Christian is not allowed either to tell a lie, or to encourage others to lie. Bring me to your emperor, or if you do not wish to bring me, I will follow you, and will rather undergo the most painful death, than allow you to tell a lie on my account. And he went with them, and suffered death bravely for the faith, and in defence of the truth.

They put us to shame, since we often tell lies for some worthless cause.

O Christians, have we not just reason to be ashamed of ourselves! We are guilty of such frequent violation of truth every day; and for what? Are we perhaps in danger of death? Are we threatened with torture? Are we afraid of being dragged to prison and loaded with chains? Ah, even all that we should be ready to endure with joy, rather than offend God by the least sin! And yet, for the sake of some worthless thing, that is not of the least importance, in order to keep up a conversation, or to deceive others, we make a daily habit of telling most bare-faced lies. How shall we be able to account for our conduct, when we shall have to appear before that God, who, as David says, will destroy all that speak a lie?

Yet we are not bound always to make known the truth.

But, some one will say, am I then always bound to declare the truth to every one who asks me? By no means, my dear brethren, that is not at all necessary, nor would it be always advisable. For there are circumstances in which I might commit a grievous sin by making known the truth, for instance, if I reveal an important secret, or disclose any thing injurious to my neighbor's good name, or to the charity I owe him, even if I am asked to make the disclosure. It is one thing not to disclose the truth, and another to speak contrary to the truth or to lie; the former I may be often bound to do, the latter can never be lawful. "It is lawful to conceal the truth with prudence,"<sup>1</sup> says St. Thomas of Aquin; and would to God that many truths were kept more secret! How much easier it would be to preserve the peace and union and good name of families, if there

<sup>1</sup> Licet occultare veritatem prudenter.

were not talkative or silly servants who are ready to relate in confidence, to any one who asks them, all that goes on in the household! Therefore, when such indiscreet questions are asked, or when, by concealing the truth, I can prevent sin, or hinder people from quarrelling; I must either hold my tongue, and refuse to answer, or I must go away, or otherwise show that I do not wish to answer, or I must give an evasive reply, or answer in such a way as to leave the other in doubt as to whether I mean yes, or no. Once for all, to speak deliberately against one's knowledge is a lie, and that is never lawful, no matter what advantage may be derived from it.

Therefore I conclude with the words of the Apostle St. Paul to the Ephesians: "Wherefore, putting away lying, speak ye the truth, every man with his neighbor; for we are members one of another;"<sup>1</sup> and we must deal uprightly with each other. "Let your speech be yea, yea; no, no;"<sup>2</sup> as our Saviour tells us; and speak candidly without deceit, and you will have God as your friend, and men, too, will be your friends, when they know that you are truthful. Therefore, O Lord, with Thy grace we shall resolve, in the words of Thy servant Job, "As long as breath remaineth in me, . . . my lips shall not speak iniquity, neither shall my tongue contrive lying."<sup>3</sup> It will be enough for me to know that lying is a sin and offensive to Thy eternal Truth, to induce me rather to die, than to tell a lie even inadvertently. Amen.

Conclusion and exhortation to avoid lying.

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SEVENTY-FOURTH SERMON.

ON THE SHAMELESSNESS OF THOSE WHO BOAST OF THEIR SINS.

Subject.

He who rejoices at, and boasts of his sins, is the most shameless sinner of all.—*Preached on the third Sunday after Easter.*

Text.

*Mundus autem gaudebit.*—John xvi. 20.

"The world shall rejoice."

<sup>1</sup> Propter quod deponentes mendacium, loquimini veritatem unusquisque cum proximo suo, quoniam sumus invicem membra.—Ephes. iv. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Sit sermo vester: Est, est, non, non:—Matth. v. 37

<sup>3</sup> Donec superest halitus in me, . . . non loquentur labia mea iniquitatem, nec lingua mea meditabitur mendacium.—Job. xxvii. 3, 4.

## Introduction.

The difference between the children of the world and the pious servants of God, as far as this life is concerned, generally consists in this, that the former enjoy temporal prosperity and find their happiness therein, while the latter are often visited by severe crosses and trials, so that, as Our Lord says in to-day's gospel, they are made sorrowful. The pious servants of God dread nothing so much as offending the Almighty by a grievous sin; the bare remembrance of their past sins makes them weep and lament. The wicked, and the children of the world, on the other hand, have very little dread of sin; they commit it, without the least scruple, for the sake of some miserable thing, and they rejoice about it afterwards, as the Holy Ghost says in the Book of Proverbs, "Who are glad when they have done evil, and rejoice in most wicked things." Nay, there are some who go to the extent of boasting of their sins, and exulting in them. The lot of the righteous in this life is the result of an all-wise and all-just decree of God, who proves his faithful servants for a short time here below by crosses and trials, that they may rejoice with Him forever in the kingdom of Heaven hereafter; while the prosperity granted to the wicked during this life, and the pleasures they enjoy, are given to them as a kind of reward for their few good works, since they will spend eternity weeping and gnashing their teeth in hell. Thus, when sinners become hardened in guilt, they lose all shame, and actually make a boast of their wickedness. Since I have not yet spoken of this degree of perversity, my dear brethren, I will speak of it now, and I say

## Plan of Discourse.

*He who rejoices at, and boasts of his sins, is the most shameless sinner of all. Such is the whole subject. O man! have you committed a sin? If so, then keep it to yourself, and declare it with repentant heart in confession. Such shall be the conclusion. As I do not think that there are any of those shameless sinners here present, my chief object is, as you shall see in the course of the sermon, to show you what an abomination sin is, that you may avoid it all the more carefully.*

Give us Thy grace thereto, O Lord, through the intercession of Mary and the holy angels guardian.

<sup>1</sup> Qui lætantur, cum malefecerint, et exultant in rebus pessimis.—Prov. ii. 14.

To boast of a thing which is calculated to make one ashamed in the presence of respectable people, and which one must acknowledge, in his own heart, to be shameful, is a certain, undoubted sign that one has lost all sense of decency, and a man of that kind is seldom to be met with. Consider the different things that the world generally looks on as disgraceful; where will you find a tradesman who boasts of having made a great mistake in something belonging to his handicraft? On the contrary, it will cost you a great deal of trouble, and you will have to use very strong arguments to convince him of a mistake he has really made; and what a number of excuses and explanations he will bring forward to hide or to palliate the error he knows he has committed. Herod, a celebrated orator at Athens, was once delivering an oration in presence of Mark Antony, when he forgot suddenly what he had to say, and had to retire; an accident of the kind is purely natural, and might happen to the most gifted orator, so that it could not be looked on as a disgrace; yet it affected him so much that he shut himself up in his room, refused to see any one, and abstained from all food and drink until he fell into a mortal illness. Sophocles cut his throat because one of his tragedies was only slightly applauded by the audience. Where will you find a malefactor who boasts that he has been banished, or that he has stood in the pillory, or that he has been branded, or that he has stood under the gallows with the rope round his neck? No, people never speak of any disgrace of that kind that may have happened them. When Labienus found that the books he had written were publicly burned by the sentence of the magistrate, he was so much ashamed that he could not bear the light of day, and he buried himself alive in the earth. Where will you find a soldier who boasts of having thrown down his arms before a weaker hostile force, and fled through fear of being wounded or slain? There is no greater disgrace for a soldier than that, and consequently no greater insult can be offered him, than to accuse him of such cowardice. The son of Aemilius Scaurus abandoned his post during a battle; did he boast of it afterwards? By no means; when he recollected what he had done, he was so covered with confusion, that he killed himself with his own sword to get rid of the sense of his shame.

No one boasts of a shameful thing, but he who has lost all shame.

Where will you find a respectable young girl, who enjoys a good reputation, to boast of having lost her purity? How many

Every one hides his

disgrace  
carefully.

there are to whom that misfortune happens, because parents are not careful to keep their children from mixing too freely with the opposite sex! But do they boast of their disgrace? No; they do all they can to conceal it, and to prevent others from even suspecting it. Father Segneri says that he knew of a person, who had lost her purity, beseeching her accomplice in guilt to put an end to her life, that she might escape the disgrace that threatened her, and actually taking poison for that purpose; so that, for the sake of avoiding temporal dishonor, she did not hesitate to deprive her unborn babe of eternal happiness, and to hurl herself, body and soul, into hell.

Especially  
people of  
high rank.

There is no greater dishonor in the sight of the world, than for people of high rank to be publicly humiliated and put to shame. Sesostris, one of the kings of Egypt, once compelled four kings, whom he had taken prisoners, to drag his chariot, dressed in their purple garments, with their crowns on their heads. Edgar, king of England, treated two kings, whom he had overcome in Scotland and Ireland, as slaves, and having caused their heads to be shaved, made them row in his galley, with chains round their necks and feet. Whenever Sapor, King of Persia, wished to mount his horse, the great emperor, Valerian, who was his prisoner, had to stoop down on his hands and knees and make a foot-stool of his body for the king to mount by. What a fearful dishonor for crowned heads, who were formerly served on bended knee! I cannot even bear the thought of the indignities that were thus offered them. Do you think, my dear brethren, that the dishonor, heaped on those kings by the tyrants into whose power they fell by the misfortune of war, was made by them a subject of boasting and exultation? Is it not more likely that it would rather make them pine away with grief? And so it is; shameless is he who is not ashamed of his own disgrace; most shameless of all, he who boasts of it.

He who  
boasts of  
his sins, is  
so shameless  
as to look  
on his dis-  
grace as an  
honor.

Now to our subject. A shameless, dishonorable man is the sinner who boasts of his sins; for all the disgrace that we have been considering he looks on as glorious and honorable. For what does committing a mortal sin mean? (I am not speaking now of the malice that a miserable creature is guilty of, who, though he is in need of his Creator at every moment, yet does not hesitate to offend and to rebel against the Great God who is present everywhere; nor of the gross ingratitude of the sinner, who, although he is created, preserved in life, and redeemed by

God, yet makes an evil return for all those benefits; and to have the name of being ungrateful is already disgrace enough!) But one question only I will ask: do you know, O man! what a shameful, disgraceful thing you have done, if you have ever committed a mortal sin?

You have made the greatest and most disgraceful mistake possible in your profession. For you have broken the solemn engagement you publicly made with God in the Sacrament of Baptism, and you have wandered far away from your last end, as far, in fact, as the beautiful Heaven above is from the terrible hell below. And do you boast of that mistake? Like the author whose works were burned by the hangman, you have done a deed that is already condemned by God's justice to eternal fire. Do you make a boast of it? Like the cowardly, run-away soldier, you have thrown down your arms at the first sight of the enemy; that is to say, at the first approach of a temptation, that little children drive away with the sign of the Cross, you have yielded; you have deserted your God, and shamefully taken to flight and sold your soul to the devil! Can you make a boast of such cowardice?

For he boasts of a great mistake. take he has made in his profession.

Like an adulteress and one who has lost her purity, you have allowed yourself to be dishonored and disgraced by the devil. For, as St. Augustine says, "every soul is either a spouse of Christ, or an adulteress of the devil."<sup>1</sup> By your spiritual adultery you have brought a monster into the world; for, as the Prophet David says: "Behold, he hath been in labor with injustice; he hath conceived sorrow, and brought forth iniquity."<sup>2</sup> Do you publicly boast of, and exult in, such a shameful deed as that? Do you look on it as an honor and glory?

Of a spiritual adultery.

Like a malefactor caught in the act, you have been, in presence of God and his angels, publicly expelled from the society of the elect, and have been banished your true country; that is, you have lost your right to your heavenly inheritance; your soul has been branded as an accursed child of the devil; you are actually standing on the gallows with the rope around your neck, and if death suddenly overtook you in the state of sin, you would be hurled at once into the abyss of hell. Do you boast of that?

Of his sentence to eternal death.

Your precious soul, that was formerly in the state of grace, a child of God, a spouse of God, an heir to the kingdom of

And that, too, although be-

<sup>1</sup> Omnis anima aut Christi sponsa, aut diaboli adultera est.

<sup>2</sup> Ecce, parturit in iustitiam, concepit dolorem, et peperit iniquitatem.—Ps. vii. 15.

fore he was possessed of such a high dignity.

Heaven, is now lying under the weight of mortal sin like a slave, stripped and shorn of all its virtues, graces, and merits, loaded with chains, an abomination in the sight of God and His saints, and trodden under foot by the devil, who degrades it under his tyrannical yoke like a beast of burden, and exposes it to the laughter and scorn of the demons; as David says of sinners: "Do not become like the horse and the mule, that have no understanding."<sup>1</sup> Do you boast of such a degrading slavery? Is it possible that such shameless depravity can be found amongst men?

He actually boasts of sin, while others are ashamed even to speak of temptations.

What do you think, innocent, God-fearing souls? How does the very name of a mortal sin affect you? What are your feelings when you are tempted to such a sin, even only in thought? You are ashamed of it, even in the solitude of your own hearts, although no human eye could notice that you were subject to such a temptation; and yet it lasted but a few moments in your imagination, against your will. How frightened and troubled your conscience is, lest perhaps you may have consented to the temptation! How would it be with you, if your friends could see how you are being tempted? Oh, you would fly from them covered with shame; you would not dare to appear before them, lest they should see the hideous thought that is annoying you, although you do not consent to it. Yet there are people in the world who are not merely assailed by temptations in thought and desire, but who actually commit grievous sins, and very often, too, sins that are generally committed in secret, so that no one can know of them but God and themselves; and yet they have neither rest nor peace until they make their crimes publicly known, and boast of them before others. Do you think it true, or even probable, that there are really such people in the world? No; you can hardly imagine it possible for a human being to be so lost to all sense of shame.

Others are ashamed to tell their sins in confession.

And you too, sinners, who have committed many and grievous sins, what are your feelings when you are about to be reconciled to the God whom you have offended, and when, with contrite and humble hearts, you are approaching the sacred tribunal of Penance, there to declare your sins candidly to the priest? What are your feelings? I ask you again. Are you not overwhelmed with anguish? Must you not struggle fiercely against yourselves, before you can make up your minds to do that? Your limbs tremble, a cold sweat breaks out over you, your tongue can

<sup>1</sup> *Nolite fieri sicut equus et mulus, quibus non est intellectus.*—Prov. xxxi. 9.

hardly articulate, and it is only by dint of heroically overcoming yourselves that at length you manage to stammer out your sins. And why, in God's name, are you so afraid? It is only to one man that you declare your sins, and he is bound never to speak of them to any one; he is also inclined naturally to the same sins as yourselves, and perhaps he has committed even worse crimes of the same kind as those of which you have accused yourselves; very often he is an utter stranger, who knows nothing whatever about you; in any case, he has a heartfelt compassion for you, is delighted at your repentant confession, and thanks God for the occasion thus presented him of absolving and freeing a sinner and saving a soul from the slavery of the devil, restoring to it its rights as a child of God and an heir of Heaven; he is a man who never, during his whole life, will breathe a word after confession of what you have told him, either to yourselves or to any one else. Besides, you make your confession in order to get rid of the disgrace in which you were before God and His saints, to recover your honor and good name, and to be freed from your guilt. Why, then, are you so much ashamed? Alas, I am ashamed to disclose my own wickedness! Yes; and I know well that it is that very shame which makes many despair to such an extent, that they spend ten, twenty, thirty, forty years in the greatest anguish of conscience, multiply unworthy confessions and communions, and often die impenitent, so that they lose their souls, rather than declare a single, secret mortal sin, committed in their youth, to the priest who is sitting in the place of God in the tribunal of Penance, and who is full of compassion for them. Foolish souls, how I pity you!

But what do you think of those who are so little sensitive to their own disgrace, that they freely and deliberately declare their secret crimes, not in the confessional, that they may be absolved and saved from hell, but to their companions and associates, and boast of and exult in their wickedness, thus adding to their guilt? Nay, what they are sometimes ashamed to tell in confession, they do not hesitate to talk and laugh about with their companions. Is it possible, I ask again, that any one can be so devoid of shame?

Yes, there are unfortunately only too many who glory in their sins, and take a delight in publishing them, either by their actions, or by their boasting words. Most worldlings publish their shame by their actions, since they look on it as a disgrace to allow others to surpass them in wickedness and wantonness.

But he publishes his sins openly.

Either by acts.

They seek honor and glory in the eyes of the world by their luxuriousness and vanity, by their extravagance in dress, by conforming to unlawful fashions, by adulation and flattery, by frequenting dangerous company, and by impure amusements and conversations. Thus they vie with each other in wickedness and vice. They are ashamed of Christian humility and modesty, of piety and devotion, as a mark of simplicity, unbecoming a man of the world. They are ashamed to say grace before and after meals, or to behave reverently in church, before Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, in whose presence the angels tremble. If they go to confession, no one must know of it; if they approach the Sacred Table, they do so early in the morning, so that no one may see them. If they perform other good works, they do them secretly, not through humility, like pious souls, who seek to hide their good works from the eyes of men that they may be known to God alone, but through pride, and because they are ashamed to be looked on as pious and devout. We read in the Gospel of St. Matthew that Our Lord complained of the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees, who boasted of their fasting by their emaciated countenances, of their alms-deeds by causing them to be trumpeted forth to the world, and of their apparent devotion by putting on an air of piety in the temple: "And all their works they do for to be seen of men."<sup>1</sup> But what will Our Lord think, what will He say, on the last day, of the hypocrisy of our modern Christian Pharisees, who conceal their good works, that they may not, according to their own perverse imaginations, be put to shame before the world; while by the unlawful customs they conform to, and by their dissipated lives, they give unmistakable proof that they know how to live as children of the world, and do not wish to lead Christian lives? What else do they do, but boast by their actions of their wicked and vicious mode of life?

Or by words  
and by  
relating  
their sinful  
acts.

But many are not satisfied with this alone. They are so shameless that they glory before others of even their secret sins; they boast of getting drunk themselves, and of having made others drunk. Nothing is more common than to hear them say: what a pleasant evening we had yesterday! So and so does not yet know how he got home; I had to deal with seasoned toppers, but I succeeded in getting them all under the table, etc. Or they boast of an act of revenge that they have accomplished, or intend to accomplish, and thus sin grievously against charity. And in

<sup>1</sup> *Omnia vero opera sua faciunt, ut videantur ab hominibus.*—*Matth. xxiii. 5.*

what tones of triumph they speak of their revenge, as if they had done something grand and heroic! At last I have had satisfaction, they say: I have put such a one to public shame, or I have beaten him to within an inch of his life, so that he must still feel what I have given him; such a one is still in my debt; I have not forgotten how he has treated me; my time will come, and then let him look out, etc. They boast of acts of injustice; thus, I made so much money out of that simpleton; if so and so has gained his law-suit, he may thank me for it; if I had not helped him, he would not have had the least chance; one must know how to manage such matters, and so on. I led that person by the nose, until I stripped him of everything. If you want to ruin your opponent, bribe the judge or the lawyer: I always do so; it matters not how you do it, as long as you gain your point. They boast of sacrilegious confessions: I fooled that priest nicely; I made very sure of not letting him into all my secrets. I am afraid of learned people and do not like to trust myself in their hands. I have a capital confessor who lets me do as I please; I may come back twenty times with the same old story, and he never refuses me absolution. They boast of abominable sins of impurity, and mention even the persons with whom they sinned. There are even old people who delight to talk before the young and innocent of the excesses of their youth. Nay, many a one boasts of those crimes, although he may not in reality have been guilty of them, simply to satisfy his desire of being looked upon as more ungodly than others.

And a fine thing, too, that is, to boast of committing sin and offending God! becoming God's enemy, and rebelling against Him! making one's self an abomination in the sight of Heaven; a child of malediction, and a bond-slave of Satan! What madness, what folly, to seek glory in that way, and thereby to commit a new sin, to forfeit Heaven anew, and to condemn one's self again to hell! I find in the Sacred Scripture many examples of people who sinned by vainglory; but how did they sin? The Philistine giant boasted of his bodily strength and stature; Absalom, of his beautiful hair; Sennacherib, of his mighty army; Aman, of his power at court; Antiochus, of the many victories he had gained over his enemies; Nabuchodonosor, of his magnificent palace; Ezechias, of his treasures; the Pharisee in the temple, of his fasting and alms-deeds; Lucifer, the prince of demons, of his might: intelligence and surpassing beauty. All these offended God by their vainglory; but we must acknowledge

What madness to deserve hell by vainglory of that kind.

that they all had something to be proud of. But you, O sinners, who boast of your sins, what do you do? You, "are glad when you have done evil, and rejoice in most wicked things;" you glory in your dishonor: "Whose glory is in their shame;"<sup>1</sup> as St. Paul says. Therefore you are the most shameless of mortals, and you act more like unreasoning animals, than thinking men; for, as St. Thomas of Villanova says, "Brute beasts may be beaten, slain and burned; but they cannot be made to feel shame."<sup>2</sup> In so far they who boast of their sins, are like dumb beasts; "they have committed abomination," the Prophet Jeremiah might well say of them, "yea, rather they are not confounded with confusion, and they have not known how to blush;"<sup>3</sup> they have done abominable things, and they make a boast of them!

Conclusion  
and exhortation to  
keep silence  
about one's  
sins.

Ah, sinner, (if any such are here present, as I hope not) I beg of you in the words of Ecclesiasticus: "If there be a sin with thee, disclose it not."<sup>4</sup> If you have taken revenge on your neighbor; if you have been intoxicated, or have made others so; if you have given away to an impure passion; ah, do not disclose it! keep your guilt to yourself; let your misery be confined to yourself. Why should others know anything about it? They have, or are bound to have, a good opinion of you, until they find out for certain that you are wicked and godless. If you are not disgusted at the deformity of sin, keep your shame concealed at all events; do not exhibit it openly. Let it suffice for you to be a sinner and a slave of the devil, without proving yourself lost to all sense of shame. If you do not fear the Almighty and all-seeing God, who alone knows your secret sins; if you do not fear the eternal fires of hell; if you are resolved on losing your soul: then carry out your desperate resolution; God leaves you at liberty to do so; but have a little respect for your honor and good name, while you are still on earth! How bitterly you complain sometimes of calumniators and detractors, who speak ill of you, either in your presence, or behind your back! My honor, you say, is as precious as my life; I cannot allow the least stain to rest on it, I would give the last drop of my blood in defence of my good name. Why then should you yourself destroy your own reputation? yet that is what you do, when you boast of

<sup>1</sup> Quorum gloria in confusione eorum.—Phil. iii. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Jumenta pecuti, occidi, cremari possunt; verecundari non possunt.

<sup>3</sup> Abominationem fecerunt: quoniam in confusione non sunt confusi, et erubescere nescerunt.—Jer. viii. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Si est tibi delictum, noli denudare.—Ecl. xix. 8.

your sins. Therefore, if you have a sin on your conscience, do not reveal it.

Yet, if you wish to reveal it as you ought, if you wish to escape hell and to gain eternal happiness, I will tell you where you can do so, to your own great glory and honor in the sight of Heaven; go to the sacred tribunal of Penance, and there, putting aside all shame, disclose your sin, with contrite heart, to the minister of God. If you follow that advice, you will be cleansed from the filth of sin, rescued from the slavery of the devil, and be given the liberty, honor, and glory of the children of God, with the certain hope of enjoying honor and glory with the elect for all eternity. Amen.

And to declare it candidly in confession.

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*SEVENTY-FIFTH SERMON.*

**ON THE HOPELESS STATE OF THOSE WHO BOAST  
OF THEIR SINS.**

**Subject.**

He who boasts of his sins is a hopeless sinner: 1. Hopeless as far as he himself is concerned. 2. Hopeless as far as God is concerned.—*Preached on the fourth Sunday after Easter.*

**Text.**

*Cum venerit ille, arguet mundum de peccato.*—John xvi. 8.

“And when He is come, He will convince the world of sin.”

**Introduction.**

The sin of which the Holy Ghost will convince the world, is, strictly speaking, the want of faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as the gospel of to-day expressly says: “Of sin, because they believe not in me.” Yet this conviction will be extended to each and every sin, for all sins are due to a want of lively faith, but especially to those sins which are committed against the Holy Ghost, the chief of which is despair on the part of the sinner. But if there is any despairing sinner in the world, my dear brethren, it is, in my opinion, he who boasts of his sins. He is the most shameless of all sinners, whether he boasts by word, or by act, as we have seen in the last sermon. He is a hopeless sinner, too, as I shall now prove.

**Plan of Discourse.**

*He who boasts of his sins is a hopeless sinner; such is the whole subject. Hopeless as far as he himself is concerned; the first part. Hopeless as far as God is concerned; the second part.*

O God of goodness, save us all from that hopeless sin, we beg of Thee, by the intercession of Mary our Mother, and the holy angels guardian.

If a sinner wishes to repent and to save his soul, he must acknowledge and detest the wickedness of his sins.

That sick man is in a hopeless state, who, laboring under a dangerous malady, refuses to follow the advice of the doctor or of his friends and to take the medicine that might help to cure him, and that, because he is firmly persuaded that he is in good health, and that there is nothing amiss with him. Nothing short of a miracle can help a man in that state. This, my dear brethren, is an exact picture of the sinner who boasts of his sins; he has as many dangerous maladies, as he has mortal sins on his conscience; his soul is actually dead, and only awaits the last moment of his life, which is known to God alone, to fall into the everlasting death of hell. For him to have any hope of recovery, of saving his soul by true sorrow and conversion to God, he must heal radically the diseases of his soul by using the medicine appointed for that purpose, and be reconciled to God in the Sacrament of Penance; but that is just where there is no hope for such a sinner. For he cannot do penance and recover the grace of God without acknowledging the wickedness and deformity of his sin, and detesting and execrating it, with all his heart, more than any other evil in the world. It is not enough for him to confess his sins most accurately and with all their circumstances that are necessary to be declared, to an approved priest; that is certainly required, but it is, so to speak, the least and most insignificant part of true penance. How many confessions of Christians are but the outward appearance of penance, and mere counterfeits, which add to, instead of taking away, the guilt of sin! For it is only in a minority of cases that people wilfully conceal mortal sins and thus make their confessions invalid. Besides, it is not a great trial for those shameless sinners, who boast of their wickedness and talk about it to others, to tell their sins candidly in confession. That which most frequently interferes with the validity of the sacrament is the fact that there are many who do not fully acknowledge the malice and deformity of sin, and consequently they do not sincerely repent of and detest it.

*Hopeless state of those who boast of their Sins.* 487

You see now, my dear brethren, why I say that he who boasts of his sins is in a hopeless state, as far as his salvation is concerned; for he does not acknowledge the malice and deformity of his sins, and does not repent of them. He does not acknowledge their malice and deformity, for otherwise he would be ashamed of having committed them and certainly would not make a boast of them. A vain woman, who thinks herself beautiful and wishes to attract admiration, cannot bear to have the least speck of dirt on her face; she is continually studying the glass, and asking others how she looks, so that, if there is anything wrong, she may set it right at once. If some mischievous person were secretly to make a black mark on her cheek or forehead, and she, knowing nothing about it, went out into the street, or into company, what would people say of her? They would say at once that some one had made a fool of her, and that she had not the slightest idea of the trick that had been played on her, for the purpose of making her ridiculous. Suppose, now, that she happens to look in a glass, and sees the black mark on her face; she is ready to die with shame, and runs away at once, nor does she show herself again in the same company for a long time. To be thus ridiculed and put to shame might be to many a cause of serious trouble, and even of illness. On the other hand, the same woman may wear patches on her face, and take some trouble too to put them on properly, without being in the least ashamed of them. And why? Because she does not consider them a deformity, but rather a means of enhancing her good looks, so that people will admire her all the more. By the help of this simile, my dear brethren, you can draw your own conclusion with regard to him who boasts of his sins, and see whether he can have a true knowledge and heartfelt detestation of the malice and deformity of those sins which he glories in. No, that cannot be; he looks at his sins as "beauty-spots"; he thinks they are becoming to him, and therefore he speaks of them and boasts of them. Thus he refuses to acknowledge the malice and turpitude of his sins, and consequently he cannot repent of and detest them.

Now he who boasts of sin does not acknowledge its malice.

The sorrow required for true repentance and conversion is a supernatural act of the will, by which man conceives such a hatred and horror of sin, that he execrates and condemns it more than any other evil, more even than the eternal flames of hell, because it offends God who is infinitely great, or infinitely

He does not repent of and detest his sins.

just, or infinitely deserving of love for His own sake; and he who is not in such disposition has not a sorrow that will avail to obtain forgiveness of his sins. Now, in the case of those of whom we are speaking, where is this horror? "They are glad when they have done evil, and rejoice in most wicked things."<sup>1</sup> O ye holy souls who did penance! David, Peter, Magdalen, the public sinner of the Gospel, what were your dispositions when you first began to repent and to amend your lives? David watered his couch with his tears every night; he ate ashes like bread; he mingled his drink with his weeping, as he himself testifies. The public sinner stands humbly at the door of the temple, striking his breast, and not daring to raise his eyes to Heaven. Peter used to shed bitter tears during the remainder of his life, whenever he was reminded of his denial of Christ by hearing a cock crow. Magdalen retired into a cave in the desert and scourged every day severely her body, that was the occasion of the sins she had formerly committed. But those other sinners rejoice when they have done evil, and boast of having offended God as they would of some heroic action; and by that very boasting they commit another mortal sin. What hope is there of such sinners sincerely repenting and saving their souls? I know, that, as long as a man lives, he can change his perverse will, even if he has become hardened in guilt; and therefore one might think, that, although those sinners do not now see the malice and deformity of their sins, yet they may see it later on and repent of it. They have now neither hatred, nor detestation, nor sorrow for their crimes, yet they may by and by sincerely repent of them, and be reconciled to God by a supernatural sorrow, and thus save their soul. But, my dear brethren, there is very little hope of that; the great probability is that they will never repent. And this is the reason:

He will hardly repent later on, because he has fallen into the very depths of sin.

Of hardened and obdurate sinners the Holy Ghost says in the Book of Proverbs: "The wicked man, when he is come into the depth of sins, contemneth; but ignominy and reproach follow him."<sup>2</sup> There is hardly any means by which he can be brought to repentance and amendment. You may give him the most salutary warnings: "he contemneth;" threaten him with the severest punishment: "he contemneth;" speak to him of the omnipresent, Almighty God, whom he has so often offended:

<sup>1</sup> *Lætantur, cum malefecerint, et exultant in rebus pessimis.*—Prov. ii. 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Impius, cum in profundum venerit peccatorum, contemnit, sed sequitur eum ignominia et opprobrium.*—Ibid. xviii. 3.

“he contemnueth;” it is long since the thought of God had any power to move him; show him how he has forfeited the joys of Heaven for a worthless thing: he cares nothing for his loss; open hell to him, if possible, and let him behold all the fearful torments that await him in that sea of fire: he has no fear of it. And why? Because “he is come into the depth of sins.” There you have a true sketch of the sinner who boasts of his sins; he is sunk into the lowest depths of wickedness. The Prophet David calls him mighty in iniquity: “dost thou glory in mischief, thou that art mighty in iniquity?”<sup>1</sup> And certainly he must be sunk deep in depravity and, so to speak, have lost all feeling through a long-continued habit of sin, who is no longer ashamed of his wickedness. For experience teaches, and every one who has offended God by a grievous sin knows well, that the first, second, third, or fourth sin always inspires one with a secret fear and anxiety. And what a combat goes on before consent is given to the first mortal sin! That consent is given after a long struggle, but with fear and trembling; and therefore, as Our Lord says, “every one that doth evil hateth the light.”<sup>2</sup> He who meditates evil shuns the light; he does not wish to be seen; he hides himself in dark corners; he is afraid almost that the very walls of his room will reproach him. And when he has committed the sin, how ashamed he is of himself! How careful he is to prevent others from coming to a knowledge of his guilt! When David committed adultery with Bethsabee, he was filled with anxiety lest his crime should become known, and he had recourse to all sorts of artifices to conceal it, until at last he commanded the husband of Bethsabee, Urias, a brave soldier who had often exposed his life for him, to be placed in front of the army, so that he might be slain by the enemy. This cruel order was carried out; Urias was killed, and David married Bethsabee; and all that he did solely with the view of concealing his crime from the eyes of men. Nature itself inspires a man with that sense of shame, when he is still a novice in wickedness.

Even after he has made some progress in vice and committed many grievous sins, it still takes a long time to deaden the worm of conscience, so that its gnawings are not felt. He is filled with fear and despondency, when he remembers that he is an enemy of God, a child of perdition; there is no repose nor enjoy-

He loses all  
fear and  
anxiety  
about com-  
mitting sin.

<sup>1</sup> Quid gloriaris in malitia, qui potens es in iniquitate.—Ps. li. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Omnis qui male agit, odit lucem.—John iii. 20.

ment for him even in his sinful pleasures, and it is the greatest torment to him to think of having to declare his sin even to one man in the tribunal of penance. Even they who have been for some time in the habit of indulging recklessly in sin, and who have as yet no intention of amending, seldom go so far as to wish to be looked on as bad and vicious. The proud man does not like to be thought proud; the avaricious man dreads nothing more than to be called a miser, and tries to palliate his parsimony by saying that it is a necessary economy; anger is called just indignation; hatred, envy, and vindictiveness are dignified with the name of lawful resentment; and thus the vices are clad with the appearance of virtue, that they may be concealed from the eyes of the world. It is the lowest degree of wickedness to wish to appear wicked and to put off all appearance of goodness. And here we have the true character of him who boasts of his sins; he has neither fear nor anxiety on account of them; he is not ashamed of them, nor does he try to hide them; he glories in publishing them; his delight is to be looked on as impious and ungodly; he does not wish to be thought pious. He has come into the depth of sins, and is obdurate in wickedness, so that he scornfully rejects all the means that could help him to repent and amend, and therefore he is in a hopeless state as far as his salvation is concerned; as Louis of Grenada says: "It seems to me a sure sign of reprobation, to have a facility in committing mortal sin without any sense of sorrow."<sup>1</sup> And that is my opinion, too, my dear brethren. Yet, what am I saying? Who am I, O great God, that I should dare to set bounds to Thy infinite power and mercy? Is there any heart so hard that Thou canst not soften it, if Thou wilt? No; the treasures of Thy grace are inexhaustible, and in it Thou hast an endless store of inspirations and impulses, with which Thou canst in a moment convert the most obdurate sinner! Thy goodness and mercy, too, are infinite, and are always ready, at every moment, to receive even the greatest sinners, if they wish to turn to Thee! So it is, my dear brethren; and therefore we must never despair of the conversion and salvation of any one, no matter how wicked he is, as long as the breath of life is in him. Still, if I consider the matter according to the general course of divine Providence, I find that there is a great difficulty attending the conversion of those who boast of their sins, for there is no reason to suppose that

<sup>1</sup> *Reprobationis signum mihi certum videtur facilitas lethaliter peccandi sine doloris sensu.*

the just God will ever give them the extraordinary and most powerful graces that they require to be converted; and therefore, as far as God is concerned, the salvation of such sinners appears hopeless. The reason of this I shall briefly explain in the

### Second Part.

The crime of high treason is committed by one who insults his sovereign, and it is punished by the severest kind of death. If that crime is committed in a sudden fit of passion, and secretly, so that no one is aware of it except the culprit and the sovereign to whom the insult is offered, then perhaps the latter, if he is of a merciful and forgiving disposition, may be induced to listen to the humble prayers and apologies of his guilty subject, and to pardon the offence. But if the culprit is so foolhardy as to boast of the insult he offered his sovereign, and to make it a subject of laughter among his companions, and actually to seek thereby to foment a rebellion against lawful authority, what would you think of it, my dear brethren? Would you say that there is the least hope of pardon for such a one? No; such insolence as that could not be tolerated even by a private individual, much less by a crowned head, who must rule his people by his authority, and make them respect and obey the laws of the land. To have his tongue torn out and to be quartered is too slight a punishment for one who openly insults his sovereign and is guilty of high treason.

Oh, sinner, you are guilty of the same crime against the infinite majesty of God, when you boast of your sins. You have deliberately deprived yourself of the use of reason by drunkenness, or you have encouraged others to a similiar excess; you have vented your wrath on your neighbor, you have had revenge on him who has injured you; you have gratified your impure desires; all these sins are so many insults and acts of contempt towards the infinite majesty of God, that deserve to be punished by hell fire. Another has committed the same sins, but secretly and stealthily, and at first with a feeling of shame and fear at having offended God so grievously, so that he sinned because he was overcome by a violent temptation, and he is very careful to hide his guilt from the knowledge of men. He has sinned grievously, I know, and deserves hell; but we have a patient, long-suffering and merciful God, who is always ready to receive into His favor the sinner who acknowledges his guilt, and returns to Him with a contrite heart, and that favor is easily shown

Public offences against a sovereign are not easily pardoned.

Such is the crime committed against God by him who boasts of his sins.

to the secret sinner, because the insult he has offered to God is, so to speak, a hidden and private thing; the divine honor is assailed only by and in presence of one individual, accompanied perhaps by the parties of his guilt. But you, O presumptuous man, are not satisfied with that; it is not enough for you to despise and insult your Lord and your God; you must make known to others the insult you have offered Him, and boast of it to your companions! Can you imagine that you will find a way to recover His friendship and favor as easily as he who sins in secret and is ashamed of his guilt? Must that great and jealous God, who so often assures us in Holy Scripture that He will not allow any one to attack His honor and authority with impunity, bear such an insult patiently? No, no; that cannot be. I know that St. Augustine has made known to the whole world the many and grievous sins he committed in his youth, and that he has published them, so that any one who wishes may read them; but why did he do that? What was the holy man's object? It was to humble himself, to put himself to public shame: to show to the whole world that he had acted most unjustly towards God; to testify to the deep and heartfelt sorrow that he felt for his sins, and to the hatred and execration with which he regarded them; to make known to all, and to glorify throughout the world, the infinite goodness and mercy of God who had borne with him so patiently for so many years, and had admitted him again to His grace and friendship; to give courage and confidence to all sinners to do penance, and to return to God without delay; to inflame all hearts with love for a God who is so deserving of love, and thus to make reparation for the insults he has offered to the Almighty. Such was the desire for humiliation with which true contrition and a burning love of God had inspired St. Augustine.

And that, too, as a public defiance and rebellion against God.

But you, on the contrary, O shameless sinner, who boast publicly of your sins, what are your motives in doing so? You wish to gain honor and glory before men, because you have ventured to offend God and to transgress His law without scruple or shame; to protest before the world that you care nothing for God's commandments, and that you disregard alike His promises and His threats; to show others that you still have a secret pleasure and satisfaction in remembering that you have sinned and offended God; to carry sin about in triumph, as it were, by making your honor and glory before the world consist therein; and to encourage others to be just as unscrupu-

lous as yourself in transgressing the divine law. And what else is that but to treat the Almighty with public disrespect, as if He were unworthy of honor or reverence, to defy Him, and, as it were, to say to Him: what do I care for Thee? What else is it but to make one's self a leader of rebels, and to seek to induce others to revolt against God? What else is it but to take away all shame and dishonor from sin, to make it respectable and becoming, and to set it up on a throne, since you make it the subject of mutual rejoicing and congratulations? And where is all that done? In what country? In Tartary, perhaps, amongst barbarians? In a savage land inhabited by heathens and infidels? Amongst idolaters and sworn enemies of God? Amongst witches and sorcerers who devote themselves to the service of the devil? No; it is done in a Christian country, in the bosom of the Holy Catholic and only true Church, in sight of the Cross of Jesus Christ, by and amongst Catholic Christians who in the holy Sacrament of Baptism have publicly sworn to uphold the honor and glory of Jesus Christ, their God and Saviour, even to the last drop of their blood. These are they who thus boast of and glory in having committed sin and offended God!

And wilt Thou, O Almighty God, bear with that? Wilt Thou allow men to insult Thee thus publicly with impunity? Wilt Thou give Thy grace and favor, and that too in an extraordinary measure which Thou owest to no sinner, to one who acts so insolently and presumptuously against Thy honor? No; for Thou assurest us of the contrary by Thy Prophet Isaias: "Their tongue and their devices are against the Lord, to provoke the eyes of His majesty. The shew of their countenance hath answered them; and they have proclaimed abroad their sin as Sodom, and they have not hid it."<sup>1</sup> And what will happen to them? "Woe to their soul, for evils are rendered to them."<sup>2</sup> But was it not the intention of the Prophet to threaten them with evil which should befall them in the future? Certainly. Could he not then have said, woe to their soul, for evils will be rendered to them? True; but the punishment that awaits them is so certain that it may be looked on as a present reality: therefore, "evils are rendered to them;" the wrath of God has already overtaken them, nor is there any hope of their escaping it. Woe to their soul! and woe forever!

Therefore his salvation seems hopeless as far as God is concerned.

<sup>1</sup> *Ingenia eorum et adinventiones eorum contra Dominum, ut provocarent oculos majestatis ejus. Agnitio vultus eorum respondit eis; et peccatum suum quasi Sodoma patecaverunt, nec absconderunt.—Isa. iii. 8, 9.*

<sup>2</sup> *Vae animæ eorum, quoniam reddita sunt eis mala.—Ibid. 9.*

Conclusion  
and exhortation to  
correct  
and to  
avoid those  
boasters.

Ah, dear Christians, be careful to avoid that hopeless state of sin; do not allow yourselves to become so shameless and so presumptuous as to make a boast and a source of amusement of your sins! If any one speaks vauntingly of his sins in your presence, then, at all events, show to the Almighty God, who is present everywhere and who is worthy of all fear and love, the same respect that you would show to your sovereign if any one attacked his honor, especially if there is reason to believe that the latter will hear of your conduct. Oh, how careful people are under such circumstances! They cast their eyes to the ground; no one speaks a word; every one seems anxious to leave the company in which such disrespectful conversation is carried on; nay, he who is zealous for his sovereign's honor will not hesitate to stop with a blow the insolent mouth that dares to speak thus. Let every good Christian, I say, have the same regard for the honor and glory of God. If you hear any one dishonoring God by boasting of his sins, sanctify your hand by giving him a good blow on the blasphemous mouth; but if you have not courage or zeal enough for that, interrupt him at least by a gentle warning, and tell him that it is small honor to him to have offended God; or else show by your silence that you do not approve of such talk. In any case, do not allow yourself to be scandalized by it; nor seem to approve of it by laughing at it; nor must your hatred and detestation of sin be a whit less, although you hear others glorying in their sins. You must feel sorrow for the insult offered the divine honor; say to yourselves with contrite hearts: O God be merciful to me and all poor sinners: "From my secret sins cleanse me, O Lord; and from those of others spare thy servant." Thou, O Lord, knowest the sins I have committed in secret; I confess my guilt to Thee: "To Thee only have I sinned, and have done evil before Thee."<sup>2</sup> I am sorry from my heart for ever having offended Thee! Instead of boasting of my past sins, I will glory in and make publicly known the infinite goodness and mercy with which Thou hast so patiently borne with me, a presumptuous sinner, for so many years, and as I confidently trust, forgiven me my transgressions; I will not cease to bewail my sins as long as I live, that I may one day exult, through Thy great mercy, in the sight of Heaven for all eternity. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Ab occultis meis munda me; et ab alienis parce servo tuo.—Ps. xviii. 13, 14.

<sup>2</sup> Tibi soli peccavi, et malum coram te feci.—Ibid. l. 6.

SEVENTY-SIXTH SERMON.

ON THE PRESUMPTION OF EVERY SINNER.

Subject.

Every one who commits a mortal sin, treats his Lord and his God most contemptuously. What insolence and presumption on the part of man! How fearful the malice of sin!—*Preached on the fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

*Unum sustinebit, et alterum contemnet.*—Matth. vi. 24.

“ He will sustain the one, and despise the other.”

Introduction.

In these few words, my dear brethren, is described the presumption of every sinner: “ No man can serve two masters,” says Christ; no one can serve God, and at the same time the devil, the corrupt flesh, or the perverse world. Now, what does man do when he commits a mortal sin? “ For either he will hate the one, and love the other; or he will sustain the one, and despise the other.” He hates his God, who is his lawful Master, and loves the world, or the flesh; he sustains the devil, and despises his God. O sinners, is there one among you who finds it hard to acknowledge and repent of his sins? Let him only consider well what it means to have treated his Lord and his God with contempt; and he will find therein cause enough for the most profound sorrow and detestation of his offences. To that end I will now spend a little longer than usual in explaining the meaning of those words. This sermon will be profitable, not only for sinners, to arouse them to repentance and amendment, but also for those who have already repented of and amended their wicked lives, to keep them from relapsing into sin, and also for the just and the innocent, to give them a greater knowledge of the malice of sin, and thus inspire them with a greater horror of it.

Plan of Discourse.

*Every one who commits a mortal sin treats his Lord and his God most contemptuously. This is the proposition which I intend to prove. What insolence and presumption on the part of*

*man! How fearful the malice of sin! Such will be the inference from the first truth. To impress you with the fear of ever offending God is the object of this sermon.*

O Immaculate Mother of my Lord and my God, and you, O holy angels, who are His ministers and servants, obtain for us all the grace to know what a terrible thing it is to commit sin, and thereby to despise Our Lord and God, that we may never dare to offend Him.

God is the Lord.

Amongst all the titles which, as far as our weak understanding can know His infinite attributes, properly belong to God, there is none that He has reserved to Himself in such a special manner as that of the Lord, the Almighty Lord. Whenever He speaks of Himself, or is spoken of in the Holy Scripture, it is nearly always by the name of Lord. With this He begins, continues, and ends all His command and laws. "Thus saith the Lord," are the words with which the Prophets begin their inspired utterances; "Thus saith the Lord Almighty," are the words in which they conclude them. If He promises His people to protect them against their enemies, or to free them from tribulation, He generally confirms His words by saying, "And you shall know that I am the Lord." If He threatens punishment and eternal death to the wicked and disobedient, He gives a terrible emphasis to His words by adding, "And they shall know that I am the Lord." If He is asked why He does this or that in such and such a way, His answer is: "Because I am the Lord." So that it is the same whether we say the Lord or the Almighty: God has done it, or the Lord has done it: "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." Thus He shows the greatness of His majesty and unlimited supreme power over all created things, which He cannot and will not share with any creature, and which all creatures must obey, like servants and slaves, with the greatest submission.

He is the Lord of infinite greatness.

But how great is the Lord our God? That is a useless question to ask, my dear brethren. If I wish to answer it, I should use the words of Epictetus; if I could say how great God is, then, "either I should be another God, or God should not be what He is."<sup>2</sup> For He alone can understand and say how great He is, and He can say it to no one but Himself; because no understanding outside of Him can comprehend the height and greatness of His majesty. Ask the heavenly hosts of angels

<sup>1</sup> Dominus dedit. Dominus abstulit, sit nomen Domini benedictum.—Job 1. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Aut Deus non esset Deus, aut ego essem deus.

who surround His throne, and see Him clearly, how great this Lord is. They will turn away from you in silence, and trembling with awe, veil their faces before Him, as if they could not bear the brightness of His Majesty. If I place Him above everything in Heaven and on earth, if I say that God in His goodness and perfection far surpasses all that He has created and will create, I should do Him more injury than honor by a comparison of the kind; just as if I were to compare a man to a worm, and say that he far surpasses the worm in excellence. "Lord," says St. Ambrose, "if I say Thou art greater than all created things, I do Thee an injury by comparing Thee with Thy works."<sup>1</sup> The philosopher Simonides offered a great insult to God when, on being asked about the essence and perfection of God, he requested three days' time to consider the question, and at the expiration of that time, deferred answering for another three days, so that his answer might be complete and satisfactory. Three days indeed, and three days again! If all the Cherubim and Seraphim were to spend a whole eternity thinking of it, they could neither understand nor explain what a great Lord God is. This is all we can think and say with the Prophet David: "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and of His greatness there is no end."<sup>2</sup> So great is He, that St. Paul is amazed that He should not be ashamed to be concerned about us, and to be called our God: "God is not ashamed to be called their God."<sup>3</sup>

If we consider His power, who can resist Him? He is the Lord; to will and to accomplish is the same thing to Him. Does He wish to create the world and all that is in it, or millions of worlds vaster and more beautiful than this? He requires no help, no instrument for that purpose, but a single word, the breath of His mouth, as the royal Prophet says: "By the word of the Lord the heavens were established; and all the power of them by the spirit of His mouth."<sup>4</sup> And where does He place the world? On what foundation? "He hangeth the earth upon nothing."<sup>5</sup> Let the most clever inventors, the most experienced masters and talented artists of the whole world put their heads together, and see whether they

God is Almighty.

<sup>1</sup> Domine, si te omnibus majorem dixero, injuriose te tuis operibus comparavi.—S. Ambros. l. 5, de fide, c. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Magnus Dominus et laudabilis nimis, et magnitudinis ejus non est finis.—Ps. cxliv. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Non confunditur Deus, vocari Deus eorum.—Hebr. xi. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Verbo Domini cœli firmati sunt, et spiritu oris ejus omnis virtus eorum.—Ps. xxxii. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Appendit terram super nihilum.—Job xxvi. 7.

can find any way of making even an apple remain unsupported in the air without falling to the ground. But our Lord and our God can keep the vast globe of the earth in the midst of the air without support or foundation for it to rest on: "He hangeth the earth upon nothing." Does He wish to destroy the earth and reduce it to nothing? Again, He need only make a sign as the Jewish hero, Judas Machabaeus, reminded his soldiers, when exhorting them to fight bravely. "For they," he said of the enemy, "trust in their weapons, and in their boldness; but we trust in the Almighty Lord, who at a beck can utterly destroy both them that come against us, and the whole world."<sup>1</sup> If any man had strength enough to crush to powder a ball of stone or iron by merely closing his fingers on it, who would allow himself to be grasped by such a hand? And yet what would it be, compared to the mighty hand of the Lord? If we consider His riches, we find that He has everything, and wants nothing. "Thou O Lord of all things, who wantest nothing"<sup>2</sup> was the prayer of the priests in the Old Law. "Is there any numbering of His soldiers?"<sup>3</sup> asks the friend of Job. Consider His pomp and magnificence, as the Prophet Daniel describes it, and you will cry out in astonishment: "Thousands of thousands ministered to Him, and ten thousand times a hundred thousand stood before Him."<sup>4</sup> O ye monarchs and kings of this world, you must grovel in the dust before this Lord! No matter how great the power He has given you, you are not able, by your utmost efforts, to create a single blade of grass; with all your might you cannot command even a single drop of rain to respect your crowned heads, nor a single gnat not to disturb your rest! In spite of the respect, reverence, and submission that are due to your exalted persons, you must humbly acknowledge, that, compared to this Lord, you are infinitely lowlier and meaner than the poorest beggar is, when compared to you! He is the Lord of lords, who alone can say of Himself: "I am the Lord, and there is none else."<sup>5</sup>

And yet, what a fearful crime it is in the eyes of the world, to offend an earthly sovereign! He bears the scepter in one hand,

How presumptuous the man who dares to despise this Lord!

<sup>1</sup> Nam illi quidem armis confidunt, at, simul et audacia: nos autem in omnipotente Domino, qui potest et venientes adversum nos et universum mundum uno nutu delere, confidimus.—II. Mach. viii. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Tu Domine universorum, qui nullius indiges.—Ibid. xiv. 35.

<sup>3</sup> Numquid est numerus militum ejus?—Job xxv. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Milia militum ministrabant ei; et decies milles centena milia assistebant ei.—Dan. vii. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Ego Dominus et non est alter.—Isa. xiv. 6.

and the sword in the other, to punish those who dare to resist his authority; the laying waste whole cities and countries is sometimes not punishment enough for a single insult offered to an earthly ruler. But why, dear brethren, speak of the kings and monarchs of earth? What a disturbance is sometimes created in a family, if a servant is disobedient or obstinate! What a crime it must then be, what wickedness and presumption, for a mere mortal to dare to offend the Almighty Lord, and to despise Him! Could one believe such a thing to be possible? "Can the vile dust of the earth," asks St. Bernard in astonishment, "dare to offend such awful Majesty?"<sup>1</sup>

Alas, it is not impossible; it may happen; it has happened frequently; it still happens every day and hour, and it will happen. You, and I, and all who commit mortal sin, are guilty of that wickedness and presumption. We insult our Lord and our God by despising His authority, His majesty, and His almighty and supreme power. Is it not "the Lord Himself, against whom we have sinned?"<sup>2</sup> There is no necessity of wasting time in proving this; every one knows it who understands what sin is. For what else is sin but a transgression of the divine commands, an opposition of a created will to the will of the Creator; in a word, a rebellion and disobedience by which man refuses to do what God wills him to do, or does what God forbids him to do. Hear how this great Lord complains by the Prophet Isaias of all sinners: "I called, and you did not answer; I spoke, and you did not hear; and you did evil in my eyes, and you have chosen the things that displease me:"<sup>3</sup> you have refused to do as I commanded you. "You slighted the commandment of the Lord your God, and did not believe Him, neither would you hearken to His voice; but were always rebellious."<sup>4</sup> This very day, the Lord says to you, O sinner, and to me, that we must keep within the bounds of the law He has laid down for us, and never refuse Him our service. But what answer do we give Him, when we commit sin? Hear what He says by the Prophet Jeremias: "Thou hast broken my yoke, thou hast burst my bonds, and thou saidst, I will not serve."<sup>5</sup> And yet I have placed a sweet

Yet it is done by every one who sins mortally.

<sup>1</sup> Tam terribilem Majestatem audet vitis pulvisculus irritare?

<sup>2</sup> Nonne Dominus ipse, cui peccavimus?—Isa. xiii. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Vocavi, et non respondistis: locutus sum, et non audistis, et faciebatis malum in oculis meis, et quæ nolui, elegistis.—Ibid. lxx. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Contempnistis imperium Domini Dei vestri, et non credidistis ei, neque vocem ejus audire voluistis, sed semper fuistis rebelles.—Deut. ix. 23, 24.

<sup>5</sup> Confregisti jugum meum, rupisti vincula mea, et dixisti: Non serviam.—Jer. ii. 20.

yoke and a light burden on thee:"<sup>1</sup> but, like an untamed horse, thou hast thrown off My yoke and My burden, and trampled them under foot: "Thou hast broken My yoke." The commandments I have given thee, are so many bonds to bind thee in My love and service, and in the true freedom of My children; but thou hast torn them asunder, and hast dared to refuse absolutely to obey Me, and to serve Me. If thy friend asked anything of thee, thou wouldst grant it willingly, and wouldst count it an honor and a pleasure to serve him; and thou art ready to do just as much for a neighbor, or a mere acquaintance, or even for an utter stranger. But when I, thy only and supreme Lord, ask thee for anything, thou answerest without shame: no, I will not serve.

By breaking any commandment, he opposes the will of God.

Yes, O great Lord, so shamefully do I treat Thee whenever I transgress Thy commands! Thou sayest to me that I must sanctify the Lord's day, and devote all Sundays and holydays to Thy service alone by good works; but I answer: no, I will not serve; I will spend those days in gambling and drinking. Thou sayest I must honor my father and mother, and treat them with due respect, obey and love them; but with all disobedient children, I answer: no, I will not serve. Thou commandest parents to "bring up their children in the discipline and correction of the Lord;"<sup>2</sup> to train them up in Thy fear and love for their last end, not to teach them worldly vanities, but to keep them from evil, and lead them on to good. No, says the father or mother, I will not serve; Thou mayest command me a thousand times, but I will not obey. "But I say to you, love your enemies;"<sup>3</sup> forgive them from your hearts; do not cherish hatred, anger, or a desire of revenge. But the vindictive man refuses to obey; let me only get my enemy in my power, he says, and I will revenge myself in spite of Thy command; I will not obey; I cannot and will not endure the sight of that man. Thou commandest us not to steal, nor to injure another's property, either by word or deed, or to hinder another's prosperity, or to retain anything unjustly. No, is the answer; I will not serve; I will steal whenever I can; I will get possession of that property unjustly; I will not make restitution. Thou commandest us not to commit adultery, nor to give way to impurity even in thought or desire, much less in

<sup>1</sup> Jugum enim meum suave est, et onus meum leve.—Matth. xi. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Educate illos in disciplina et correptione Domini.—Ephes. vi. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Ego autem dico vobis : Diligite inimicos vestros.—Matth. v. 44.

words or acts; to avoid dangerous company, and to renounce at once that unlawful attachment. But the answer is again, I will not serve; I prefer Thy creature to Thy command; I will give every freedom to my eyes, ears, and other senses; I must gratify my lusts. Thou commandest us not to curse our neighbor, nor to wish him harm, not to speak ill of him, nor in any way to scandalize him, or give him occasion to sin. But Thy command is disregarded; I will not serve, is the answer; I will not obey. Thou sayest: But I am the Lord thy God who command thee! No matter, I will not obey. But I will punish thee in hell with the demons, if thou art disobedient! No matter, I disregard Thy threats; I will not serve.

See, O presumptuous mortal, so insolently do you act towards Him whom you know to be your supreme Lord and God, whenever you commit a mortal sin! I say, Him whom you know to be your supreme Lord; for when King Pharaoh was told, on the part of God, that he should allow the Israelites to go, he answered at once: "Who is the Lord that I should hear His voice? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go."<sup>1</sup> Pharaoh paid no attention to what the God of Israel said. But he would have shown far greater pride and insolence, if he had said: I know the Lord, but I will not hear His voice, nor receive any commands from Him. What the shameless pride of Pharaoh could not do, that you do, O sinner! For you acknowledge God to be your supreme Lord and Master; you know full well what He so earnestly requires of you; and yet you dare to say to Him that you will not hear His voice, nor listen to His command, nor obey Him, nor serve Him. Is not that despising His authority and supreme power? Is not that an act of rebellion against His will? And a creature dares to act thus towards his Creator! A vile worm of the earth, towards the great God! If the Lord were your equal, could you act more insolently towards Him? But, you think, far be that from me; I have never said such a thing in my whole life; I have sinned, not through contempt of God, but for the sake of gain or pleasure. True, you have not said it in words; but you have by your sinful actions, which speak louder than any tongue could, and are understood better by the Lord who knows all things. If I give you a blow on the cheek, although I keep silent, and do not say I wish to hurt you, you feel it all the same, and I have insulted you; for I

By his acts  
he says to  
God: I will  
not do as  
Thou com-  
mandest.

<sup>1</sup> Quis est Dominus, ut audiem vocem ejus? Nescio Dominum, et Israel non dimittam  
—Exod. v. 2.

know well that you do not like it. You command your servant-maid to do something; she says nothing, but does not obey; you may command or threaten as you will, she continues obstinate. Do you not think her guilty of contemning your authority? You certainly do not propose to yourself contempt of God as the end and aim of your actions; but in reality you do condemn Him, since you know that act to be in direct opposition to His express command. What greater presumption can there be?

He encourages others not to hear the voice of God.

Yet the presumption of most sinners goes even beyond this, and they offer a still more grievous insult to the Lord. For he who sins, and who requires an accomplice and helper in his sin, if only in thought and desire, not only disobeys his Lord and his God, but, terrible to think, actually makes others share in his disobedience. He wishes, as it were, to be a greater lord than God; he sets more value on his own will and command, than on the will and command of the Almighty. See now whether this is not the case. The sinner says, not in word, but in deed, I desire to prove that God is less deserving of obedience than I; He forbids that man to swear rashly, or to bear false witness; but my wish is that he should do so, my interest requires it, and I will cajole and bribe him until he accedes to my wish. God commands all men to abstain from drunkenness, and not to injure their reason or their health by excessive indulgence; but I wish the contrary to happen; I will ply that man with drink until he is completely intoxicated. The Lord commands that married woman or that maiden to observe chastity according to her state; but my wish is that she should help me to gratify my sensual desires, and she will do it, in spite of what God commands her; He promises her eternal joys, if she is faithful to Him; I have nothing for her but a few flattering words, and she will listen to me rather than to God. The Lord forbids that official to be untrue to his trust, that lawyer to defend an unjust cause, that judge to pronounce an unjust sentence, that superior to tolerate any injustice; He causes them to hear His voice by His preachers and confessors; He threatens them with a terrible judgment and the flames of hell, if they do not hearken to Him, but all to no purpose; my money, or persuasion, or trickery, or authority will have the contrary effect, and my will must be done.

What fearful presumption!

O my Lord and my God, canst Thou behold this and yet bear it patiently? Ye heavens, how can you restrain your thunderbolts from avenging the insult thus offered your Creator? O man, can you dare to think of such wickedness, not to speak of

committing it? A rebel angel once thought to himself, "I will ascend into Heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, I will ascend above the height of the clouds, I will be like the Most High;" and like a flash of lightning he was hurled into the abyss of hell. But man goes, so to speak, still further; he is not satisfied with being equal to God; he must have greater authority than He; his will must be preferred to the will of God: "For he hath stretched out his hand against God, and hath strengthened himself against the Almighty."<sup>2</sup> What a fearful thing that is! If a subject rebels against his earthly sovereign, the whole country demands that he expiate his crime with his life, and even death by the gallows or wheel is deemed insufficient chastisement for his presumption; and who pities even the death agony of such a criminal! Yet a miserable mortal dares to revolt against Heaven, against the almighty, infinite majesty of God, and to say, I will not serve, I will not do as my Lord and my God commands; but no one is disturbed thereat; it happens every hour of the day; we bear with it in our children and domestics; we do it ourselves and intend doing it again!

Miserable mortal, what makes you so daring and insolent as thus to provoke one who can in a moment hurl you into the depths of hell? Suppose I held you by the hair of the head suspended over the parapet of a bridge, ready to drop you into the water, how would you behave towards me? Would you struggle against me, abuse and curse, and try to beat me? Oh no; you would keep quite still, for I need only open my hand to let you drop into the river below, where you would be drowned. I think you would rather be inclined to talk very gently to me, and to beg my pardon most humbly, if you had ever done anything to offend me. And yet, if I, dear brethren, let you fall, I should only take away your temporal life; I could not do your soul the least harm. Now I ask you, has not your Lord and your God got you in His hands, far more than I should in that imaginary case? When, how, and where He wills, He has complete power over you. If He withdraws His all-powerful hand from you, where will you fall? Not into a river, from which you might possibly be rescued, but into the abyss of hell, thus losing not only the temporal life of the body, but the eternal life of the soul. He is the Lord whom Christ tells us to fear, in the

Shown by a  
simile.

In caelum conscendam, super astra Dei exaltabo solium meum; ascendam super altitudinem nubium, similis ero Altissimo.—Isa. xiv. 13, 14.

<sup>2</sup> Tetendit enim adversus Deum manum suam, et contra Omnipotentem roboratus est.—Job xv. 25.

Gospel of St. Matthew: "Fear Him that can destroy both soul and body into hell."<sup>1</sup>

All creatures are ready to avenge such an insult to their Creator.

Nor would it cost him any trouble to do this in a moment; for all the creatures He has made are so many executioners who stand ready to do His bidding, and to inflict punishment on you. For, as St. Thomas of Aquin, the Angelic Doctor, says, even senseless creatures have an innate desire and inclination to avenge, as far as they can, every insult offered to their Creator.<sup>2</sup> They all cry out against the sinner, just as Abisai did against Semei, who was reviling his King David: "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? I will go and cut off his head."<sup>3</sup> I will go, cries out the fire, when man sins and despises his Creator, I will go, O Creator, and burn him to ashes! I will go, exclaims the water, and overwhelm him, and drown him! I will withdraw from him, says the air, that he may be suffocated. I will open under his feet, cries out the earth, and swallow him up. We will go, howl the wild beasts in the wilderness, and devour him. I will go, barks out his own dog, and tear him to pieces. I will fall in upon him, says the house in which he has sinned, and crush him. The lightning and hail are ready to strike him. The demons are only waiting the word to carry him off. If the Lord only gave a sign, there would be an end to the sinner. And yet, O man, you, who are so completely in the hands of God, in all places and at all times, dare to defy and provoke Him, to despise His commands, and to say by your actions, I will not serve Thee, O Lord; I will not do as Thou commandest!

This shows the great malice of every sin.

This, my dear brethren, is enough to make our hair stand on end with horror. To sin means to despise the Almighty God, and not to do as He wills. That is a consideration that should make you pine away with grief and sorrow, if you have committed but one mortal sin; and it should at all events keep you from all grievous sin in future. To sin means to despise the Almighty God! Oh, if we thought of that as we ought, which is, alas, the last thing the vain world thinks of, we certainly should not be astonished to hear, that, as the learned Sessius says, God receives more dishonor and insult from a single sin, than He does honor and glory from all the good works of the angels and saints in Heaven, and of the just on earth. "Sin," says the learned

<sup>1</sup> Timee eum, qui potest et animam et corpus perdere in gehennam.—Matth. x. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Naturaliter est insitus cuilibet creature appetitus vindicandi injuriam creatoris.

<sup>3</sup> Quare maledicit canis hic mortuus domino meo regi? vadam, et amputabo caput ejus.—II. Kings xvi. 9.

author, "appears greater to God as an evil, than all good works do as a good. If God were capable of feeling pain, sin would cause Him more affliction, than good works cause him joy."<sup>1</sup> He would feel more sorrow at one act of revenge, than He does joy at the heroic virtue displayed by those who for His sake forgive their worst enemies; He would be more troubled by one act of impurity, than consoled by the spotless purity of all virgins, and of His own ever Immaculate Mother Mary; He would be more embittered by the irreverence of those who talk, and laugh, and behave disrespectfully in church, than pleased at the zeal and devotion of the most pious souls. The reason of this, says Sessius, is "because all the works of men are as nothing compared to God,"<sup>2</sup> and we should owe God a tribute of infinite honor and love, if we were capable of paying it. But what is most intolerable in the sight of God, is that a miserable creature should despise and dishonor Him. If we only thought of that aright, we should not be surprised at what St. Catharine of Siena says, that if we knew clearly what a great injury is offered God by sin, and were in the midst of a fiery furnace surrounded by flames, and could save ourselves therefrom by committing sin, we would rather burn to death, than commit a single sin. Nor should we be astonished at St. Anselm, who said that if he had to choose between offending God, and being buried forever in hell, he would prefer the latter.

And this is the reason why mortal sin is punished eternally. Many a one may think that God is too strict with His poor creatures, that the pains of hell are too severe for a single sin, and that it is not right to have to spend a whole eternity in fearful torments for a momentary pleasure, that may have been consented to only in thought. True, my dear brethren, it is a severe punishment to have to spend a hundred years, a hundred thousand million years, in hell, and yet to have hardly reached the beginning, not to speak of the end of eternity, and that, too, for one sin that was committed in a moment. But if we consider the malice and presumption with which it was committed, we shall find that it is not the momentary pleasure which is so severely punished, but the perverse will with which the sinner has enjoyed that pleasure, knowing that he was acting against God's express command. And if we remember what a great Lord He

Which is  
justly pun-  
ished in  
hell.

<sup>1</sup> Peccatum plus a Deo aestimatur in ratione mali, quam omnia opera bona in ratione boni. Peccatum magis Deum affligeret, si capax esset doloris, quam omnia opera bona exhilararent.

<sup>2</sup> Omnia opera hominum sunt ad instar nihil respectu Dei.

is who is thus despised, and whose Majesty is thus insulted, knowingly and deliberately and for such a miserable thing, by one who is always in the power of that Lord, then we shall understand why theologians say that the punishment of hell, instead of being too severe for one sin, is not severe enough, and that God shows His mercy even when chastising sinners eternally.

The consideration of this should keep us from all sin.

What, O sinners, are the thoughts and resolutions that this truth inspires you with? Will you still continue in the state in which you now are? Ah, I beg of you, change at once! You have against you a great Lord, whose enmity you have first provoked by wanton insults, and from whose power you can never escape. Woe to you, if He should now wish to take vengeance on you! Do you intend to sin again? Ah, think of what you do! The duration of the sin is short, the pleasure or profit it brings you, is small; but the injury you thereby offer to God is exceeding great. If you are ever assailed by a violent passion or temptation, if company or occasion is about to lead you into sin, if the desire of unjust gain, or of revenge, or the unlawful love of a creature almost compels you to transgress the divine law; then, I beg of you, wait a moment; say to yourselves first: where am I going to? what am I doing? My sovereign Lord is present and sees me; shall I, in spite of that, say to Him, I will not serve, I will not obey Thee? If that thought is not enough to keep you from sin, you have either reached the farthest limits of presumption, madness, and desperation, or else you have no real faith in God and His commandments.

As it kept Joseph from sin.

What a fearful temptation it was that Joseph had to endure in Egypt from the continual solicitations of that wanton woman, as the Holy Scripture says. And yet the mere thought of the injury he would do his master by consenting, was enough to keep him from sin. "How can I do this wicked thing," he said, "and sin against my God?"<sup>1</sup> Not only am I unwilling, but actually unable to do it. But why, O Joseph, can you not do evil? So many of your ancestors and relations have committed grievous sins. Think of what your own brothers did; was not "Her, the first-born of Juda, wicked in the sight of the Lord?"<sup>2</sup> Were not all your brothers guilty of the greatest injustice to you, when they sold you into slavery? Why then can you not sin? Ah, I should offend my God, and I cannot do that; it is impossible. Such too, my dear brethren, should be our dispositions

<sup>1</sup> Quomodo possum hoc malum facere, et peccare in Deum meum?—Gen. xxxix. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Nequam in conspectu Domini.—Ibid. xxxviii. 7.

in all temptations and occasions of sin. Shall I sin against God? we should say: no, I cannot do this evil thing. If I dwell on this sinful thought, I shall offend my Lord and my God; how can I do this wicked thing! If I speak impurely, uncharitably, or profanely, I shall speak against my God; how can I do this wicked thing? If I commit this act of injustice, impurity, or revenge, I shall violate the express command of God; how then can I do this wicked thing, and sin against my God?

Ah, my Lord and my God! I am ashamed of myself when I speak these words; how often and how shamelessly have I not offended Thee hitherto! I have, alas, been able to do many wicked things, for I have done them, and have sinned against Thee in thought, word, and deed, and have despised Thee by trampling under foot Thy holy law. Oh foolish presumption! I have not wished to do as Thou hast commanded me! Thy will and command have had as little influence with me, as if I had to do, not with the true living God, but with an idol hewn out of wood or stone. And what should now most astonish me? My own presumption in revolting against Thy awful majesty, and offending Thee by my sins, although I am a miserable worm of the earth, who am always in need of Thy help and protection; or the patience with which Thou hast borne with me for so many years, allowing me to treat Thee so unjustly, and remonstrating with me, as if Thou hadst not the power of defending Thyself against my attacks? O heavenly spirits, what did you think, when you saw me, a handful of dust and ashes, despising your Lord and mine? While you were veiling your faces, trembling with awe before His divine majesty, and crying out, Holy, Holy, Holy; I, a miserable mortal, stretched out my hand against Heaven, and like a rabid dog, raved against your God, crying out in my madness, I will not serve; I will not do what God commands! Oh! how were you able to restrain yourselves from taking up arms against me, as against a rebellious Lucifer, and avenging the insult offered to our Creator by hurling me into hell? I know who restrained you; it was the same God whom I offended, and who is as good as He is great, and desires not the death, but the repentance of His disobedient servant. Why then do I delay? why do I not at once throw myself at His feet and beg for mercy and pardon? Perhaps this is the hour in which my long-suffering Lord has determined to take vengeance on me? Oh no, merciful Lord, wait a little! Behold me at Thy feet, full of contrition and sorrow! I have sinned against Thee;

Sorrow, and  
resolution to  
avoid all  
sin.

I have shamelessly and presumptuously sinned against Thee; I acknowledge it. But I am sorry for it from the bottom of my heart, not on account of the punishment that I so richly deserve, but on account of the injury I have offered Thee, my sovereign Lord. Have mercy on me according to Thy great mercy! I will at once do Thy will by candidly confessing my sins, to my own confusion, and I will never again, during my whole life, consent to sin; rather would I suffer the pains of hell, than offend Thee. Hence forward I shall be the more zealous in Thy service, as I have hitherto been more shameless in insulting and despising Thee. I will show, by Thy grace in all my actions, that I honor, fear, and love Thee, who art our Almighty Lord. Amen.

*Another Introduction to the same sermon for the Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle.*

Text.

*Dominus meus, et Deus meus.*—John xx. 28.

“My Lord, and my God.”

The holy Apostle St. Thomas may be considered as a true model of a penitent, since in those words of his, “My Lord and my God,” he includes all the parts of true penance. For, in the first place, he repents of and detests forever all the sins he committed by his incredulity and obstinacy, and in the second place he confesses those sins in the same words. At the same time he alludes to the reason of his repentant confession, namely, that by his sins he had offended his Lord and his God. O sinner, is there one amongst you who has a difficulty in acknowledging and detesting his sins? Let him only consider, with the repentant Thomas, those words, “My Lord and my God,” Thee have I offended. Therein he will find reason enough for a most heartfelt sorrow. To that end I shall now spend a little more time than usual in considering those words. This sermon will be found profitable, etc.—*Continues as before.*

*On the strict justice of God against sinners, on the wickedness, obduracy, and temporal punishment of sinners, see the following Third Part. On the eternal punishment of the wicked, see the following Fifth Part.*

END OF THE FOURTH VOLUME.

*To the greater honor and glory of God, of the most Blessed Virgin Mary, the Queen of Heaven, and of all the holy Angels Guardian, and to the salvation of souls.*

# INDEX OF SERMONS.

## FOR ALL THE SUNDAYS OF THE YEAR.

### First Sunday of Advent.

	VOL.	PAGE.
SERMON 29.—On the different Kinds of Superstition and its Malice. . . . .	i.	397

### Second Sunday of Advent.

SERMON 28.—On Those who Seek Advice from Fortune-tellers. . . . .	i.	382
<i>May be also preached on the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost.</i>		

### Third Sunday of Advent.

SERMON 73.—On the Lying Tongue. . . . .	ii.	463
---	-----	-----

### Fourth Sunday of Advent.

SERMON 30.—On Superstition in Sacred Things. . . . .	i.	411
<i>May be also preached on the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost.</i>		

### Sunday within the Octave of the Nativity.

SERMON 60.—On the evil Effects of Scandal. . . . .	ii.	292
<i>May be also preached on the Feast of the Angels Guardian.</i>		

### First Sunday after Epiphany.

SERMON 46.—On the dangerous State of Those who seldom Hear the Word of God. . . . .	ii.	107
<i>May be preached on the Feast of the Dedication of a Church.</i>		

### Second Sunday after Epiphany.

SERMON 47.—On Those who Hear the Word of God without Fruit. . . . .	ii.	120
<i>May be preached also on the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost.</i>		

### Third Sunday after Epiphany.

SERMON 48.—On Those who Hear the Word of God with hard Hearts. . . . .	ii.	183
<i>May be preached on the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost.</i>		

	VOL.	PAGE.
<b>Fourth Sunday after Epiphany.</b>		
<b>SERMON 50.</b> —On the small Number of Those who Hear Sermons properly.	ii.	158
<i>May be preached on the Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost.</i>		
<b>Fifth Sunday after Epiphany.</b>		
<b>SERMON 71.</b> —On the Impure Tongue.	ii.	439
<b>Sixth Sunday after Epiphany.</b>		
<b>SERMON 27.</b> —On Sloth in the Service of God.	i.	367
<i>May be preached on the Third Sunday after Pentecost.</i>		
<b>Septuagesima Sunday.</b>		
<b>SERMON 51.</b> —How unjustly They act who disgrace the Season of Shrove-Tide.	ii.	171
<b>Sexagesima Sunday.</b>		
<b>SERMON 17.</b> —On the Nature and Characteristics of Gluttony.	i.	236
<i>May be preached also on the First Sunday in Lent.</i>		
<b>Quinquagesima Sunday.</b>		
<b>SERMON 53.</b> —On the Indecency and the Bitterness of the Pleasures of Shrove-Tide.	ii.	197
<b>First Sunday in Lent.</b>		
<b>SERMON 19.</b> —On How the Fasts of the Church which are Violated by Gluttony are to be Observed.	i.	259
<b>Second Sunday in Lent.</b>		
<b>SERMON 20.</b> —On the End and Object of Fasting, which is Frustrated by Gluttony.	i.	271
<b>Third Sunday in Lent.</b>		
<b>SERMON 21.</b> —On the Unaccountable Folly of Those who Injure their Health by Excessive Drinking.	i.	283
<b>Fourth Sunday in Lent.</b>		
<b>SERMON 22.</b> —On the Shameful Malice of Those who Impoverish themselves, and Injure their Good Name by Excessive Drinking.	i.	294
<b>Fifth Sunday in Lent.</b>		
<b>SERMON 23.</b> —On the Guilt and Sinful Effects of Habitual Drunkenness.	i.	366
<b>Easter Sunday.</b>		
<b>SERMON 38.</b> —On Ingratitude as a Vice hateful to God, and yet very common.	ii.	7
<i>May be preached also on the Thirtieth Sunday after Pentecost.</i>		

*Index of Sermons.*

511

VOL. PAGE.

**First Sunday after Easter.**

- SERMON 54.—On Nightly Promiscuous Gatherings of Young People. . . . . ii. 209  
*May be preached also on the Second Sunday after Epiphany.*

**Second Sunday after Easter.**

- SERMON 41.—On the Punishment of Ingratitude. . . . . ii. 43

**Third Sunday after Easter.**

- SERMON 74.—On the Shamelessness of Those who boast of their Sins. . . . . ii. 475

**Fourth Sunday after Easter.**

- SERMON 75.—On the Hopeless State of Those who Boast of Their Sins. . . . . ii. 485

**Fifth Sunday after Easter.**

- SERMON 37.—On False and Useless Prayer. . . . . i. 502

**Sixth Sunday after Easter.**

- SERMON 68.—On the Depravity of Cursing. . . . . ii. 401

**Pentecost Sunday.**

- SERMON 69.—On the Malice of Cursing. . . . . ii. 414

**First Sunday after Pentecost.**

- SERMON 70.—On the Necessity of Correcting the Habit of Cursing. . . . . ii. 426

**Second Sunday after Pentecost.**

- SERMON 32.—On Unworthy Communion. . . . . i. 438

**Third Sunday after Pentecost.**

- SERMON 64.—On the Wickedness of Defaming the Character of Our Neighbor. . . . . ii. 352

**Fourth Sunday after Pentecost.**

- SERMON 3.—On the Vain Labor of the Proud. . . . . i. 39

**Fifth Sunday after Pentecost.**

- SERMON 65.—On the Irreparable Injury caused by Defaming Another's Character. . . . . ii. 364

**Sixth Sunday after Pentecost.**

- SERMON 18.—On the Injurious Effects of Gluttony. . . . . i. 249  
*May be preached also on the Second Sunday of Lent.*

**Seventh Sunday after Pentecost.**

- SERMON 66.—On the Manifold Ways of Defaming Our Neighbor's Character, and the Excuses that are generally made for this Sin. . . . . ii. 376

	VOL.	PAGE.
<b>Eighth Sunday after Pentecost.</b>		
SERMON 6.—On the Vain Labor of the Avaricious.	i.	84
<b>Ninth Sunday after Pentecost.</b>		
SERMON 7.—On the Carelessness of the Avaricious in Neglecting God during Life.	i.	98
<b>Tenth Sunday after Pentecost.</b>		
SERMON 8.—On the Unhappy Death of the Avaricious.	i.	112
<b>Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost.</b>		
SERMON 67.—On Those who Hear uncharitable Talk.	ii.	388
<b>Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost.</b>		
SERMON 9.—On Injustice as an Effect of Avarice.	i.	126
<b>Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost.</b>		
SERMON 10.—On the Necessity of Restoring Ill-Gotten Goods.	i.	140
<b>Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost.</b>		
SERMON 76.—On the Presumption of Every Sinner.	ii.	495
<i>May be preached also on the Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle.</i>		
<b>Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost.</b>		
SERMON 11.—On the Circumstances of Restitution.	i.	154
<b>Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost.</b>		
SERMON 62.—On the Injustice of finding fault with and interpreting in a bad Sense the Actions of Others.	ii.	323
<b>Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost.</b>		
SERMON 58.—On the small Number of Those who Love their Neighbor.	ii.	264
<b>Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost.</b>		
SERMON 31.—On Blasphemy.	i.	425
<b>Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost.</b>		
SERMON 35.—On the Malice of Irreverence in Church, and the Punishment it deserves.	i.	476
<i>May be preached also on the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost.</i>		
<b>Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost.</b>		
SERMON 13.—On the Incurableness of the Vice of Impurity.	i.	183
<b>Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost.</b>		
SERMON 24.—On the Unreasonableness of giving way to Anger, and the best Means of Controlling it.	i.	320

	VOL.	PAGE.
<b>Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost.</b>		
SERMON 55.—On the Deformity of Human Respect. . . . .	ii.	225
<b>Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost.</b>		
SERMON 56.—On the Injustice of Human Respect. . . . .	ii.	237
<b>Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost.</b>		
SERMON 72.—On the Loquacious Tongue. . . . .	ii.	451
<i>May be preached also on the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost.</i>		

INDEX OF SERMONS

FOR THE PRINCIPAL FEASTS OF THE YEAR.

<b>On the Feast of St. Andrew, Apostle.</b>		
SERMON 43.—On rejecting the Divine Inspirations. . . . .	ii.	69
<b>On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.</b>		
SERMON 12.—On the Folly of Impure Desires of Sensual Pleasures. . . . .	i.	170
<i>May be also preached on the Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost.</i>		
<b>On the Feast of St. Thomas, Apostle.</b>		
SERMON 59.—On the Manifold Ways and the Wickedness of giving Scandal. . . . .	ii.	279
<i>May be preached also on the Sixth Sunday after Easter.</i>		
<b>On the Feast of St. Stephen, the First Martyr.</b>		
SERMON 25.—How unbecoming it is to seek Revenge. . . . .	i.	33
<b>On the Feast of St. John, Apostle.</b>		
SERMON 63.—On the Injury done to One's self and to God by Fault-Finding. . . . .	ii.	336
<b>On the Feast of the Epiphany.</b>		
SERMON 44.—On Those who refuse to acknowledge the Divine Inspirations. . . . .	ii.	80
<b>On the Feast of the Purification.</b>		
SERMON 14.—On the Anger of God against the Vice of Impurity. . . . .	i.	197
<b>On the Feast of St. Matthias, Apostle.</b>		
SERMON 51.—How Unjustly they act, who disgrace the Season of Shrove-Tide. . . . .	ii.	171
<i>May be preached also on Quinquagesima Sunday.</i>		

	VOL.	PAGE.
<b>On the Feast of the Annunciation.</b>		
SERMON 45.—On Those who do not at once Follow what they Know to be Divine Inspirations. . . .	ii.	93
<b>On Easter Monday.</b>		
SERMON 6L.—On the Multiplicity of Sins of the Tongue. <i>May be preached also on Pentecost Sunday.</i>	ii.	308
<b>On Easter Tuesday.</b>		
SERMON 39.—On the odious Ingratitude of Those who are under most Obligations to God. . . .	ii.	20
<b>On the Feast of SS. Philip and James, Apostles.</b>		
SERMON 15.—On the Folly of the Envious. . . . <i>May be preached on the Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost.</i>	i.	210
<b>On the Feast of the Ascension.</b>		
SERMON 2.—On the Incredulity of Bad Christians. . . . <i>May be preached also on the Tuesday after Pentecost.</i>	i.	23
<b>On Whit-Monday.</b>		
SERMON 42.—On rejecting the Light of the Holy Ghost.	ii.	56
<b>On Corpus Christi.</b>		
SERMON 33.—On Irreverence to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. . . .	i.	450
<b>On the Feast of St. John the Baptist.</b>		
SERMON 4.—On the Folly of the Proud. . . .	i.	53
<b>On the Feast of SS. Peter and Paul.</b>		
SERMON 1.—On the Malice with which Bad Christians assail the Catholic Church. . . . <i>May be preached also on the Second Sunday after Easter.</i>	i.	7
<b>On the Feast of St. James, Apostle.</b>		
SERMON 5.—On the Characteristics of Pride, and the Means of Attaining Humility. . . . <i>May be preached also on the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost.</i>	i.	68
<b>On the Feast of St. Lawrence, Martyr.</b>		
SERMON 26.—On the Injustice of Revenge. . . . <i>May be preached also on the Feast of St. Stephen.</i>	i.	351
<b>On the Feast of St. Bartholomew, Apostle.</b>		
SERMON 49.—On Those who do not Practise what they Hear in Sermons. . . .	ii.	146

*Index of Sermons.*

515

	VOL.	PAGE.
<b>On the Feast of St. Matthew, Apostle.</b>		
SERMON 16.—On the Malice of Envy. <i>May be Preached on the Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost.</i>	i.	223
<b>On the Feast of St. Michael, Archangel.</b>		
SERMON 40.—On Ingratitude to the Holy Guardian Angels.	ii.	31
<b>On the Feast of SS. Simon and Jude, Apostles.</b>		
SERMON 57.—On unlawful Fashions and Customs. <i>May be preached also on the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost.</i>	ii.	250
<b>On the Feast of All Saints.</b>		
SERMON 36.—On the Profanation of Sundays and Holy-days.	i.	490
<b>On the Feast of the Dedication of a Church.</b>		
SERMON 34.—On Irreverence in Church.	i.	462

## ALPHABETICAL INDEX OF SUBJECTS.

### —A.—

Angels.	SERMON.	MARGINAL NOTE.	VOL.	PAGE.
Neither good nor bad angels can know infallibly the secrets of the human heart. . . . .	72	1	ii.	453
Ingratitude of him who forgets and displeases his angel guardian. . . . .	40		ii.	31
Great care the angels guardian take of their charges. . . . .	40	2 to 5	ii.	32
Many men are ungrateful to them. . . . .	40	10 and fol.	ii.	38
Woe to those who are ungrateful to their angels guardian. . . . .	40	15	ii.	41

### Anger.

Is contrary to sound reason. . . . .	24		i.	320
Draws down the wrath of God. . . . .	24	9	i.	327
How they must behave who have to do with angry people. . . . .	24	10, 11	i.	327
How one must control his anger. . . . .	24	12 to end.	i.	329

*Avarice.—See Money.*

### —B.—

### Beauty.

Corporal beauty is a vain thing. . . . .	4	14	i.	63
--	---	----	----	----

### Benefits.

No one should be upbraided with benefits conferred on him. . . . .	41	1	ii.	44
It is only the ungrateful that God upbraids with His benefits. . . . .	41	3	ii.	45

### Blasphemy.

What it is and how manifold. . . . .	31	2 to 5	ii.	426
A terrible sin. . . . .	31	6, 7	i.	429
“ “ . . . . .	61	13	ii.	319
It is more offensive to God than any other sin. . . . .	31	8, 9	i.	430
Blasphemy in man is worse than in the devils and lost souls. . . . .	31	12	i.	433
Is uttered without any reason through anger. . . . .	31	13	i.	434
Justly punished by God in extraordinary ways. . . . .	31	14	i.	435

	MARGINAL		
SERMON.	NOTE.	VOL.	PAGE.

**Boast.**

To boast of one's sins,—*See Sin.*

**Business.**

Our only business is to serve God and save our souls. . . . .	63	2	ii.	338
---	----	---	-----	-----

—C.—

**Children.**

Wicked children a disgrace to their parents.	1	1	i.	7
Graceless child that forgets its mother.	40	1	ii.	31
Should avoid nightly gatherings.	54	12	ii.	218

**Christ.**

Christ and the devil always in opposition, and inviting men to follow them. . . . .	52	1, 2	ii.	185
Looks on it as an honor to be meek to His enemies; in this all should imitate Him. . . . .	25	14, 15	i.	345
Wishes especially to be honored in the Blessed Sacrament. . . . .	32	3	i.	440

**Christians.**

Bad Christians dishonor the holy name of the Catholic Church. . . . .	1	6, 7, 8	i.	12
More culpable and inexcusable before the judgment-seat of God, than heathens and infidels. . . . .	1	11, 12, 13	i.	17
Will be mocked at in hell. . . . .	1	14	i.	20
First Christians by their mode of life convinced the pagans of the holiness of our religion. . . . .	2	13	i.	34
Many nowadays are put to shame by heathens. . . . .	2	14	i.	35
Give scandal and disgrace our religion by the dissipations of Shrove-tide. . . . .	53	7	ii.	202

**Church.**

Irreverence in church very unbecoming. . . . .	34		i.	462
Splendor and magnificence of the Temple of Jerusalem in former times. . . . .	34	1 to 5	i.	464
God dwells in our churches, and wishes to be specially honored in them. . . . .	34	6 to 8	i.	467
Many are irreverent in church. . . . .	34	9 to 13	i.	468
They offer a great injury to God. . . . .	34	14	i.	473
Profanation of church implies contempt of God. . . . .	35		i.	476
He who is irreverent in church is put to shame by heretics, heathens, and Turks. . . . .	35	5 to 8	i.	480
The devils rejoice at such irreverence. . . . .	35	10	i.	482
God complains of it. . . . .	35	11	i.	482
How severely He punishes such irreverence. . . . .	35	12 to end.	i.	483

	SERMON.	MARGINAL NOTE.	VOL.	PAGE.
<b>Communion.</b>				
By an unworthy Communion Our Lord is treated most unworthily. . . . .	32	1 to 8	i.	439
A terrible sin. . . . .	32	9	i.	445
Committed by many. . . . .	32	10 to 13.	i.	445
<b>Confession.</b>				
Not even in confession must the sins of others be spoken of. . . . .	64	8, 9	ii.	359
The unchaste must accuse themselves mod- estly in confession. . . . .	71	10	ii.	446
Hard to disclose one's own shame in con- fession. . . . .	74	10	ii.	480
Not enough for penance merely to confess one's sins. . . . .	75	1	ii.	486
<b>Conscience.</b>				
Grows uneasy in danger of sin. . . . .	53	11	ii.	206
Still more so after sin is committed. . . . .	53	13	ii.	208
<b>Conversation.</b>				
Many kinds of wicked conversation. . . . .	61		ii.	306
Uncharitable conversation causes much mischief. . . . .	61	8	ii.	314
He who keeps silent when he ought to speak, does wrong. . . . .	72	13	ii.	461
<b>Cursing.</b>				
Cursing is unbecoming a Christian. . . . .	61	2, 3	ii.	310
Is a hellish language. . . . .	68	1 to 10	ii.	402
Is most scandalous. . . . .	68	10 to 12	ii.	408
Eternal reprobation awaits all who are given to cursing; therefore all should avoid it. . . . .	68	14 to 16	ii.	410
In itself it is a grievous sin. . . . .	69	1 to 3	ii.	415
A most injurious sin. . . . .	69	6 to end.	ii.	419
No excuse for the habit of cursing. . . . .	70	1 to 7	ii.	428
Difficult to correct it. . . . .	70	8, 9	ii.	433
Means of correcting it. . . . .	70	10 to end.	ii.	434
—D.—				
<b>Dancing.</b>				
Dancing in nightly gatherings a very dan- gerous occasion of sin. . . . .	54		ii.	209
<b>Death.</b>				
At the hour of death all must leave their money and property to others. . . . .	6	12	i.	92
<b>Debts.</b>				
Not to pay one's debts when one can, is an injustice. . . . .	9	13	i.	134

	SERMON.	MARGINAL NOTE.	VOL.	PAGE.
<b>Detraction.</b>				
A grievous and dangerous sin. . . . .	61	10, 11	ii.	315
Is against the charity we owe our neighbor. . . . .	64	1 to 3	ii.	353
Steals away his good name. . . . .	64	4 to 6	ii.	356
Those who speak against others punished by God. . . . .	64	11, 12	ii.	362
Insurmountable difficulty of atoning for detraction by making due restitution. . . . .	65	2	ii.	365
Therefore all should avoid it. . . . .	65	13	ii.	375
Many circumstances in which one is excused from such restitution. . . . .	65	10, 11, 12	ii.	372
Many ways of defaming others. . . . .	66	1 to 7	ii.	377
Vain excuses alleged by detractors. . . . .	66	9 to end.	ii.	382
How they sin who listen to uncharitable remarks. . . . .	67	1 to 6	ii.	389
How to act so as not to sin by listening to them. . . . .	67	8 to end.	ii.	394

**Descent.**

No one should think highly of himself on account of noble descent. . . . .	4	11	i.	60
--	---	----	----	----

**Devil.**

Is satisfied with a small service from man at first, because he knows he will soon have a greater. . . . .	27	5, 6	i.	371
A fearful sin to ask help from the devil. . . . .	28	1	i.	383
This is done by those who ask certain suspicious characters for advice. . . . .	28	2 to 6	i.	384
The devil can only guess at future things, and generally deceives others about them. . . . .	28	8	i.	388
He can know present and secret visible things; but in such matters, too, he often deceives men. . . . .	28	9	i.	389
Why he wishes to have superstitious practices combined with holy things. . . . .	30	1	i.	412
How foolishly they act, who, by any superstitious practices, seek help from the devil. . . . .	30	11	i.	421
The devil seeks to distract those who are listening to a sermon. . . . .	47	5	ii.	124
Most men take sides with the devil. . . . .	52	3	ii.	187
It is not lawful to curse the devil. . . . .	69	4	ii.	417

**Dress.**

Indecency in dress gives great scandal. . . . .	59	13	ii.	289
Little hope of improvement in this respect. . . . .	59	14	ii.	289

**Drink, Drunkenness.**

Many shorten their lives by excessive drinking. . . . .	21		i.	283
How wicked this is. . . . .	21	8	i.	289

	SERMON.	MARGINAL NOTE.	VOL.	PAGE.
How blind. . . . .	21	9	i.	289
How wrong to compel others to drink too much. . . . .	21	10, 11	i.	290
How foolish to allow one's self to be thus compelled. . . . .	21	12	i.	292
How foolish to drink to excess to another's health. . . . .	21	13, 14	i.	292
Excessive drinking ruins a family. It is foolish and wicked therefore. . . . .	22	1 to 7	i.	295
They who do it are the cause of much sin. . . . .	22	8, 9	i.	300
Drunkards lose their good name. . . . .	22	11 to 14	i.	301
Drunkenness most disgraceful in a woman. . . . .	22	15	i.	304
Deliberate drunkenness a mortal sin. . . . .	23	2 to 7	i.	308
By which one exposes himself to the risk of eternal damnation. . . . .	23	8	i.	311
Habitual drunkards generally die an unhap- py death. . . . .	23	9, 10	i.	312
Drunkenness is <i>not</i> lawful under any pre- text. . . . .	23	12	i.	313
They are guilty of grievous sin who make others drunk. . . . .	23	13	i.	314
The habit of excessive drinking is in most cases an occasion of much sin. . . . .	23	14 to 18	i.	315
How wives should act who have drunken husbands. . . . .	23	19	i.	317

## —E.—

**Ears.**

Our ears often deceive us in what we hear from others. . . . .	62	8	ii.	330
---	----	---	-----	-----

**Envy.**

What envy is. . . . .	15	1	i.	211
How common it is. . . . .	15	2, 3, 4	i.	212
The envious man is a fool. . . . .	15		i.	215
Envy is the greatest enemy of Christian charity. . . . .	16		i.	223
From it come nearly all sins against charity	16	4 to 7	i.	226
It is cruel. . . . .	16	8, 9, 10,	i.	229
It is devilish. . . . .	16	12	i.	231
Severe punishment awaits the envious man.	16	13	i.	233
How they who are envied must act. . . . .	16	15	i.	234

**Eyes.**

The eyes often deceive us. . . . .	62	7	ii.	329
------------------------------------	----	---	-----	-----

## —F.—

**Faith.**

What is a living and a dead faith. . . . .	2	1	i.	24
A dead faith is of no avail to salvation. . . . .	2	2	i.	25
Our works must correspond to our faith. . . . .	2	3, 4	i.	26
Most Christians have a dead faith. . . . .	2	5 to end.	i.	28

	SERMON.	MARGINAL NOTE.	VOL.	PAGE.
From the want of a lively faith comes irreverence to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. . . . .	33		i.	450

**Fashion.**

To follow the fashions in unlawful things is a great insult to God. . . . .	57	1, 2	ii.	251
Its malice is all the greater as it embitters the wrath of God. . . . .	57	11	ii.	259
Many follow the prevailing fashion by omitting their prayers, and giving way to a habit of cursing. . . . .	57	3	ii.	252
By living in great style without paying their debts. . . . .	57	4	ii.	253
By acts of injustice. . . . .	57	5	ii.	254
By drunkenness. . . . .	57	6	ii.	255
By not training their children properly. . . . .	57	7	ii.	255
By dressing in scandalous style. . . . .	57	8	ii	256

**Fasting.**

The saints lived to be very old in spite of their fasting. . . . .	18	7	i.	254
Obligation of fasting. . . . .	19	1 to 5	i.	260
Manner of fasting. . . . .	19	6, 16	i.	263
Invalid excuse that people allege to dispense themselves from fasting. . . . .	19	7 to 10	i.	263
Fasting does not injure the health. . . . .	19	13	i.	267
How strictly the first Christians used to fast. . . . .	19	17	i.	269
End and aim of fasting. . . . .	20		i.	271
Many fail to observe it. . . . .	20	4, 5	i.	275
Fasting tames vicious inclinations and strengthens against temptation. . . . .	20	9	i.	278
Everything in man should fast. . . . .	20		i.	280

**Fault-finding.**

It is against charity to find fault with and put a bad interpretation on the actions of others. . . . .	62	1	ii.	324
He who does so, neglects his own soul. . . . .	63	1 to 9	ii.	337
He usurps the right and office of God. . . . .	63	10 to end.	ii.	344

**Flattery.**

Flattery is evil conversation. . . . .	61	9	ii.	315
--	----	---	-----	-----

—G.—

**God, Spirit of.**

Many are not enlightened by the spirit of God, because they do not desire His light. . . . .	42		ii.	56
--	----	--	-----	----

**God.**

Is the supreme Lord who wishes to be served in all and above all things. . . . .	27	2	i.	369
--	----	---	----	-----

	SERMON.	MARGINAL NOTE.	VOL.	PAGE.
That service is not rendered Him by those who are untrue to Him in small things	27	3	i.	369
He will have our hearts altogether, or not at all.	27	7	i.	373
He who despises small things in God's ser- vice displeases Him.	27	8	i.	374
He does not love God who offends Him in small things.	27	13	i.	376
God is truly present in the Blessed Sacra- ment.	33	4	i.	453
He alone can injure and is therefore alone to be feared.	56	9, 11	ii.	246
He is a great, almighty Lord.	76	1, 2, 3	ii.	496
What is required to please God.	7	1	i.	98
God's patience in bearing with sinners is the most astonishing of his perfec- tions.	14	10	i.	203
He shows His Almighty power thereby.	25	12	i.	343
According to circumstances, one sin implies a greater contempt of God than another.	35	1	i.	477

### Gluttony.

In what the vice of gluttony consists.	17	1 to 4	i.	237
How sin is committed by gluttony.	17	5	i.	238
It is a common vice.	17	6, 7, 8	i.	239
Signs of gluttony.	17	10 to 16	i.	241
Punished by God.	17	17	i.	247
Injures the health.	18		i.	249
How foolish to give way to it.	18	11	i.	256

## —H.—

### Hatred.

Considers only the faults of one's neigh- bor, in order to condemn them.	62	2	ii.	324
Puts a bad interpretation on everything, ven on the inward intention.	62	3, 4	ii.	326

### Health.

What a great blessing it is.	21	1, 2	i.	284
How careful one must be of it.	21	3	i.	285

### Honor.

Most men labor to gain honor before the world.	3	1	i.	40
Honor before the world is of no value in it- self.	3	2	i.	41
The ambitious find nothing but trouble and chagrin in honorable positions.	3	3, 4	i.	42
It is not wrong to be honored, but to seek honor.	3	9, 10	i.	47
What it is that confers honor before God and the world.	4	1	i.	54

	SERMON.	MARGINAL NOTR.	VOL.	PAGE.
<b>Humility.</b>				
How to be humble in all circumstances. . . . .	4	17	i.	66
Marks of false humility. . . . .	5	5, 6	i.	71
Marks and effects of true humility. . . . .	5	7, 8	i.	73
It is a rare virtue, and yet necessary to sal- vation. . . . .	5	9	i.	74
Means of attaining it. . . . .	5	10 to end.	i.	75

—I—

<b>Impurity.</b>				
No sin too great for one to commit, who is given to an impure passion. . . . .	13	8, 9	i.	188
Such a one has a great difficulty in amend- ing. . . . .	13	11 to 14	i.	190
Generally is not converted even on his death- bed. . . . .	13	16	i.	195
No vice more embitters the wrath of God.	14		i.	197
Punished more severely than other vices by God. . . . .	14	11 to end.	i.	203
The impure are ungrateful to their guard- ian angels. . . . .	40	12	ii.	39

**Impure Songs and Conversation.**

Give great scandal. . . . .	61	5, 6, 7	ii.	312
Are most unbecoming a Christian. . . . .	71	5	ii.	443
Many innocent souls are thereby corrupted and lost forever. . . . .	71	6, 7	ii.	443
Confessors must be very careful in this mat- ter, when hearing the confessions of young people. . . . .	71	9	ii.	446
Preachers must also be careful when speak- of it. . . . .	71	11	ii.	446
The impure must accuse themselves modestly in confession. . . . .	71	10	ii.	446
Those who speak impurely have the surest signs of reprobation. . . . .	71	13	ii.	447
Their intention does not excuse them. . . . .	71	14	ii.	449
Impure metaphors and allusions are the most dangerous kind of impure con- versation. . . . .	71	15	ii.	449

**Inconstancy.**

The inconstancy of man in good is great. . . . .	50	7	ii.	164
--	----	---	-----	-----

**Ingratitude.**

To God is an odious vice, hated by God. . . . .	38		ii.	7
In what ingratitude consists. . . . .	38	1	ii.	8
The ungrateful man put to shame by inan- imate creatures. . . . .	38	7	ii.	13
Most men are ungrateful to God. . . . .	38	8 to 13	ii.	13
They will be forsaken by God. . . . .	38	14	ii.	17
They who are under most obligations to God are generally the most ungrateful. . . . .	39		ii.	20

	SERMON.	MARGINAL NOTE.	VOL.	PAGE.
How and in what manner God is wont to punish the ungrateful even in this life.	41		ii.	43
The ungrateful die prematurely.	41	11	ii.	51
<b>Injustice.</b>				
Many kinds of injustice are practised in the world.	9		i.	128
The unjust must expect a strict judgment.	9	18	i.	138
Injustice brings no temporal profit, and in- curs eternal damnation.	9	20	i.	139
How foolish to seek gain unjustly.	10	18	i.	152
Foolish of parents to try to enrich their children unjustly.	11	4	i.	158
<b>Injuries.</b>				
Must be borne meekly.	25	13 to end.	i.	345
<b>Inspirations.</b>				
How and whence divine inspirations come.	43	1	ii.	69
To despise and reject them may occasion eternal ruin.	43	2	ii.	72
They who do not acknowledge good thoughts as divine inspirations, place their souls in great danger.	44	3	ii.	83
In important matters we must not take every thought that occurs as a divine in- spiration, but ask advice.	44	8	ii.	86
Otherwise one may be deceived by the devil.	44	10	ii.	88
Very dangerous not to follow good inspir- ations.	44	12 to end.	ii.	89
Not to follow them at once, is to place one's self in danger of an unhappy death.	45		ii.	93
God has appointed for each of us a certain number of those inspirations.	45	9 to 12	ii.	100
<b>Intemperance.</b>				
In eating and drinking leads to impurity.	20	7	i.	277
Makes one earthly and brutish.	20	8	i.	277
<b>Irreverence.</b>				
Towards Christ in the Blessed Sacrament comes from want of a lively faith.	33		i.	450
Irreverence in church arises from not think- ing of the great Lord who is present there.	34		i.	462
—K.—				
<b>Knowledge.</b>				
Knowledge of what concerns our salvation is very rare.	50	4	ii.	161
Many have it, but do not live according to it.	50	5	ii.	162

	MARGINAL			
	SERMON.	NOTE.	VOL.	PAGE.
—L.—				
<b>Laborers.</b>				
A great sin to defraud laborers of their wages	9	12	i.	133
<b>Law of God.</b>				
Must be our only guide.	57	14	ii.	261
<b>Love.</b>				
He who loves impurely does not attain what he seeks.	12		i.	170
How foolish to indulge in impure love.	12	3	i.	172
Impure love is rather a pain than a pleasure.	12	7 to end.	i.	175
Makes a man hardened in wickedness.	13		i.	183
Hinders the Word of God from bearing fruit.	49	6	ii.	150
What is required by the love of our neighbor.	16	1	i.	224
Love should be shown in time of need.	51	8	ii.	178
The love of one's neighbor is rare amongst men.	58		ii.	264
What it is to love one's neighbor as one's self	58	12	ii.	274
Sinful love of one's neighbor.	58	11	ii.	273
Love puts the best interpretation on everything.	62	11	ii.	331
<b>Lying.</b>				
Is disgraceful and odious before God and man.	73		ii.	463
Is very prejudicial to the general welfare.	73		ii.	465
Is necessarily forbidden by God and man.	73	4	ii.	465
Is a common vice.	73	5	ii.	466
Brings no temporal advantage.	73	6, 7	ii.	466
Opposes the divine truth.	73	9	ii.	470
Is never lawful in any circumstances.	73	10, 11, 12	ii.	470
Pious Christians would rather die than save their lives by a lie.	73	13	ii.	473
It is not lying to conceal the truth.	73	15	ii.	474
—M.—				
<b>Man.</b>				
Is poor and mean of himself.	4	4, 5	i.	56
Man's weakness and inconstancy in good are great.	50	7	ii.	164
<b>Mass.</b>				
Unlawful to have masses said with stolen money when one knows the owner of it.	11	9	i.	162
<b>Money, Avarice, Avaricious.</b>				
One can work for money, and serve God at the same time.	7	6	i.	101

	SERMON.	MARGINAL NOTE.	VOL.	PAGE.
The avaricious man labors in vain.	6		i.	85
Money and property are vanity.	6		i.	84
The false idea that money can do everything.	6		i.	86
How one becomes avaricious.	6	5	i.	88
The avaricious man is a fool.	6	6 to 10	i.	88
Incurs the hatred of all men.	6	10	i.	92
Hard for him to leave his money at the hour of death.	6	12	i.	93
The avaricious neglect God during life.	7		i.	93
They are careless of all good.	7	5	i.	100
Labor for others, not for themselves.	7	8	i.	102
Make money their god.	7	9	i.	103
Lose all pity for the poor.	7	10	i.	101
Nearly all vices come from avarice.	7	11 to end.	i.	105
The avaricious generally die an unhappy death.	8		i.	112
Are difficult of conversion.	8	3 to 6	i.	114
Find it very hard to make restitution.	8	8 to 12	i.	118
Are the most miserable of men.	8	13	i.	122
Avarice increases until death.	8	2	i.	113
Prevails amongst even the poor, and people of all classes.	8	15, 16	i.	123
Happy he who does not love money.	8	14	i.	122

## —N.—

## Name.

A good name is the greatest and best wealth	64	4	ii.	356
God is careful of a man's good name.	64	7	ii.	358
A good name is more valued than life.	22	10	i.	301

## Neighbor.

Few love their neighbor as themselves.	58		ii.	264
Who our neighbor is.	58	1, 2	ii.	265

## Nightly Gatherings.

Of both sexes are very dangerous occasions of sin.	54		ii.	209
---	----	--	-----	-----

## —P.—

## Parents.

Must be careful not to cause jealousy among their children.	16	14	i.	233
Must keep their children from nightly gath- erings.	54	15	ii.	221
Must especially avoid cursing.	68	13	ii.	411
The curses of parents have a special efficacy with regard to their children.	69	10, 11, 12	ii.	422

## Poor.

The poor may be avaricious.	8	15	i.	123
Stolen property may not be given to the poor, when one knows the rightful owner.	11	5, 6, 7	i.	159

MARGINAL  
SERMON. NOTE. VOL. PAGE.

**Prayer.**

Prayer is false and useless, when one does not really wish to receive what one asks: most people pray in that way.	37		i.	502
God is thereby dishonored.	37	16 to end.	i.	513

**Preacher.**

A preacher must be careful when speaking of impurity.	71	11	ii.	446
---	----	----	-----	-----

**Pride, Proud.**

The proud man does not gain what he seeks, either from God or man.	3		i.	39
He finds nearly always the contrary.	3	6, 7, 8	i.	44
No vice more intolerable to God.	3	11	i.	48
The proud man robs God of His honor.	3	12	i.	49
From pride come many sins.	3	13	i.	50
The proud man is a fool.	4		i.	53
To be proud of one's riches is foolish.	4	10	i.	59
As it is also to be proud of one's family, or mental gifts, or skill.	4	11, 12	i.	60
Or of one's success in business.	4	13	i.	62
Or of personal beauty.	4	14	i.	63
Or even of good works.	4	15	i.	64
Difficult to distinguish pride from humility.	5	1 to 4	i.	69
Marks of a proud man.	5	5, 6	i.	71

**Promises.**

What to believe of the promises attached to certain prayers in some prayer-books.	30	9	i.	419
---	----	---	----	-----

—R.—

**Religion.**

The Catholic religion is the holiest.	1	2	i.	9
Has the holiest Founder.	1		i.	8
The holiest law.	1	3	i.	10
From which holiness its truth is evident.	1	4	i.	4
The only religion in which salvation can be found.	1	8	i.	15
Is the cause of a deeper damnation for the bad Christian.	1	9, 10	i.	15

**Respect. (Human)**

To do evil or leave good undone through human respect, is a disgraceful thing.	55		ii.	225
And most unjust toward God.	56		ii.	237

**Restitution.**

Of stolen property is very difficult.	8	8	i.	118
Especially at the hour of death.	8		i.	119
Is necessary to salvation, when possible; no excuse from it.	10		i.	140



	MARGINAL			
	SERMON.	NOTE.	VOL.	PAGE.
Those who are officially bound to secrecy do great harm by divulging secrets.	72	8 to 11	ii.	456
This is very odious in a man.	72	12	ii.	459
He is put to shame therein by women.	72	13	ii.	460

**Shrove-tide.**

The days of Shrove-tide belong to God, and by right ought to be specially consecrated to Him.	51		ii.	171
In heathen times they were devoted to the devil; therefore Christians should devote them to God.	51	1, 2	ii.	173
The Catholic Church cannot tolerate the excesses of Shrove-tide.	51	3, 4	ii.	174
It is not lawful to sin during this season.	51	5, 6, 7	ii.	175
Christ must suffer much during this season, therefore good Christians should show Him all the more love.	51	9 to end.	ii.	179
During this season most people are on the devil's side.	52	3 to 6	ii.	187
Pious Christians must be faithful to Christ, even in Shrove-tide.	52	8 to 9	ii.	190
How shameful to abandon God during this season.	52	10	ii.	191
Shrove-tide amusements are generally unlawful.	52	12, 13	ii.	193
Very indecent and unbecoming a Christian.	53		ii.	197
Heathens and Turks are not worse in this respect than many Christians.	53	6	ii.	201
The latter scandalize the former thereby	53	7	ii.	202
Shrove-tide amusements disturb the conscience.	53	10 to end.	ii.	205

**Sin**

The malice of sin consists in its turning the human heart away from the Creator to creatures.	14	1	i.	198
Loses all its shamefulness by scandal.	60	8, 9	ii.	299
By sin man incurs great disgrace.	74	4	ii.	478

**Sinner.**

Sinners should no longer reject the proffered grace of repentance.	45	13, 14, 15	ii.	104
How a sinner becomes obdurate.	48	5, 6	ii.	138
Many obdurate sinners are converted by sermons.	48	12	ii.	142
They who boast of their sins are the most shameless sinners.	74		ii.	475
They publish their own disgrace.	74	4 to 7	ii.	478
They are hopeless sinners.	75		ii.	485
They do not acknowledge the malice of their sin.	75	2	ii.	487
They do not repent, and will hardly ever repent.	75	3, 4,	ii.	489

	SERMON.	MARGINAL NOTE.	VOL.	PAGE.
<b>They are guilty of treason and rebellion against God.</b> . . . . .	75	7, 8	ii.	491
<b>Will therefore hardly find grace with God.</b> 75		9	ii.	493
<b>Presumption of the sinner in despising God.</b> 76			ii.	495
<b>He encourages others not to hearken to God.</b> 76		8	ii.	502
<b>All creatures are ready to take vengeance on the sinner.</b> . . . . .	76	11	ii.	504
<b>From this appears the terrible malice of sin.</b> 76		12	ii.	504
<b>Which is justly punished forever in hell.</b> 76		13	ii.	505
<b>Slavery.</b>				
<b>Is disgraceful to a man.</b> . . . . .	55	1	ii.	226
<b>The most disgraceful slavery is to do evil or omit good through human respect.</b> 55		2 to 7	ii.	227
<b>Sloth in Divine Service.</b>				
<b>Very displeasing to God.</b> . . . . .	27		i	367
<b>The slothful do not serve God sincerely.</b> 27		7	i	373
<b>They are not upright with God, and there- fore do not please Him.</b> . . . . .	27	8	i.	374
<b>They love God only with the lips.</b> . . . . .	27	14, 15	i.	377
<b>Can have no true peace of conscience.</b> . . . . .	27	16	i.	378
<b>Soul.</b>				
<b>They who try to save souls, are men of God.</b> 59		1	ii.	280
<b>The Son of God has paid dearly for souls.</b> 59		4	ii.	282
<b>Stolen Property.</b>				
<b>Brings no luck nor blessing with it.</b> . . . . .	10	17	i.	151
<b>Sundays and Holy-days.</b>				
<b>God wishes to have them spent in His honor alone.</b> . . . . .	36	1 to 5	i.	491
<b>How they are to be sanctified.</b> . . . . .	36	6	i.	493
<b>In how many ways they are profaned.</b> . . . . .	36	7 to 12	i.	494
<b>How unjust that is to God and to one's soul</b> 36		13	i.	499
<b>Punishment of those who do servile work on those days.</b> . . . . .	36	14	i.	500
<b>More severe punishment deserved by those who sin on those days.</b> . . . . .	36	15	i.	501
<b>Superiors.</b>				
<b>Are bound to attend to the faults of their subjects.</b> . . . . .	63	10, 11	ii.	344
<b>Superstition.</b>				
<b>What it is.</b> . . . . .	29		i.	398
<b>A common sin.</b> . . . . .	29	2	i.	399
<b>Committed by all kinds of vain observations</b> 29		3	i.	400
<b>Believing in dreams.</b> . . . . .	29	7	i.	402
<b>Horoscopes.</b> . . . . .	29	8	i.	404
<b>Superstitious means of recovering lost things, or growing rich.</b> . . . . .	29	9	i.	405

	SERMON.	MARGINAL NOTE.	VOL.	PAGE.
Of finding hidden treasure. . . . .	29	10	i.	406
Of healing sickness. . . . .	29	11	i.	407
All superstition is grievous, because there- by the devil is appealed to for help.	29	12	i.	408
How one can be guilty of superstition in prayer and by means of holy things, and how to detect superstition in any work of devotion. . . . .	30		i.	411
How foolish to seek help from the devil by superstition. . . . .	30	11	i.	421

**Swearing.**

How wicked to swear without necessity. . .	61	4	ii.	311
--	----	---	-----	-----

**—T.—**

**Tale-bearing.**

Is a grievous and an injurious sin. . . .	61	12	ii.	318
“ “ “ “ . . . . .	72	4 to 7	ii.	454

**Temple.**

What large sums were spent in building the Temple at Jerusalem. . . . .	34	2, 3	i.	464
--	----	------	----	-----

**Temperance.**

In eating and drinking is meritorious. . .	18	14	i.	257
--	----	----	----	-----

**Temporal Cares.**

Close the entrance of the heart to the divine light. . . . .	49	1, 3, 4, 5	ii.	147
---	----	------------	-----	-----

**Thieves.**

Many kinds of thieves in the world. . . .	9		i.	126
Small thieves generally make restitution; but not great ones. . . . .	11	1, 2	i.	155

**Time.**

At no time is it lawful to sin. . . . .	51	5	ii.	175
In time of need true love and friendship should be shown. . . . .	51	8	ii.	178

**Tongue.**

Many kinds of wicked tongues in the world	61		ii.	308
The tongue should be carefully guarded. .	61	16	ii.	321

**—U.—**

**Understanding.**

No one should be proud of a good under- standing. . . . .	4	12	i.	61
--	---	----	----	----

	SERMON.	MARGINAL NOTE.	VOL.	PAGE
—V.—				
<b>Vice.</b>				
Vices generally decrease in old age . . . . .	8	1	i.	113
<b>Vindictiveness.</b>				
Is a disgraceful thing before God and man. . . . .	25	1 to 5	i.	335
The meek man, who does not take revenge, is always held in true honor. . . . .	25	6 to end.	i.	239
He who seeks revenge, acts against all right, human and divine. . . . .	26		i.	351
—W.—				
<b>Woman (Wife).</b>				
A drunken woman is a disgrace. . . . .	23	15	i.	304
How wives must act who have drunken husbands. . . . .	23	19	i.	317
Some women put men to shame, as far as keeping secrets is concerned. . . . .	72	13	ii.	460
<b>Word of God.</b>				
Many neglect, or make a bad use of the Word of God in sermons. . . . .	42	11	ii.	65
Others hear it, but do not always heed it. . . . .	42	13	ii.	67
They are in a bad or dangerous spiritual state, who seldom hear the Word of God. . . . .	46		ii.	107
For that reason they should hear it dili- gently . . . . .	46	4	ii.	110
Vain worldlings seldom hear the Word of God. . . . .	46	5	ii.	111
They are in a dangerous state. . . . .	46	6	ii.	112
Some ignorant people, through mistaken piety, seldom hear the Word of God in sermons. . . . .	46	7, 9, 10, 11	ii.	113
No devotion should, as a general rule, pre- vent one from hearing sermons. . . . .	46	8	ii.	114
Those who are too busied with temporal cares seldom hear the Word of God. . . . .	46	12	ii.	118
They who hear it with distractions do not profit by it. . . . .	47	2, 3, 4	ii.	122
They give joy to the devil, who is wont to cause distractions during sermons . . . . .	47	5	ii.	124
They who hear the Word of God out of cu- riosity do not profit by it. . . . .	47	6 to 9	ii.	125
Also they who at once forget the truths they have heard. . . . .	47	10, 11	ii.	128
How to remember those truths. . . . .	47	12, 13	ii.	130
Some sinners are hard-hearted when hear- ing sermons. . . . .	48	1	ii.	134
The Word of God has power against all sins and vices. . . . .	48	2	ii.	135
But can do nothing with a hard heart. . . . .	48	3, 4	ii.	136

	SERMON.	MARGINAL NOTE.	VOL.	PAGE.
Some allow themselves to be moved in certain things, but not in all.	48	8, 9	ii-	140
They must be more diligent in hearing sermons, and eventually they will be moved.	48	11, 12	ii-	142
Many hardened sinners are converted by the Word of God.	48		ii-	142
Whatever good is done by sermons must come from God.	49	2	ii-	147
Temporal cares interfere with the fruit of sermons.	49	3 to 5 & 7 to 11.	ii-	148
Impure love also.	49	6	ii-	150
The Word of God is the occasion of a deeper damnation to those who do not fulfil what they hear in sermons.	49	13 to end.	ii-	155
How to distinguish between good and bad hearers of the Word of God.	50	1, 2, 3	ii-	159
In sermons we learn the science of salvation.	50	6	ii-	163
They strengthen us in virtue.	50	8	ii	164
They purify us.	50	9	ii-	165
The hearing the Word of God is comforting.	50	10	ii-	166
There are few good hearers.	50	11	ii-	167
How wrong to prevent others from hearing the Word of God.	50	12, 13	ii-	167