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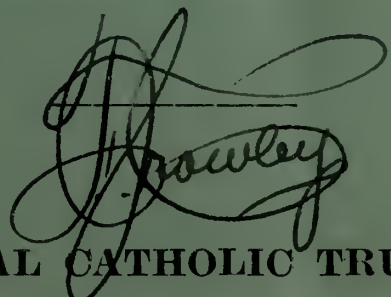
SIX GOLDEN CORDS OF A MOTHER'S HEART

BY

REV. JOSEPH O'REILLY



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THE SIX GOLDEN CORDS

CHAPTER I.

What is the Church, dear reader? The Church, as the Catechism says, is the congregation of the faithful who profess the faith of Christ, partake of the same Sacraments, have the same Sacrifice, and are governed by their lawful pastors under one visible Head.

The Church is consequently a society, and its ministers are empowered by Jesus Christ Himself to loose and to bind, to make laws. We have our President and under-officials to see that the State law is made and carried into effect. The Church is Christ's institution, and, like a State, it embraces the government and the governed. He gave it full power to enact laws, and He says expressly and implicitly, "He that heareth you, heareth Me: and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me" (St. Luke x. 16); and "He that hears not the Church (that is, the governing portion of it), let him be to thee as a heathen and publican" (St. Matt. xviii. 17); *i. e.*, let him be deprived of the Sacraments and every spiritual advantage enjoyed by those in communion with the Church whilst living, and be buried without holy rites when dead.

Christ gave the Church power to teach and govern. "Going therefore, teach ye all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (St. Matt. xxviii. 19); and to St. Peter He says, "Feed My Lambs; feed My sheep" (St. John xxi. 15-17), *i. e.*, "guide, govern and preach to all My people," who are signified by "lambs" and "sheep." And He promised the Apostle that He would be with them to the end of the world—"Behold, I am with you," etc. (St. Matt. xxviii. 20)—and that the gates of hell should not prevail against her.

At first the Church was small, numbering only the twelve Apostles and some disciples, but after our Divine Lord had appointed St. Peter as her head, and had instructed him and the other Apostles in Divine truths and duties, and had taken His departure to Heaven to send the Holy Ghost upon them, those Apostles went, full of zeal, throughout all parts of the

world, to carry out the will of God in bringing pagans and lost sheep to the one true fold.

Gradually, but surely, the Congregation, the Christian society, the Catholic Church, increased in numbers. Our Mother brought forth many children in pain and trouble. The bark of Peter withstood the storms of Judaism, paganism, heresy and false science, gloriously overcame them all, and today is filled with over two hundred and fifty million occupants. The powers of secret societies, of diabolical persecutions, of lordly princes, of heresies and hell united, could not and cannot overthrow the Church of Jesus Christ, founded upon an immovable rock. All the devices that hellish ingenuity could employ have been used by ancient and modern haters of the Catholic Church, as history attests, but it stands proudly intact; its brow is still unstained, its fertility is still unimpoverished, it has survived all, and preserves life even more vigorous than ever. She is the bride of Christ, spotless and undefiled.

This, our glorious and indestructible Church, our Mother, is visible and known by four marks, noble characteristics: she is One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic. These are the marks which wholly and exclusively belong to her.

The Church of Christ, consequently the true one, ours, must be *one*; because our Lord says in St. Matthew (xvi. 18) to St. Peter, "Thou art Peter, and upon this Rock I will build My Church." Here He does not say His churches, but *His* Church, His one Church, and there is only one rock, one solid foundation for that Church. Besides, Christ speaks of "one Shepherd, one fold" (St. John x. 16), "one body" (Eph. iv. 4), "one Head" (Col. i. 18). Again, our Divine Lord expressly says, "Every kingdom divided against itself shall be brought to desolation" (St. Luke xi. 17). Now, the Church is a kingdom; therefore, if it is divided into two hundred or three hundred churches, as the Protestant is, it must surely *fall*. But it can never fall, for our Saviour assures us the gates shall never prevail against it; consequently it can never be divided, and therefore it must be one. Thus we have unity in our church.

She is holy. She is pre-eminently holy in her Founder, Jesus Christ, the God of all sanctity; holy in her doctrines, teaching that marriage is indissoluble except by death; teaching the unity and trinity of God, the virginity of Mary, Mother of God, the necessity of charity, chastity and penance. She is holy in all her teachings, tendencies and aims; holy in her precepts, as we shall see; holy in her Sacraments; holy in millions of her martyred members, and thousands who still live on earth saintly lives, lives of mortification and martyrdom.

She is Catholic, or universal, as to time and place, embracing all nations. She had her birth in Jesus Christ, was nursed by the Apostles, and has grown large through the blood of martyrs. She today can look back through the varied scenes of nineteen centuries and behold her dark and bright days, days of persecution, and glorious days of triumph.

Our Church is Catholic as to time. She is ancient, she is glorious, she is the admiration of the world. No country is without the Catholic Church; her power is felt in every clime. South America, Ireland, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Austria, and other countries are almost entirely Catholic. North America, Germany and other countries are, in great part, Catholic. The name Catholic should be dear to our hearts. In the first centuries the Holy Fathers claimed the name Catholic, and felt proud in doing so. "Christian is my name, Catholic my surname," proudly said St. Pacianus.

Our Church is Apostolic, for Christ founded it upon the Apostles, and He said to their head, "Thou art Peter," etc. (St. Matt. xvi. 18, 19). He also said to the Apostles, speaking of the descent of the Holy Ghost, "If I go I will send Him to you" (St. John xvi. 7); and afterwards He said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost" (St. John xx. 22). The Apostles received a command to go and teach all nations, and a promise that Jesus would be with them. Our Divine Lord said, "As the Father sent Me, I also send you" (St. John xx. 21). He had all power in Heaven and on earth; therefore the Apostles received their commission and all necessary power from Him, and

could communicate their office and power to other Apostles and send them, as they did. Apostle continuously succeeded Apostle in the persons of the Popes (chiefs of the Apostles) and bishops and priests from St. Peter to this very day. So our Church is Apostolic.

Considering then, what the Church is: that she is the congregation of the faithful who profess the true faith, that she gloriously triumphed over the Jews, the Gentiles, and all the powers of earth and hell, knowing well that she, and she alone, is One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic, it is sincerely to be hoped that all Catholics will endeavor to have a great love for her, never feel ashamed of her, always obey her laws and rules with fidelity, feeling convinced that she is a tender Mother, always wishing the instruction, enlightenment, sanctification and salvation of her children.

CHAPTER II.

Dear reader, now we have seen what the Church is. We have seen that our Saviour, in organizing the Catholic Church, gave the charter members, the Apostles, power of the keys to loose and unloose, power to make and enforce laws; and He further said: "If anyone will not hear the Church"—that is, obey the Church's laws and commands—"let him be to thee"—that is, to the Church and each good member—"a heathen and a publican, *i. e.*, a cast-off, a sapless branch. So we must obey the precepts of the Church, with which God is always present, or fall under God's anger. The Church has enacted very many laws, but there stand out prominently and rightly, for the guidance and profit of her people, her children, six of these golden protectors or cords, viz.:

1. To hear Mass on Sundays and Holy-days of obligation.
2. To fast and abstain on the days appointed.
3. To confess our sins at least once a year.
4. To receive Holy Communion during Easter time.
5. To contribute to the support of our pastors.
6. Not to marry non-Catholics or persons who are related to us within the fourth degree of kindred, nor

privately, nor without witnesses, nor to solemnize marriage at the forbidden times.

The first precept is, to hear Mass on Sundays and Holy-days. The Church of God, the Bride of Christ, our holy Mother, places the commandment to hear Mass on Sundays and Holy-days in the first place, and with good reason, because it relates immediately to the service and worship of God, Who is first, above everything, and from Whom all good things come. This easy precept, to hear Mass on Sundays and Holy-days, to spend half an hour or an hour, as the case might be, at the adorable Sacrifice of the Mass, thanking, adoring God and begging His grace and mercy, is imposed, as has been said, by the Church. But, even if there were no Church and no Divine law commanding us to give some of our week, some of our time, to God, our very nature, natural law, our natural sense of obligation, for life and other blessings, to God would irresistibly urge us to worship Him often. But, besides the natural law to honour, worship and serve God, there comes a law from God Himself, by which, in the old dispensation, He positively set apart one day in every week, and several days in the year, for the purpose of receiving worship and thanks.

Our Church appointed Sundays and Holy-days as days on which her children are obliged under pain of mortal sin to assist at Mass and thus thank and worship their Creator. You may ask, Why did the Church change the Jewish day of worship, the Sabbath, or Saturday, to Sunday? One reason is given by St. Paul to the Hebrews (vii. 12). "The priesthood," he says, "being translated, it was necessary that a translation be made of the law," *i. e.*, the Priesthood of Aaron, the prototype of Christ, the priesthood of the old law, having been abrogated, having ceased in order to give place to the Christian priesthood, the priesthood according to Melchisedech, established by Christ, there should also take place a change in the public worship of God, and, amongst many other things, this translation, or change, brought with it a transfer of the Sabbath, the last day of the week, to Sunday, the first day. St. Leo the Great, speaking on

this subject, said: "This day, Sunday, is consecrated by such great mysteries of divine appointment, that whatever has been constituted by God as specially wonderful has been effected on that day. On this day the world took its beginning. On this day, by the resurrection of Christ, death met its end and life its commencement. On this day, Sunday, the Apostles received orders to preach the Gospel to the whole world. On this day they received the power of forgiving sin. On this day the Holy Ghost, as promised by our Lord, came upon the Apostles, and so the Gospel law was published on the day of Pentecost." These are good reasons why the Church, under the Spirit of God, appointed Sunday to supersede the Sabbath, Saturday, of the old law.

Holy-days, or festivals of obligation, are appointed to be observed for the same object as Sundays, and so we incur the guilt of mortal sin if we do not hear Mass on Holy-days of obligation and thus fulfil our natural, Divine and ecclesiastical duties of worshipping God and gratefully acknowledging His many gifts to us. Festivals, or Holy-days, are days commemorating certain great religious facts, or mysteries, or the virtues and rewards of the Saints, so as to glorify God through them. We have American holidays—for example, Washington's birthday, Independence Day and other days commemorative of other glorious national happenings; and nothing is more natural or reasonable than that we should have religious festivals, celebrated with Mass and solemnity, to praise, bless and glorify God for His mercy, goodness and power, so signally manifested in His mysteries, His birth, and in His graces bestowed on the Saints, His illustrious servants.

Festivals, or Holy-days, are dictated by reason, are commanded by Divine law, also, and are appointed by the Church to be kept religiously by Catholic people. Two things are of special obligation to keep religiously Sundays and Holy-days, and they are: to hear Mass and to refrain from servile work as well as from everything that would profane these days. Other pious works or exercises, such as saying the Rosary, reading pious works,

teaching the Catechism, etc., are urgently recommended.

Some people offer some very flimsy pretexts for not obeying the law of the Church in respect to what Nature and God command, viz., to hear Mass on Sundays and Holy-days of obligation, and to take a rest from manual labor. They say, "I haven't time to go to church," or, "If I go, my employment suffers." Now, we have only six Holy-days of obligation in the year, including Christmas Day and New Year's Day, and fifty-two Sundays, and it takes only a half hour to fulfil our obligations—fifty-eight half hours for Divine worship in church out of 365 days. Just imagine: Fifty-eight half-hours, twenty-nine hours, a little over one day in 365 for exclusive worship of God, our Heavenly Father, from Whom everything we have and expect must come; and even that short time is spent by, I might say, the majority, whilst at Mass, in distractions! Think of this, dear reader! People will say they cannot afford even this short time to go to Mass on Sundays and Holy-days. They may lose more time by sickness and other misfortunes which might be entailed on them as punishments for neglecting the precept. And look at all the time many people spend foolishly—yes, often on the Sundays and Holy-days that they miss Mass.

These mere pretexts or foolish excuses which people many times allege for not going to Mass when obliged to do so by the Church of God, of Christ, of truth and justice, of tenderness, will not prevent them from incurring the guilt of mortal sin and the severe punishment of Almighty God. And then, we should not do any manual labor on Sundays or Holy-days. Our Church is a good, sensible Mother, and if you have a really good reason for absenting yourself from Mass, for staying at home on Sundays and Holy-days, she does not oblige you to hear Mass; on the contrary, she recommends you to stay at home, and, if you have any very necessary work to do on Sundays, do it.

Now, we have seen that the Church has power to make laws; that she has enacted very many, but particularly six for our guidance and profit. The first of these precepts is, to hear Mass on Sundays and Holy-

days of obligation. We have seen that even Nature itself, if Divine and Church law were silent, would point out to us the necessity of frequent Divine worship. We have seen for many and good reasons why the day for Divine worship was translated from Saturday to Sunday, the first day of the week. We have seen that to observe Sundays and festivals two things we must do, viz., hear Mass and abstain from servile work. Go to Mass, then, every Sunday and Holy-day, spend the balance of these days well for God's sake and your own soul's sake and the Church's sake; and, if you do, your Sabbath after-life will be everlastingly happy.

CHAPTER III.

Dear reader, the second of the six precepts or laws which our Holy Mother, the Church, has formulated for our betterment both here and hereafter, is "To fast and abstain on the days commanded." The Church in this law, as well as in all her dealings with her children, acts sensibly and lovingly in accordance with Nature and Divine law; in fact, the Church in all her relations with Christians behaves as the mouthpiece, the handmaid, of God, Who is with her and shall remain with her at all times, even to the consummation of the world.

I presume you know the day of abstinence (Friday) and the other days of abstinence and fast which occur in Lent, and on other occasions during the year. The reasons human beings have for fasting and abstinence are many indeed. Let us consider some of them. In the first place, as to ourselves, we are composed of a body and soul. "In the beginning, when" (as Eccles. vii. 30 says) "God made man right," the body and soul were in perfect harmony. The inferior part, the animal part, of our nature was subject to the spiritual portion; the superior had almost perfect control over the inferior part of our composition, but, after the law of abstinence was broken by Adam and Eve in eating the forbidden fruit, after the rebellion of man against his Creator was begun, a revolt took place in man himself. The inferior part of our nature refused submission to its spiritual superior,

and we all feel, and all human beings shall continue to feel while time lasts, the almost constant jarring, struggling relations between the body and the soul. The inferior part of man, what we have in common with the brute creation, propensities and inclinations after man's fall, disobeyed, refused submission to his nobler part, just as man himself, God's creature and servant, disobeyed his Superior, his Creator.

"Man's life is a warfare on earth" (Job vii. 1). Yes, there is a war, a struggle for mastery within him, and he has to do battle against the world and the devil besides. Everything turned against man, in consequence of man's foolishly turning his disobedient head against his Creator and infinitely sweet Benefactor. "I see another law," said St. Paul (Rom. vii. 23, 24), "in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin, which is in my members. Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Now, this is exactly how we stand, how we are constituted with fighting elements within ourselves, and no end to warring, deadly, insidious enemies on the outside. Did we ever ask ourselves seriously which shall be the conqueror, the higher or the lower portion of our being; the mean desires and inclinations of our corrupt nature aided by outside enemies, or the immortal soul guided by reason and religion; the animal or the Godlike nature, animality or spirituality? We all ought to be determined to restore the soul to its rightful position, to its former commanding, controlling power. We should be anxious if we are truly wise to make the immortal soul the superior, and if we are so disposed, we must recognize and utilize the second law of our Holy Mother the Church, that knows men thoroughly. We must obey the command, "to fast and abstain on the days appointed." The Church is like the General who orders the reinforcements, the auxiliaries, at the opportune time. The Church orders for us in good time fast and abstinence, which are invaluable allies in the soul's combats with the passions.

Fasting and abstinence will enable us to gain a complete

victory for the soul over all that is animal in us, and force the enemy into reason and subjection. Fasting and abstinence will most certainly remove animal tendencies from us, and elevate our minds to the noble consideration of spiritual things. Fasting and abstinence were called into requisition by St. Paul. He says himself he chastened his body, and brought it into subjection; lest perhaps, whilst he preached to others, he himself might become a castaway (1 Cor. ix. 27).

So our fallen nature renders fasting and abstinence necessary if we are any way anxious to secure the soul's supremacy here and her everlasting happiness hereafter.

Another reason why we should fast and abstain, besides the fact that God's Church and nature require these mortifications, is because God Himself in the Old and New Testament has told us to fast and abstain. Again, St. Paul says to us in inspired words, "If you live according to the flesh (if you let the body and the passions domineer over the soul), you shall die. But if by the spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh (you keep the passions and animal nature in subjection), you shall live" (Rom. viii. 13). Moreover, it is beyond all dispute that we, all of us sinners, must do some penance for the many crimes, offences, mortal sins we have committed against high Heaven. "Unless you do penance, you shall all likewise perish." "We must fill up those things that are wanting in us of the sufferings of Christ" (Col. i. 24), *i. e.*, we must personally and individually fill up the void of suffering, or affliction in ourselves for our own sins by punishing ourselves. We must fill up the want of similarity between us and our Savior, the suffering God-man, and one of the best ways to do this is to fast and abstain. Fasting and abstinence not only help to blot out sins, but they also put us on our guard against future sins.

Our Savior's atonement for the sins of men is superabundant, but we must none the less make atonement ourselves. You know after mortal sin is forgiven in confession, as to the eternal guilt and punishment, there remains due to it a temporal punishment which must be endured in this world or in the next. Now, God is so

very good and loving that He by His Church, our loving Mother, gives us the law of fasting and abstinence in order that we may be enabled to easily satisfy His strict justice by doing away with this temporal punishment. He stands before each and every one of us with His scourge in His hand, and He says, Either I shall punish you—and “It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”—or you must take the easy law of My Church and willingly, voluntarily scourge, chastise yourselves. I should think that, as children of a tender and loving mother, we should be only too anxious to obey her law, her very sensible command to fast and abstain, and thus please God in punishing ourselves a little for our past misdeeds. Willingly choose the easier part, then, fast and abstain. Fasting and abstinence, consequently, are indispensable for us poor human beings in this land of exile, and our warfare with our fierce passions and other inveterate foes. Fasting and abstinence are obligatory because of God's and His Church's commands. Fasting and abstinence become necessary for us when we consider the many insults we have offered to the Most High. So, feeling convinced of the great and, I might say, absolute necessity of fasting and abstinence, I am sure that, instead of complaining and blaming our Holy Mother the Church for enacting this law, viz., “To fast and abstain on the days commanded,” and for urgently bringing the matter before us in Lenten and other times, we really feel grateful to her and to the Spirit of God Who ever abides with and guides her. If we are incapacitated for fasting and abstinence, if it is morally impossible for us to obey the law strictly, we should ever show our good dispositions to enter into the spirit of the Church and endeavor frequently to do some little act of devotion or mortification, so that the soul's interest and influence may dominate the body and its foolish inclinations, so that we may pay off the debt that may be still due upon some of our former offences. Fulfilling the wish of the Church and God's will manifested in this law, our lives will be reasonably, religiously spent and our homes beyond the grave blissful ones for all eternity.

CHAPTER IV.

The third precept or commandment of our Holy Mother the Church, of that society established by Christ, empowered by Him to make and enforce laws, is "To confess our sins *at least* once a year." This precept is another evidence of the Church's good sense, good will and pure love in our regard, for the worth of confession, both as regards temporal and eternal affairs, has been recognized and appreciated by all, and at all times. Our Divine Lord gave His Apostles, and their legal successors, the Pope, bishops, and priests, the power to forgive sins, as you know, when He breathed upon them and said solemnly, and communicating the power "Whose sins you shall forgive," etc. (St. John xx. 23). Now here in these efficacious words, and on that solemn occasion, the Sacrament of Penance was instituted in order to insure the removal, by rightly-ordained ministers, of the sins poor human beings unfortunately commit after Baptism. Sinners must individually confess, tell their sins to the priest, in order that, hearing them, he may judge of them and forgive or not forgive—retain them. Thus the Sacrament of Penance includes the confession of sins. People knew this in the early ages of the Church, but in very many instances they were careless about confession, careless about utilizing the great gift of God, the Sacrament of Penance, and so our ever-anxious Mother felt herself sorrowfully constrained to step in and in the Fourth Council of Lateran to enact a law binding all Catholics under pain of mortal sin to confess their sins *at least* once a year. This she did, for she knew that confession would make people better, more moral, more charitable, more pious and more sure of heaven.

Confession was abolished in Germany for a while, but, on account of the fearful havoc in society on morals, owing to its absence, a numerously signed petition was handed to Emperor, Charles V., to have the practice of confession restored. The Emperor and the people thoroughly realized the beauty and utility of the Church's law imperatively commanding confession once a year at least.

And what do you think of the Catholics who do not go to confession nowadays? If many, with divinely-instituted helps, or opportunities, unfortunately fall, what of the confessionless multitudes? Confession is abhorred and shunned by the weak-minded, the ignorant or the thoroughly bad. They say, as a foolish excuse, "Confession is difficult, repugnant, hard for human nature, and so we do not go; we avoid it." Now, should we avoid or shun a thing because it is hard or repugnant to nature? If we would, then we should have but few soldiers or sailors, real heroes; we should have very few virtuous, truly noble people on this planet. Purity, that angelic virtue, is guarded and preserved with much difficulty and hardship amid our many worldly allurements. Should we, then, cowardly abandon it? No. All virtues are difficult and hard to practise. Should they be all avoided, therefore? No. True heroism, manliness, bravery of spirit and heart, shine out most brilliantly when, in the greatest hardships and difficulties, we do what God and right demand of us.

If there is any humiliation or unpleasantness connected with confession, it results from our first having humiliated or enslaved ourselves by sin. Sin is a revolt of pride, and it must be partially cured by the small humiliation of confession. Confession is an eminently profitable act, an act of heroism, too, and so the Church with good reason prescribes its performance or use, *at least* once a year for all Catholics of reasonable age. The Church says, "*at least* once a year," and so hints to us that she wishes us to go to confession oftener.

And, my dear reader, we should go to confession oftener than once a year, if we have any mortal sin to confess. For you know that, while we remain in mortal sin our works, as far as a heavenly reward is concerned, are dead; and besides, we are exposed at any moment to be cut off and cast into eternal tortures. See how anxious people are to insure their houses when there is danger of a fire! See how vigilantly people guard against serious diseases! And what fire can do more irreparable damage than hell fire? And what diseases can bring

more dreadful consequences than the leprosy of mortal sin? We who live in the light of faith, truth and grace must strive to be as wise as children of the world. We must insure by confession our souls against the torments of hell and the fearful deadly poisons of soul-destroying mortal sin.

Should we ever have the misfortune to fall into mortal sin, we should at once go to confession and get rid of it, and afterwards determine and strive to avoid it. It is the only real destructive monster in this world; it poisons soul and body. We should go to confession oftener than once a year, for many other reasons besides these I have just mentioned. We know that confession removes our sins and brings new graces upon the soul, new helps to do better. Confession brings us good advice from our Confessor, who is our judge, father and physician. Confession puts us on our guard against sin and even temptation to sin, and it makes us more eager to work out our salvation. Confession has converted many a drunkard, prevented many a suicide and divorce.

Masters, mistresses, fathers and mothers are strictly bound to put these good ideas permanently in their own minds and hearts, and their position obliges them to see that their servants and children are duly impressed with these salutary notions too, and to see also that the law of our time-sanctioned, God-inspired Mother the Church is attended to; to confess *at least*, as she says, once a year.

Now, a great deal more could be said on this law of the Church regarding confession at least once a year, and on confession itself, but I think at the present time and in the present circumstances enough has been said to show you the good will and good sense of the Church in this profitable precept, enactment. Love and obey your Church, and endeavor to profit by the hint she gives you in her "*at least*" once a year." Go often to confession, always do the very best in your power, and, with the grace and light of God, make your confessions with all the proper conditions and dispositions. If you do, the Church's aim, or wish, will be accomplished; yourself and society will be the better off by your acts; God will

be glorified, the devil shamed, and Heaven will finally rejoice at your soul's salvation.

CHAPTER V.

We know, dear reader, that our Savior founded, instituted a society called the Church, for the carrying out of His will and the salvation of souls, and He gave the governing, legislative and executive portion of that society full power to enact and enforce laws. We have seen that that society has certain notable and easily-recognized characteristics: it is One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic; that it has survived persecutions, and that it shall last, that it shall prevail against the gates of hell until the end of time. We have seen that our Lord said, "He that will not hear the Church let him be to thee—to loyal subjects and legal representatives—a heathen and a publican;" *i. e.*, a sapless, lifeless branch, unworthy of the Church's benefits here, and unworthy of a share in the glories of its faithful members hereafter. We have seen, moreover, that the Church, with the highest and even Divine motive, made six prominent laws for the good of Heaven and earth. We have considered already three of these precepts, *viz.*, "to hear Mass," etc., "to fast and abstain," etc., "to confess," etc., and now let us consider the fourth one, *i. e.*, "to go to Communion *at least* once a year."

In the early ages, in the infancy of the Church, the people were exceedingly good, pious, honest, pure and simple, because they were full of faith and good sense, and in those good old days all the Catholics who assisted at Mass would think it a sad loss if they did not receive Holy Communion. Their presence at Mass and their receiving our Saviour went hand in hand, were always most connected. Catholics—and all Christians were Catholics at that time—realizing and adoringly treating the presence of our Savior in Holy Communion, were even allowed in the times of persecution to keep the Blessed Sacrament, to have our blessed Lord in their houses, so that they could communicate when in danger of prison or torture; so that, fortified by the reception of Holy Communion, they could easily, even joyfully, suf-

fer and give up their lives for the faith. But many Catholics in the course of the ages became worldly, cold, faithless, forgetful of their souls and Holy Communion, just as they felt regarding confession; and our Holy Mother, ever faithful, ever vigilant Guardian, felt herself with keen sadness compelled to enact the law which is the fourth law of the Church, forcing under terrible penalties all her members to receive Holy Communion worthily at least once a year.

The most striking idea in this commandment of the Church, the one that forces itself upon reflecting Catholics, is the shameful, negligent conduct of Catholic Church members which brought the law into existence. A Catholic believes in his Church, believes that God is with it, that Jesus Christ is really and truly existing under the appearances of bread and wine, and that the receiving of our Saviour in Holy Communion is a necessity for the vigorous temporal and eternal life of the soul; and besides, that his Saviour, being his best and unchangeable Friend, cannot deceive or be deceived; and notwithstanding these facts, these beliefs, obliges the Church to pass a law compelling him under pain of sin and other penalties to do the most profitable, the noblest action on earth, viz., to receive Holy Communion *at least* once a year. The idea must raise feelings of shame in all reasonable Catholics, must bring a blush to the cheeks of even the most indifferent.

Let me make this idea clearer, if possible. Just suppose I met a fairly intelligent pagan, and told him what all Catholics and I believe about the Blessed Eucharist, that our Saviour assures us He is the Bread from Heaven; and that unless we eat of the Flesh and drink the Blood of the Son of Man we cannot have life in us; and that He invites all of us to easily and without cost receive Him, the God of Consolation, the King of Heaven, the source of grace and happiness, into our souls in Holy Communion. And suppose I then told this decent pagan that the society which our dear Saviour founded for the guidance and salvation of men was necessitated to enact a threatening precept, ordering all Catholics to receive

this Divine Food once in twelve months—the pagan, considering the wonderful, ineffable goodness, mercy and love of our dear Lord, and the indifference of some Catholics, would be amazed. He would surely say that some Catholics were either absolutely faithless or senseless. We should feel saddened that the coldness and apathy of former Catholics made the Church enact such a law, and we should experience a sense of deep shame to think that the Church's law is with more reason than ever in force at the present time.

The precept is usually complied with at Easter, or at any time from the beginning of Lent up to Low Sunday, in your own parish. The Church allows in some dioceses about three months' time wherein to receive our Lord in the Blessed Eucharist after a good confession. Let us sensibly and frequently consider our Church's conduct towards us; let us always admire the justice, wisdom and charity of her laws; let us profit by the hint she gives us in "*at least once a year,*" generously and wisely persuading ourselves that we should receive our Blessed Saviour, our first Beginning and last End, not only at Easter, once a year, under compulsion, but very often; even daily, with faith, hope, humility and love, anxious to satiate, nourish and strengthen our souls with the Bread of Angels. Considering, admiring and loving the Church's good sense and good will in her laws, we will gladly and profitably observe her commands, and especially the two which are most intimately connected, ordering us to confess and communicate *at least once a year*. Thus God will be pleased, society bettered, and we, in God's good time, will reap the benefit of our obedience, wisdom and piety in eternal happiness.

CHAPTER VI.

We have arrived now, dear reader, at the fifth precept of our Church, which commands us to pay tithes, or to contribute to the support of our pastors according to our means. Besides saying a few words on this precept, I shall also touch lightly on the sixth and last precept of the Church, in which she tells her children, her subjects,

not to marry persons who are not Catholics, or who are related to us within the fourth degree of kindred, nor privately without witnesses, nor to solemnize marriage at forbidden times.

The priests in the old law were, as they are always, chosen by God from among the people for Divine ministrations and purposes, to minister at the altar, to pray for and look after the spiritual welfare of the people. There is not, and there never has been, in any priest any particular gift that renders him worthy of God's calling him to the priesthood.

God gratuitously gives the vocation, or calling. "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you." God also has provided for the priests' support. He commanded (Num. xviii. 26 and fol.) the Jewish people to give a tenth of all their produce towards the support of their priests, and He, at the present time, by His Church, commands Christian people "to contribute to the support of their pastors." Our Divine Lord in St. Luke (x. 7), said to the Apostles and the people, "The laborer is worthy of his hire, and after the Apostles had gone out and preached and returned on a visit to our Divine Lord, He asked them, in the words of St. Luke (xxii. 35), "When I sent you without purse and scrip and shoes, did you want anything?" But they said, "Nothing." The priests in those days and for several ages afterwards worked as they do now, and the people, thoroughly appreciating the priests' work and their own obligations, acted so generously that the priests did not have to ask for anything. Priests actually wanted nothing.

Many people in the present age forget or ignore the strict, natural and God-imposed obligation they are under to provide for the decent support of their priests. They do not seem to realize the great and binding law of God's Church, "To pay tithes, to contribute to the support of their pastors." This neglect makes people guilty of sin, even of dishonesty, for it deprives the laborer of his wages. The priests' means of support are derived from collections, pew-rents, donations, baptisms, funerals and marriages. By generously contributing to these various

sources of revenue the children of the Church fulfil her fifth precept, and in fulfilling the precept they are avoiding sin, they are pleasing their Mother's loving heart, they are doing God's will, and He, in turn, will generously reward them.

The sixth precept tells all the lay members of the Church not to marry persons of a different religion not to marry within forbidden degrees of kindred, not to marry without their priests and witnesses, and not to marry with solemnization during Lent and Advent.

The experience of ages, nations and individuals shows the extraordinary wisdom, justice and goodness of this law of our Church.

The Church can grant dispensations in cases falling under the sixth precept, whenever there is an urgent good cause—for the one who makes the laws can grant exemptions from the law for justifiable reasons. But the Church never gives dispensation from her rules, or laws, without experiencing some fear or regret. Exemptions from the law of the Church have turned out sometimes exceptionally well; but in many, very many, cases inexpressibly sorrowful results followed, thereby in the exceptionally few good cases and the many bad ones proving the great wisdom of the rulings of the Church in this matter. Fathers and mothers should understand this precept and tell their children about it. Marriageable boys and girls should strive to remember the sixth precept of the Church. They should endeavor to select a good life-partner of the Catholic faith. They must bear in mind that a Catholic getting married by any other official than by the priest commits sin, and they must understand and ever remember that matrimony is a Sacrament, which in conferring grace pre-supposes a soul in grace.

Now, I have endeavored briefly to explain to you the facts that our dear Lord, whilst on earth, founded a society—a Church—for the guidance and salvation of souls. You have seen that this Church met with numerous persecutions, and that today she gloriously stands the smiling, unsullied survivor of all. We have considered that she is One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. We

have made ourselves acquainted with the fact that she, acting by Christ's authority, has enacted and enforced laws for the spiritual and the eternal welfare of her members, and we have spent a little while in considering the Church's good will and good sense so easily seen in the six prominent laws which are called the precepts of the Church. We have seen how beautiful and natural and profitable the command, "to hear Mass on Sundays and Holy-days of obligation" is; how good and necessary the law asking us "to fast and abstain on the days commanded" is; how useful and indispensable the orders "to go to confession and Communion *at least* once a year, are; also, just now we have endeavored to realize the rectitude of the two last precepts, telling us "to contribute to the support of our pastors," and "to marry the right persons and in the right way."

Read over the precepts of your Church, study them and, realizing the good will and sense and anxious love they contain, each and all, you cannot but feel a sense of admiration and gratitude for our Savior and the society our Church, He has so wisely founded and guarded. Loving our Holy Mother the Church, her Savior, Founder and Guide, you will the more readily and cheerfully obey her laws, keep her golden cords burnished, follow in the footsteps of our Savior and secure the salvation of your immortal soul.

After finishing these short, rather incomplete instructions on the "Six Golden Cords," I thought a few explanatory words on the "Hail Mary" and "Holy Mary," which bring us closer to the heart of our churchly Mother and of our heavenly Mother Mary, would be profitable; so with hope and pleasure I give them in the following chapter, "Hail Mary," "Holy Mary."

CHAPTER VII.

"HAIL MARY," "HOLY MARY."

Dear Reader, I do not know whether it ever occurred to you to ask yourself or others why Catholics usually—in fact, I may say invariably—place and say the "Hail Mary" and "Holy Mary" after the Lord's Prayer. Prob-

ably the question never came to you before. Let us strive to see some of the various reasons for so doing, and also consider briefly the meaning of the words in the "Hail Mary" and "Holy Mary" and "Holy Mary" following our Saviour's prayer. One very good and natural reason is this, because Mary being the Mother of our Lord and King, we stand a better chance of having our petitions made in the Lord's Prayer for needs of soul and body, time and eternity, heeded and granted when we enlist her influence and sympathy by these prayers. Another reason, and a good one, too, is because we know through the Fathers of the Church, that as Jesus Christ is Mediator between God and man, so the Blessed Virgin is an advocate between us and her Divine Son; and, besides, God is pleased to have us receive His gifts through our Lady's intercession and tender, motherly hands. "Such is the Will of God, who desires that we should have everything through Mary," says St. Bernard.

Still another reason—the simplest and easiest to be remembered by all—is because Mary, the Queen of Heaven, is called and really is our Mother. When our Lord was dying on the cross He entrusted the whole human race to His Blessed Mother as her family, and He asked her as His expiring request, to be a mother to us all. "Mother, behold thy son; son, behold thy Mother." These reasons are sufficient and satisfactory enough, I hope, to account for our beautiful and profitable custom of following up the Lord's Prayer with an earnest appeal to His and our Blessed Mother in the words of the Angel Gabriel, St. Elizabeth and our Church.

Now let us try to understand the meaning of the words in our Lady's prayer.

The first word is "Hail." This is the respectful, reverential salutation of the Angel Gabriel when he appeared before the young Jewish, saintly Virgin, as God's messenger to her. The angelic salutation is replete with significance. After receiving his high commission, the Angel must have entertained some such thoughts as these: "Now, I am going on the most important mission ever given to a messenger from heaven to discharge. One

is chosen from amongst the daughters of Adam, from the whole human race, to be the Mother of the promised Redeemer. What a glorious privilege! One far surpassing any conferred upon me or any of the highest spirits under God. I am deputed to tell this Favorite of Heaven about this ineffable dignity. I must show her the greatest respect and reverence." Such, very likely, were the thoughts of Gabriel on his way to the poor cottage of Mary.

On entering the humble room of this sweet, incomparably favored and holy Virgin, and beholding her who was more holy and perfect than any of the Angels with whom he had been associating in the court of Heaven, the celestial messenger Gabriel with deepest reverence bowed to Mary, and with the utmost possible respect saluted her with "Hail."

What do you think of the sad difference in our dispositions and attention, when we address our "Hail," not to a little virgin girl, but to the glorious Queen of Heaven, in our daily prayers?

Our words and feelings and minds are, unfortunately, too often vastly different from those of the Angel when from the "valley of tears" we salute our Heavenly Mother with our "Hail."

To "Mary" one meaning "bitter" is given. Again, "Mary" is interpreted "Sweet." Mary is bitter, terrible to the infernal serpents, whose heads she crushed, but sweet beyond expression to the angels and all saintly people. Mary also means "illumination," for she was the illuminating morning star that rose and shone brightly before the glorious Sun of Salvation day. "Mary," moreover, has another significant meaning, viz., the Sea, or Mistress, Lady of the Sea.

Mary is the sea of blessings or graces. This last idea will enable us to understand the meaning of the other words of the Angel, "full of grace." Mary at the time of the Angel's visit was filled with the holiness or grace of God, so that there was no place for sin in her. In fact, at her conception, at the first moment of her existence, she had more grace than all the Saints and martyrs

that ever lived. "To other," says St. Bernard, "grace is given in parcels, in partial supplies, but in Mary the whole fulness was poured out." God created the earth, and prepared the basin of the sea for its waters. A full sea contains a wonderful amount of water, when compared to a full barrel or river; and as God prepared Mary for a Mother, to contain the Saviour of mankind, the Ocean of Sanctity, so you may just imagine the fulness of grace she possessed and enjoyed at the time of the Annunciation, when Gabriel reverently and truthfully said to her, "full of grace."

"The Lord is with thee," are the next words of the Angel's address, or salutation. The Lord, my dear friends, is with all of us. We cannot get along without Him in some degree, for "In Him we live, move, and have our being" (Acts xvii. 28). Besides, as St. Paul says (1 Cor. iii. 16), "We are temples of God."

The Lord, the Lord God, was with the Saints and martyrs, for by Him they suffered the greatest privations and most exquisite tortures with pleasure and joy; but the Lord God in a most especial manner was with Mary constantly in her thoughts, in the affections of her pure heart, in all her faculties, helping her to prepare herself for her astonishing, incomprehensible dignity, the Motherhood of His only Son. God was truly with Mary.

After the words, "The Lord is with thee," the Angel continued, "Blessed art thou among women." Surely when Mary was "full of grace," and "the Lord was with her" in a more singular way than He ever was or ever will be with any other, the Angel could properly gleefully say that she was blessed above and beyond all the women of the human race. St. Elizabeth used the very same words, "Blessed art thou among women," when she was visited by the Blessed Virgin shortly after the Annunciation; and Mary said to her cousin in prophecy, "Because the Lord hath regarded my humility, all generations shall henceforth call me Blessed." Oh, yes, blessed, thrice blessed was, is and shall be, our Heavenly Mother.

The remaining words of the "Hail Mary," viz., "and blessed is the Fruit of thy womb," were spoken by St.

Elizabeth; and "Jesus," meaning "Saviour," Who was Mary's Son, was added by the Church. You all know very well that Jesus Christ, the Fruit of Mary's womb, the Eternal Son of the Eternal Father, Whose sacred Flesh and the Blood that runs through it were furnished by Mary and Mary alone, is and shall ever be, blessed, sanctified.

In the early part of the fifth century a heresy assailed the dignity of Mary, hinted that she was not the Mother of God. A General Council of bishops was convened at Ephesus to consider the case; the heresy was promptly condemned, Mary was with pride and exultation proclaimed to the Ephesians and the whole Catholic world as Mother of God, and thus by the Church was added to the beautiful salutation of the Angel Gabriel and St. Elizabeth the words, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of our death. Amen." The excitement of the people at the time was intense, and the enthusiastic joy of all Catholics when receiving and hearing the words, "Holy Mary, Mother of God," etc., was indescribable, unbounded. After saluting our Blessed Mother in the words of our Church we humbly, lovingly, earnestly ask her, as Mother of God, to intercede for us, to work for our welfare at the present time, and especially at the all-eventful hour of our death.

Now, dear friend, we have briefly and I hope profitably considered the explanation of the "Hail Mary" and "Holy Mary," and we have seen some of the many good reasons why we begin with addresses, prayers to our dear Mother and the true Mother of our loving Saviour, immediately after offering our earnest, Saviour-taught petitions to God Himself. We should strive with all our strength to say the "Our Father," the "Hail Mary" and "Holy Mary" as often as possible, with deepest respect, attention and reverence. If we do, our Father and Mother in Heaven will take good care of us here below, console us in trials, protect us from evil, teach us good lessons and prepare us for a glorious position or situation in the eternal heavens, where with them and the Angels and Saints, in joy and glory we can revel for ever. Amen.

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