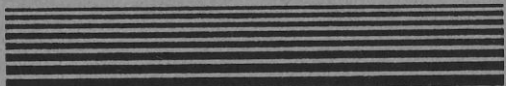


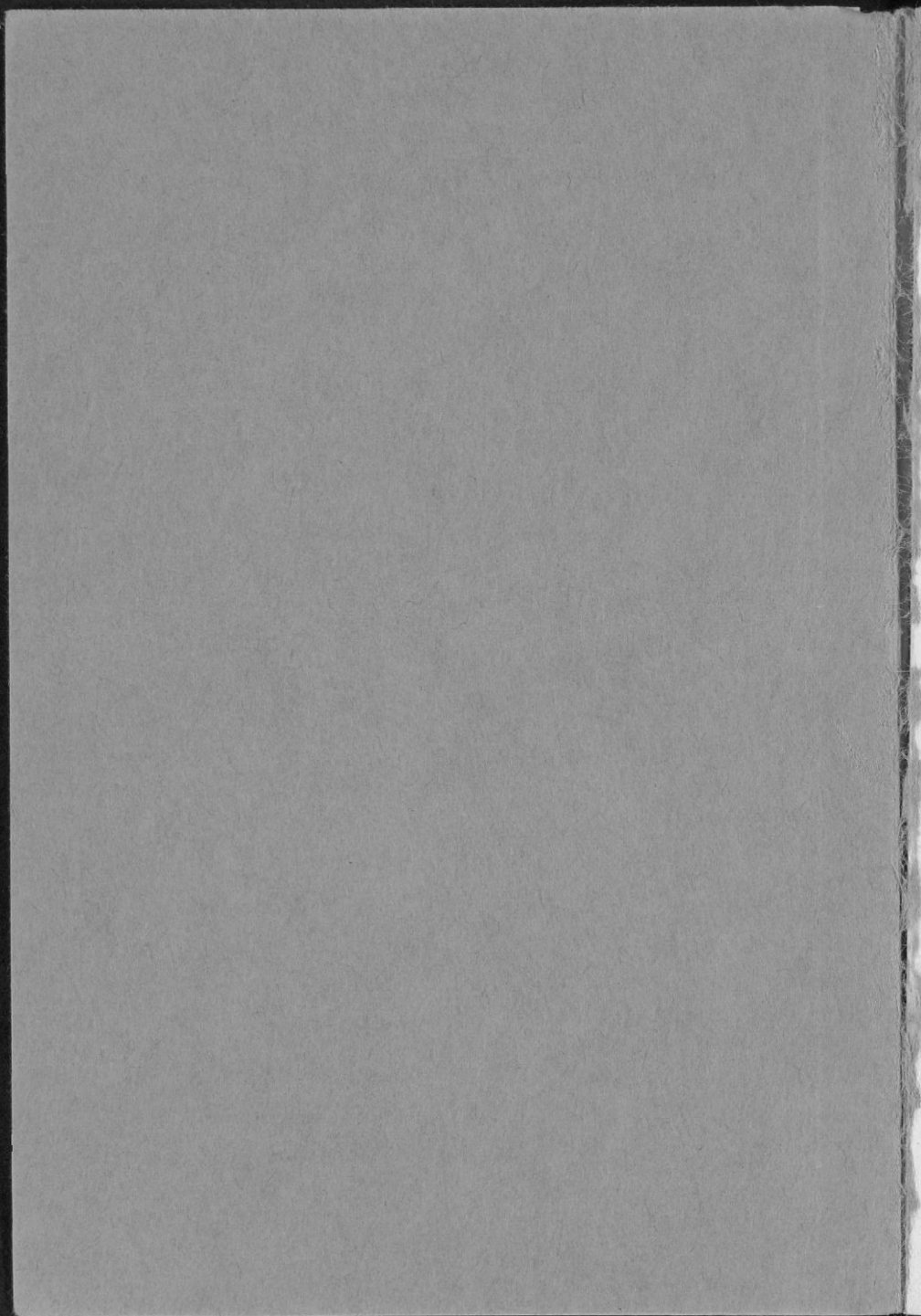
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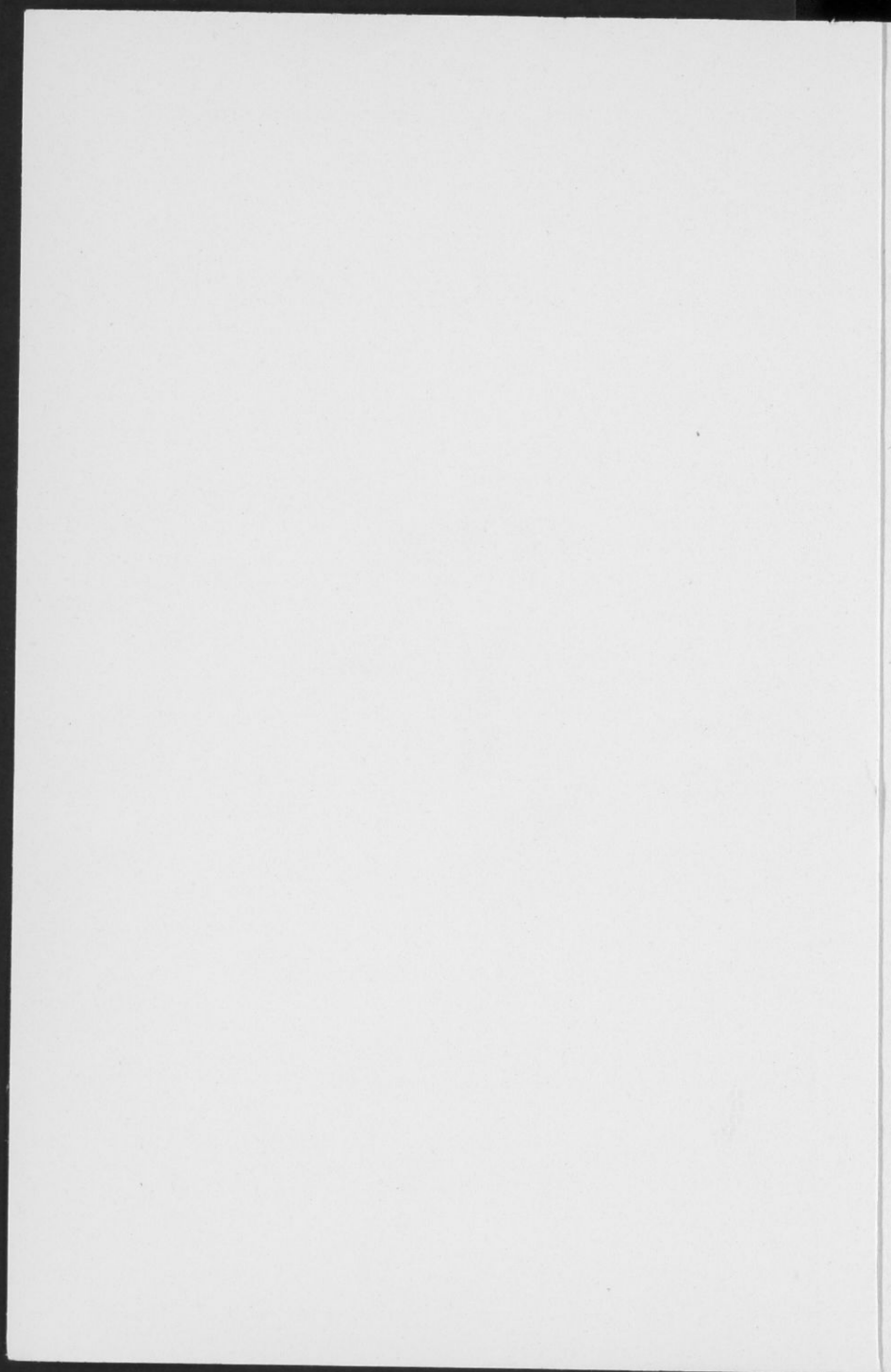
SERMONS FOR LENT

REV. JOHN F. BURNS, Ph.D. O.S.A.









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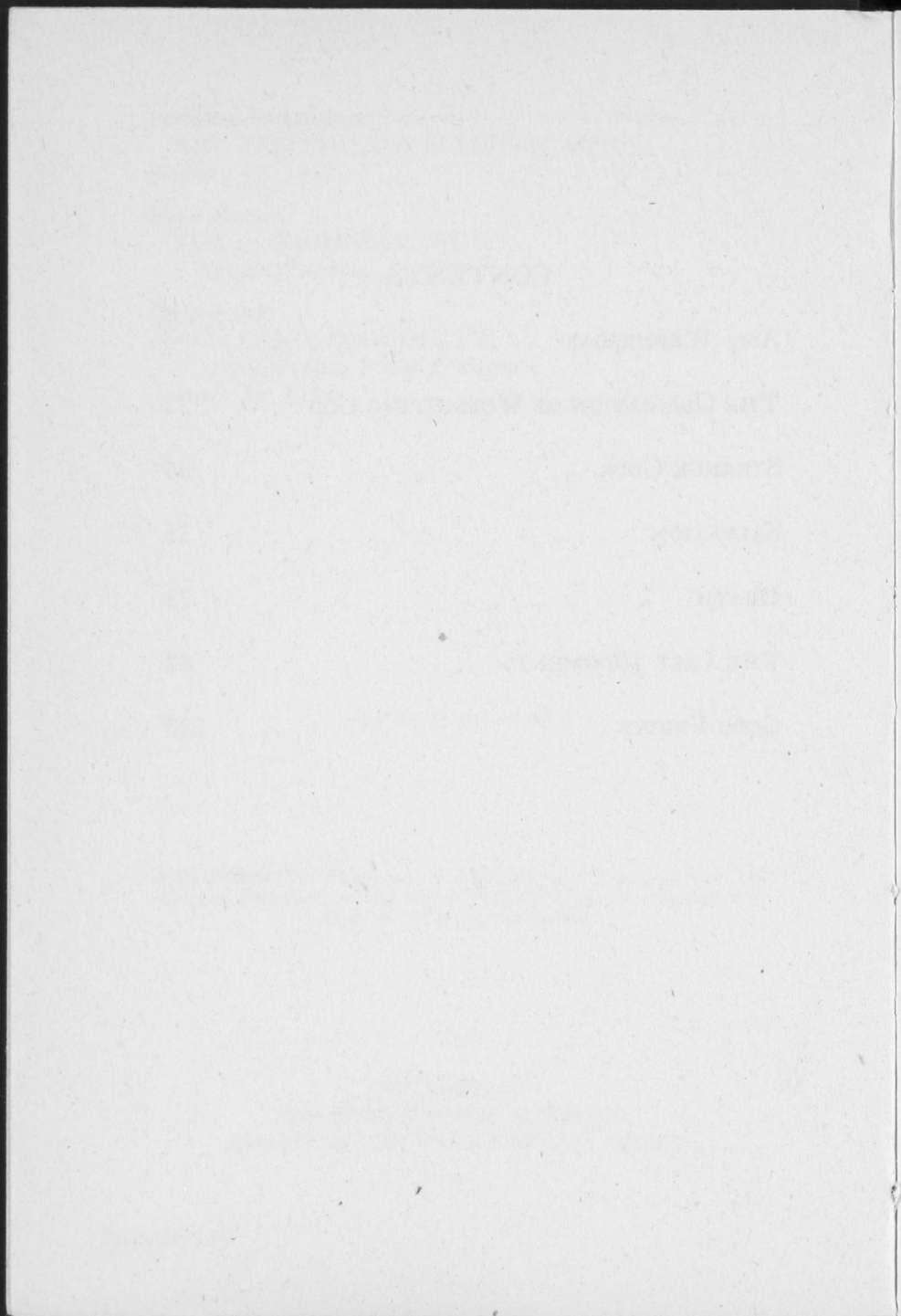
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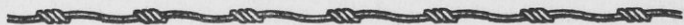
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ASH

WEDNESDAY



The Message of This Sermon

Sincere observance of Lent requires two things: that the sinner remove the stain of serious sin through the sacrament of penance; that everyone endeavor to make atonement and satisfaction to God for all sins through the virtue of penance, or voluntary mortification.



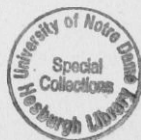
ASH WEDNESDAY

“Now therefore saith the Lord: Be converted to Me with all your heart, in fasting, and in weeping, and in mourning. And rend your hearts . . . and turn to the Lord your God” (Joel ii. 12, 13).



During these solemn days the world begins the celebration of Lent. We ask you to note particularly the words “the *celebration* of Lent.” For in some circles the “celebration” has become quite fashionable. One must be able to discuss the beauty of penance. One must by all means have attended that touching service, or have heard that eloquent preacher — as advertised! And one must *so* lament one’s terrible wickedness!

But, dear friends, no one else must lament it! No one else must suspect it! No one else must accuse of it! This is wherein the Lent of the world and the Lent of the Catholic Church differ. The Church smashes through this veneer of righteousness, this smug respectability, this coddling sentimentalism. To the man and woman who, like the rich man in the Gospel story, is totally absorbed in self and in



pleasure, and who is enjoying life, with never a serious thought for its great realities — death and judgment and eternal destiny — the message of the Church on Ash Wednesday comes like a thunderbolt from heaven: "Thou fool! This night," it may be, "do they require thy soul of thee!" (Luke xii. 10.) For "dust thou art and into dust thou shalt return!" The Church further says to them: "Thou hast sinned! Into the very face of thy God and Saviour who created thee, who gave to thee all that thou hast, who suffered and died for thee, thou hast flung the insult of thy sin! God is not mocked! Repent! Remove the guilt of sin, and make atonement to God!" "For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap" (Gal. vi. 7). "The soul that sinneth, the same shall die" (Ezech. xviii. 20). "He shall be punished for all that he did" (Job xx. 18). And "which of you," asks Isaias, "can dwell with devouring fire? Which of you shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" (Isa. xxxiii. 14.)

But immediately we hear the objection: Why be so direct about these things? Why refer to matters that are so disconcerting? Why stress subjects that are highly disturbing? Why not dwell rather on the happiness of heaven, or the beauty of virtue, or the amiability of Christ? Why preach on sin and penance and punishment? Or, if you must refer to

them, why not at least drape them over in some artistic manner? Treat of them academically, with a certain aloofness, a certain tact and consideration. Do not give to them any personal bearing! My dear friends, when you realize that sin is so outright in its folly, so despicable in its ingratitude, so base in its treachery, you cannot drape it over! Who was more impartial, more considerate, more tactful, more refined than Christ Himself? And how spoke He of sin? And to audiences that numbered the best people of His day — refined people of the most cultured tastes, educated, keen of mind, courteous, polished to the last degree? To these, Christ spoke not to please their ears but to pierce their hearts. It was “liars,” “hypocrites,” “detractors,” “robbers of the poor,” “adulterers” that He called them! If Christ did not apologize when He spoke of sin, why should His Church be expected to do so? And if, as St. John writes, “we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (I John i. 8). Now it is precisely because of sin that the Church at the beginning of Lent sends out in the words of Joel the call to repentance and to penance: “Now therefore saith the Lord: Be converted to Me with all your heart, in fasting, and in weeping, and in mourning. And rend your hearts . . . and turn to the Lord your God” (Joel ii. 12, 13). For the

Church knows that the Son of God has Himself said concerning sin: "Unless you shall do penance you shall all likewise perish" (Luke xiii. 3).

"Now therefore saith the Lord: Be converted to Me with all your heart" (Joel ii. 12). For all sinners the process of conversion necessarily implies penance. For the person who is conscious of serious, unforgiven sin, the first and most necessary form of penance is the sacrament of penance, or confession. For if we admit the folly, the ingratitude, the treachery, and the shame of sin, are we not practically defying Almighty God by remaining in a state of sin and by refusing to seek the forgiveness He offers us in the tribunal of penance? The person who does this is making a mere sham out of Lenten observance. He is, as it were, sending out a most reckless challenge to the mercy of God. He knows that sin has brought his Saviour to death upon the cross. But he does not care. He knows that mortal sin is deliberate rejection of God. But he does not care. He knows that unrepented mortal sin may damn his soul forever. But he does not care. He knows that his conscience forbids it, that the Ten Commandments forbid it, that the Commandments of the Church forbid it. But he does not care. He would do well indeed to take to himself these words of our Saviour: "Woe to thee, Corozain; woe to thee, Bethsaida: for if in Tyre and Sidon had been

wrought the miracles that have been wrought in thee [miracles of God's love and grace], they had done penance long since in sack-cloth and ashes" (Matt. xi. 21). If Lent is to mean anything at all, it must mean first a turning away from sin and a turning back to God. "Be converted to Me with all your heart," says the Lord God in the words of Joel. We cannot be converted to Him with all our hearts if we remain in a state of sin. Therefore, the first act of penance for a sinner is to seek forgiveness of his offense in the sacrament of penance.

Dear friends, may I call your attention particularly to the following reminder? After the sinner has gone to confession, after his sins have been forgiven, he has still a further obligation to fulfill. Many people erroneously suppose that the performance of the penance that is given in confession always makes entire satisfaction and atonement to God for their sins. They forget, as the Council of Trent informs us, that God does not remit our sins "without any satisfaction, lest . . . imagining our sins less grievous than they are . . . we fall into greater enormities . . . (Council of Trent, Sess. 14, *de poenit. cap. 8*). Satisfaction and atonement to God even after sins have been forgiven are required, says the same Council of Trent, as an act of justice toward God. It is true that the sacrament of penance, or confession, forgives our sin and removes

the eternal punishment due to sin. But the sacrament does not always remit all the temporal punishment due to sin. Nor does it always offer entire satisfaction or make complete atonement to God for the offense committed against Him. Penance, undertaken in the form of private, voluntary mortification, does offer satisfaction and make atonement; and it lessens and can even remit the temporal punishment due to sin. That is why the Church calls upon us in the words of the prophet to be converted to God with all our hearts "in *fasting*, and in *weeping* and in *mourning*." These have reference to voluntary, private penance freely undertaken. Lest we forget the necessity and the advantage of this private penance, the Church calls us each year to the observance of the penitential season of Lent. St. John Chrysostom explains our obligation to do private penance in this manner. He says, referring to a bodily wound, that it is "not enough that the arrow has been extracted from the body; the wound that it inflicted must also be healed. So with regard to the soul, not enough that sin has been pardoned; the wound that it left must be healed by penance" (Serm. 5, *de omn. sanct.*, quoted in *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, chapter on the Sacrament of Penance). In the life of King David we have a piercing example of the necessity of offering satisfaction to God by penance even

after sin has been forgiven. David, who had committed the grievous sins of adultery and murder, was pardoned by God. "The Lord . . . hath taken away thy sin," he was told. "Thou shalt not die" (II Kings xii. 13). But David, not content with this pardon, voluntarily subjected himself to the most severe mortifications, begging God not only to forgive his sin but also to remit the punishment due to it, and to restore him to his former state of friendship with God. "Wash me yet more from my iniquity," he prayed by night and by day, "and cleanse me from my sin" (Ps. l. 4). "Turn away Thy face from my sins" (Ps. l. 11). But God, although He had pardoned David for his sins, continued to punish him. David's son by this adultery was taken in death. Another and beloved son, Absalom, turned against his father and he, too, was taken in death. Dear friends, you and I, like David and all men who have sinned, must not only look to God for pardon; we must also make atonement to God. If we neglect to make the atonement in this life by undertaking private, voluntary penance or mortification, then we must make it in the next life in the fires of purgatory. But the point is that atonement for sin *must* be made.

Unfortunately, however, when one speaks of penance and mortification in these days, people become annoyed. They do not wish to hear about penance, and much less do they wish to perform pen-

ance. When the Church announces a day of fast and abstinence, or ushers in a season of penance like that of Lent, their reaction is antagonistic. They question the right of anyone even to suggest any curbing of their appetites or retrenchment of their pleasures. They are very willing, of course, to accept from God all the favors He can bestow. But they are not willing to put themselves out, or to inconvenience themselves, or to discommode themselves in the slightest degree, in order to be more deserving of those favors. They know perhaps that they have grievously offended God. They believe, as we shall presently indicate, in the doctrine of atonement. But they are not willing to make any atonement to God. In a word, they desire from God all that He can give. But they are willing to do for God the very least that can be done in order to merit His gifts. They take all. They would give, if possible, nothing.

Dear friends, do we seriously think that we are going to finesse our way into heaven? Or that we are going to fool God and win His gifts of grace and salvation without fulfilling the conditions that He Himself has taught both by word and by example? The greatest of the saints did not dare to hope for heaven without atoning to God for sin by way of voluntary penance and mortification. But we dare so to hope! We are not going to be legis-

lated into any penance or mortification or privation that can be avoided! Isn't that our attitude? Let the saints and those who are dear to God travel the penitential road of mortification and sacrifice! We will travel the royal road to heaven in ease and comfort! Let Christ the Son of God live and die in mortification and in suffering! Let the very Mother of God have her soul pierced by a sword of sorrow! Let every great saint demonstrate in his life the necessity of atonement for sin! Let the Scriptures require it, and God's Church enjoin it! "What is that to us?" we say. We have no need of penance! My friends, just as some of us think the world owes us a living without any effort on our part to earn it, so many of us think that God owes us salvation without any effort or struggle or trouble in attaining it.

The athlete, the lawyer, the doctor, the politician, anyone who seeks a worth-while goal is perfectly willing to make the sacrifices necessary in order to succeed. How, then, do we reasonably expect to achieve an everlasting Goal effortlessly, indifferently, easily, comfortably, with absolutely no self-sacrifice? Do we seriously believe that we have a soul to save, and that we have to *work out* our salvation? But mortification? No! The giving up of any pleasure, even though it be unlawful? No! The trouble of more fervent or more frequent prayer

and worship of Almighty God? No. Nothing! Nothing at all that we can avoid if it means sacrifice, or difficulty, or even the smallest discomfort!

And yet, we do most thoroughly believe in the doctrine of atonement. Can you recall, perhaps, that person whom you had once taken in next to your heart and wrapt around with your deepest affection? It may be that you lived only for that person. It may be that you were the bulwark of his life's happiness. It may be that everything worth while in his life came from you. Then you saw him turning gradually away from you. You saw him forgetting all that you had done. You saw him perhaps turning even as the viper, to strike venomously at you, his greatest benefactor. What happened then? Was your heart and your pride and your love wounded then? And did your whole inner self shrivel up and harden against him? Did you find it difficult not to hate him? And then that person came back to you! He had realized his mistake. He appreciated all that you had meant to him. And he came back for that old place in your esteem and in your affection. And how was he received? Was he reinstated? And on the mere word that he was sorry? Was he reinstated? No! He had first to demonstrate his sorrow! He had first to prove the sincerity of his repentance! He had first to make atonement for his base ingratitude! Dear friends,

do we not believe most thoroughly in the doctrine of atonement? Why then are we so unwilling to make atonement to God for our offenses against Him? Or do we perchance imagine that the five Hail Mary's or the five Our Father's or the Rosary or other usual penance given in confession is always sufficient satisfaction? Almighty God did not think so when He spoke through His prophet: "Be converted to Me with all your heart, in fasting, and in weeping, and in mourning." Nor did His own beloved Son, our Lord and Saviour, think so when He said: "Unless you shall do penance, you shall all likewise perish" (Luke xiii. 3).

Let us return for a moment to that person who had hurt us so deeply, and from whom we demanded atonement. We may have done very much for that person. But we have not given to him the very life that he enjoys — as God has done for us. We are not with him, supporting and guiding him during every moment of his existence by an unerring Providence. We have not given to him an angel to guard his ways — as God has done for us. In all the happinesses that we may have planned for him, we have not prepared joys that surpass all understanding and that will be everlasting in heaven. And in order that he might not be deprived of that destiny, we have not sacrificed our own son, we have not laid down our very life, we have not

stretched out our hands to be nailed to a cross — as God in the Person of His Divine Son has done for us. What ought not to be the measure of our atonement after turning traitor by sin to an infinitely loving and merciful and bountiful Saviour? “Despiseth thou,” asks St. Paul, “the riches of His goodness and patience and long-suffering? Knowest thou not that the benignity of God leadeth thee to penance?” (Rom. ii. 4.)

Dear friends, voluntary, private penance can be performed in many ways. Most important are prayer, fasting, and alms-deeds. Every species of satisfaction and atonement is included under these three. You may say that the Church has exempted workingmen and their families from fasting. The Church has not, however, forbidden them to fast. And fasting may be applied to many things other than food and drink. We can refrain during Lent from certain pleasures and pastimes that markedly appeal to us, or from attendance at theaters, dances, and hilarious social events. The money that these would have cost can be given to the poor. We can sacrifice some little of our time and our rest and our convenience by coming to church for morning Mass and evening devotions and more frequent reception of Holy Communion. We can repress our impatience, and restrain harsh or critical or condemning words. We can give up a portion of our meager funds in order to help the many unfortu-

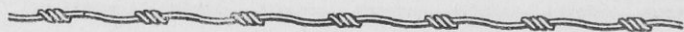
nate, hungry, cold, sickly, or discouraged brothers and sisters of Christ who are poor even as He Himself was poor. We can remember that the many afflictions and burdens that come to every normal person provide an abundant source of satisfaction and atonement for sin. These and all the ills of life, if borne patiently, can be the means, not of dragging us down into deep despair, but of lifting us high up, of balancing us, as it were, upon the cross of Christ, from which we reach out and grasp the very battlements of heaven.

But we need not to be told the methods of making atonement to God for sin. What we need most is the will to make it. And shall we not have that will? It means the lessening of the temporal punishment due to sin. It means the more perfect reinstatement in the friendship of God. It means that, by reason of our voluntary mortifications and of our sufferings patiently endured, we become more like Christ our Saviour. It means increasing strength to combat our own weakness and our inclination to sin. It means that we avert the wrath of an offended God and Judge. It means that we insure our everlasting happiness. Shall we not have that will?

Dear friends, we shall have the will, for in the Lenten time we are all "in mourning for the death of God." The Church, His Bride, is draped in purple raiment. Her ceremonies, her prayers, her

hymns are sad — in mourning for the death of God. And He is not only the God of the Church; He is our God, our Saviour, our Divine Friend, whose sad death of love for us we mourn during Lent. He who loved us “unto the end”; He whom we His children twice over should love, has died — for love of us. When someone dear to us on earth has died, do we not, in tribute of respect, go into mourning? Do we not then refrain from the ordinary joys and enjoyments of life? How much more so should we refrain from them, how much more so should we think prayerful thoughts and speak prayerful words and perform respectful acts of praise and thanksgiving and reparation and adoration when, as in the Lenten season, the crepe is on the door of our hearts, and we are in mourning for the death of God?

But dear friends and brethren of Christ, there is no sincere observance of Lent without removal of sin and atonement for sin through the sacrament and the virtue of penance. There is no sincere observance of Lent for us the friends and brethren of Christ unless we hearken to the words of His prophet Joel: “Now therefore saith the Lord: Be converted to Me with all your heart, in fasting, and in weeping, and in mourning. And rend your hearts . . . and turn to the Lord your God” (Joel ii. 12, 13).



THE OBLIGATION OF WORSHIPING GOD



The Message of This Sermon

In the matter of serving and worshiping God we have no choice or option. God has absolute and supreme dominion over all creatures. We are as creatures entirely dependent upon and subject to Him. We are bound therefore to acknowledge Him as God and to do His will.



THE OBLIGATION OF WORSHIPING GOD

"I am the Lord thy God" (Deut. v. 6).

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It is always edifying to see our Catholic churches thronged with worshipers on Sundays and on the evenings designated for devotions. The presence of so many people in this church tonight is edifying because it indicates faith in God, reverence for Him, and interest in the eternal destiny of the soul. However, many people and perhaps even many of us have mistaken notions concerning the performance of the duties of religion. They think that by coming to church or by performing these duties they are, as it were, conferring a favor upon God. They "consent" to come to church. They make a "concession" of their time or their convenience or perhaps even of what they consider to be their "better judgment" when they perform the duties of religion. They discover in themselves an attitude of tolerance and of broad-mindedness as to the ecclesiastical laws that so authoritatively require their presence during the worship of God. And they

come not exactly unwillingly, but with a certain sense of "generosity," feeling that they are doing a very praiseworthy act or a rather unusually creditable work in giving to God so much of their time. Not a few people also come to church largely from motives of gratitude. They appreciate what God has done for them. He loves them. He died for them. He promises heaven to them. Therefore, in *return*, and *because* God has been good to them, they carry out what they believe to be their side of the "bargain" by coming to church.

These and similar attitudes concerning the service and worship of God are founded upon mistaken theories. And people who may have developed these attitudes forget that mankind has no choice between worshiping and not worshiping God, no option as to whether they will or will not perform the duties of religion, no right to decide for themselves that God shall or shall not receive their reverence and their service. For we cannot reasonably suppose that we are conferring a favor, we cannot "consent" or make a "concession" however so slight, we cannot either in a spirit of generosity or of tolerance "accept," we cannot feel rather complacent, self-satisfied, praiseworthy, and deserving of notable credit in connection with duties that we are *bound* to perform — duties con-

cerning the performance of which our very state and nature leave absolutely *no choice*.

Dear friends, the service and worship of God and the performance of the works of religion are among these duties. We *must* adore, praise, thank, depend upon, love, serve, and obey God. We have no choice, no option, no freedom of decision to do otherwise. There is no question of consenting or straining a point or taking unusual credit in respect to these duties. And why is this true? I may illustrate the reason by recalling to you a very familiar fact. You have often seen a father and a mother lavishing care upon their infant child. They provide food and shelter. In time of illness they supply all that is needed. They are at great trouble and labor and expense for the child's welfare. But what would you think of those parents if they were to claim unusual credit, or feel rather generous toward their child, or regard themselves as conferring a favor or conceding a point when they perform the duties of parenthood? Have parents any justifiable claim to do otherwise? Are they not doing only what they are bound to do — only what, from the viewpoint of duty, they have no freedom, no option, no choice, in the matter of doing?

So also in relation to God who is our Creator, our Owner and our Master, we have no freedom, no

option, no choice, in the matter of performing the duties of religion. We are bound to worship God. We *must* perform the duties of religion. God has absolute ownership and supreme dominion over us. We belong entirely and without any qualification to Him. We are His property, not our own. We say that God has absolute ownership and supreme dominion over us because He has made us; because He has made and controls everything we have and every circumstance in which we live. We owe to God our very existence, for we have come into being by way of laws that He has made. Listen to the mother of the Machabees: "For I neither gave you breath, nor soul, nor life," she says to her children, "but the Creator of the world that formed the nativity of man" (Mach. vii. 22, 23). God furthermore controls every moment and circumstance of our existence. It begins when God permits, continues as He wills, and terminates when He decrees. Everything we have and everything we hope for depends also upon God. He has made the world, and He owns and controls everything in the world. The things that we regard as our very own — talents, friendships, love, money, material goods — these are fundamentally not ours, but God's. "What hast thou," says St. Paul, "that thou hast not received?" (I Cor. iv. 7.) We use these things and enjoy them; but God owns them. We

administer them; we are the stewards; but God is the Owner and Master.

In order further to illustrate the obligation that binds the creature to acknowledge, to serve, and to worship the Creator, let us suppose that you build a house. The house is yours, entirely, absolutely, and without any qualification. You designed it, you built it, you own it. You have control, therefore, of everything in it and concerning it. You may build it one or two or ten stories high. You may paint it black or brown or white. You may keep it, rent it, sell it. You may alter it, tear it down, or do with it whatever you please, for the house belongs to you. Now, let us further suppose that the house is able to think, and to speak. Would it have the right to tell you, its owner and master, that it does or does not belong to you, that it will or will not be painted black or brown or white? Would it have the right to tell you, its owner and master, that it will "consent" to let you live in it, or rent it, or alter it, or sell it? Would it, in a word, have the right to do anything at all except to serve and please you? No! It would not have the right. For the house owes to you its very existence, its nature, and its continuance. You are the absolute owner and master. Your house can do only your bidding. It is bound to do your bidding, because you have unqualified dominion over it.

Similarly, God, who is our Creator, our Owner, and our Master, has absolute and supreme dominion over us. "I am the Lord thy God," He says to us in one of His profoundest decrees. The extent of our dependence upon and subjection to Him has been explained a few moments ago. On Ash Wednesday it is most vividly recalled when the symbolic ashes are placed upon our foreheads and we hear the startling words: "Remember, man, that thou art dust, and into dust thou shalt return." We are, therefore, bound to acknowledge God, to worship Him, to do His bidding, to perform the duties of religion. We do not "consent" to do it. We make no "concession" when we do it. We are not tolerant, or broad-minded, or generous, or deserving of any unusual credit when we do it. Owing to our very state and nature, there is simply no question of choice or of option to do otherwise. As creatures made by God, we belong to Him absolutely, entirely, without any qualification. Therefore, we *must* serve! We *must* obey! We *must* worship!

But, you may be thinking, has not God made me free? Has He not given me free will, which enables me either to worship or not to worship, just as I please? Dear friends, God has assuredly made us free. But in so doing, God has not removed our obligation to acknowledge Him as God and to serve and worship Him as God. He has simply given to

us what He has given to no other created being — the privilege of freely carrying out our obligation. But the obligation remains.

Again, many people “consent” or “decide” to perform the duties of religion purely from a sense of gratitude to God. He has been very good to them. He has even sent His Son to die for their salvation. He has planned heaven for their destiny. He has provided the Church and the sacraments as means to attain this destiny. Out of gratitude, therefore, for all these things, many are willing to perform their religious duties. Remember, however, that gratitude is simply an *additional* reason why we are obliged to serve and to worship God. Gratitude is not the only reason, nor is it the most important reason. Even though God had done none of these things for us; even though we were to receive no reward after death for faithful service, we should still belong absolutely and entirely to God, we should still be God’s creatures, and for that reason we should still be bound to acknowledge Him as God and to perform the duties of religion.

But what are the consequences of not giving to God due recognition, in worship and service and the duties of religion? Let us reflect on the situation of mankind in the world today. Never was progress more remarkable. Never were governmental, industrial, and legal systems more efficiently organized.

Never were the achievements and the inventions of human genius more successful or more startling. Quite comfortably you may sit in your own living-room and hear men speaking in London or Paris or Geneva or Madrid. Uncanny machinery reaches out as it were into thin air, and without effort or noise or even apparent motion brings to you melodies and harmonies that are played on instruments possibly thousands of miles away. Soaring like birds, men ride in giant aircraft above the earth and clouds. They glide with equal facility beneath the very waters of the ocean. In medicine, in surgery, in engineering, in every science, modern discoveries and advances are all but incredible. We have in our day a civilization that is the grandest in the history of the human race. We have the greatest wealth, the highest culture, the finest comforts, the most advanced science of all time.

But with all of this there is little or no recognition of God. There is little or no recognition that He is the supreme Creator, Owner, and Ruler of the world, of all mankind, of the very intelligence of man that has achieved this progress, of the very laws of nature and of science that man has painfully and laboriously ferreted out. And not only is there little or no recognition of God; there is also widespread and concerted effort to rob God of His honor and His rights and His authority. How in-

dulgently our philosophers, our scientists, and many of our so-called successful men smile at us, make allowances for us, even pity us for our old-fashioned faith in God! Is it not so? Read the literature! Listen to the discussions! Note the attitude and the actions of both governments and individuals. With ever-increasing volume the world in our day is crying out that it does *not* give God His place, that it *will* not give God His place — that there *is* no God!

And what happens? For all of this astonishing material progress, is the world happy? For all of this fanfaronade of accomplishments, is the world successful? For all of this most advanced civilization of all time, is the world at ease? What is the situation that confronts us? On one side, the highest, finest, most cultured, most wealthy, most advanced civilization in the annals of man! On the other, more misery, more poverty, more squalor, more hunger and cold and nakedness, more unhappiness, more human suffering and injustice than the world has ever seen! Behold the greatest and the saddest paradox in human experience! Dizzy heights of civilization! Blackest depths of human misery! And these exist side by side in our grand, our understanding, our all-knowing, our progressive, our sophisticated, our "successful" civilization of this day! And was it all able to prevent the

greatest war and the greatest man-made affliction of all history? And will protocols, pacts, agreements, conferences, articles, world-courts, working on purely political or purely economic foundations, be able to prevent further war, or be able to remedy the fundamental causes of the world's present misery. They have not done so! The most tragic fallacy, the most gigantic hoax, the grimmest joke of all time is in the failure of present-day civilization to accomplish its essential purpose, namely, to assist the average citizen — the ordinary man and woman — to be ordinarily happy.

And why is our civilization failing in this essential purpose? Dear friends, we are not now pretending to succeed where the greatest geniuses in the world have failed; we are not now pretending to solve at one stroke the problem of the misery that weighs so heavily on the world today. But we do maintain that one reason for the failure of our great civilization is that God is not given His proper place. One reason is the attempted dethronement of God as Creator and Master, supreme in ownership and dominion over all men and all things. One reason is the attempted cancellation both public and private, by governments and by individuals, of the indebtedness of mankind to God — of the debt owed by the creature to his Creator, the debt of acknowledgment, of obedience, of service, of love,

of worship. You will allow that most of the misery in the world today is traceable to injustice. Public injustice sends whole nations to war and to its horrible consequences. Injustice among individuals makes for unfair competition, unfair wages, unfair prices. Injustice among individuals makes for dishonesty in business and personal relationships that wrecks man's faith in man. It makes also for dishonesty in matters of sex that wrecks the home and family life.

What is the remedy? What will make governments, groups, and individuals more just? What will best take injustice out of the world? Will political agreements? Will economic pacts? Will private contracts? They have not done so! Experience of governments and groups and individuals demonstrates the need of a more fundamental basis and a more compelling sanction for justice. The recognition of God supplies this basis. His divine law provides the best sanction. For God alone is the one unerring Judge and Avenger and Rewarder of human acts.

"I am the Lord thy God" (Deut. v. 6). If our present-day civilization would accept the teaching of the Lord God as given through His divine Son, that all men are children of God and therefore brethren to each other and dear to God, then all

men would be truly neighbors. And if a neighborly world would but practice the greatest of all Christian commandments: "Love God above all things, and thy neighbor as thyself for the sake of God," would we then have — or *could* we then have — the enormous injustices, the unbelievable sufferings, the astounding failure in the essential purpose of civilization that makes our world a miserable place to live in today? But how can this be done when God is not given His proper place, when He is not acknowledged as supreme in dominion and ownership over His creatures, when He is actually pushed out of His own world by the very creatures whom He has made? "Man! Proud man!" cries Shakespeare, "Dress'd in a little brief authority! Most ignorant of what he's most assured! His glassy essence, like an angry ape, plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven as make the angels weep!" (*Meas. for Meas.* ii. 2, 118 f.)

Dear friends, we have been trying to do one thing in our words to you this night. We have been trying to make definitely clear our most fundamental obligation toward God, our obligation to acknowledge Him as God, and therefore to serve and to worship Him and to perform the duties of religion. These are duties which, owing to our very state and nature, owing to God's supreme dominion

and ownership over us, we are bound to perform. These are duties that we *must* perform, or suffer the consequences.

Furthermore, God is not a Power to be recognized and invoked only in time of adversity. Many people actually make a convenience out of God, recognizing Him only when they are in trouble and need help. Even then they have recourse to God only as a last resort, turning to Him only when they are *driven* to do so because man, or science, or their own efforts and ingenuity have failed them. "I am the Lord thy God," reads the commandment. God is our Creator, Owner, Ruler, and Master. We, His creatures, are entirely dependent upon and absolutely subject to Him. It is for this reason primarily that we must serve Him, worship Him, and perform the duties of religion at *all* times.

Dear friends, if Lent is to mean anything at all to us, it must mean attention to fundamentals. And first and most important among these fundamentals is our obligation as creatures toward God the Creator. God's own world must recognize Him! We must recognize Him! "I am the Lord thy God!" In the same words that Moses spoke to his people after he had announced this message do I speak to you tonight: "This commandment," said Moses, "that I command thee . . . is not above thee, nor far off from thee. . . . But the word is very nigh

unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it!" (Deut. xxx. 11, 14.)

But how is it with you? Do you come to church and perform the other duties of religion because you know that God is Creator, Owner, Ruler, and Master, whom you must serve and worship. Or have you thought perhaps that you were doing an unusually praiseworthy act, or even conferring a favor upon God? Have you had the attitude of "consenting" or of making no little "concession"? Have you perhaps been considering yourself too widely informed, too sophisticated, too broad-minded to narrow yourself down to the obligation of religious duties? And when you did so narrow yourself down, have you noticed yourself feeling rather generous and tolerant and self-sacrificing? Or do you really serve and worship God only because of gratitude, in *return* for His goodness, thus fulfilling what you consider to be your side of the "bargain"? Dear friends, owing to God's supreme dominion and ownership over us, owing to our very state and nature as creatures entirely dependent upon and subject to God, we are bound to perform the duties of religion. We must perform them! There is no choice, no option, no leeway!

And if we refuse? Then the words of Moses spoken long ago to a people who also refused are applicable to us: "If thy heart be turned away

[from God] . . . I foretell thee this day that thou shalt perish!" (Deut. xxx. 17, 18.) If on the other hand we do accord to God His proper place, if we do perform conscientiously our duties of religion, then the encouraging promise of Moses to the same people will be equally applicable to us: "The Lord thy God . . . will have mercy on thee. . . . If thou be driven as far as the poles of heaven, the Lord thy God will fetch thee back . . . and will take thee to Himself . . . and will . . . make thee abound in all the works of thy hands . . . in the fruit of thy womb . . . and in the plenty of all things" (Deut. xxx. 1-4, 9). "None shall stand against you" (Deut. xi. 25). Dear friends, in the words of the same great prophet of God: "I call heaven and earth to witness this day that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Choose therefore life. . . . And that thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and obey His voice, and adhere to Him. For He is thy life and the length of thy days!" (Deut. xxx. 19, 20.) He is "the Lord thy God!"

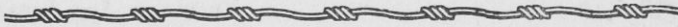
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*STRANGE
GODS*



The Message of This Sermon

We are forbidden to allow anything to interfere with our service and worship of the true God. But people today are leaning to the cult of self, of money, or pleasure, or of sex. God has consistently punished those who turn to "strange gods." He may punish us also.



STRANGE GODS

"I am the Lord thy God. . . . Thou shalt not have strange gods before Me" (Deut. v. 6, 7).



Our preceding discourse reminded us of the fundamental duties of religion that arise out of God's supreme ownership and dominion over us. We are bound to acknowledge God — to worship Him, to thank Him, to make reparation to Him for offenses committed, to manifest our trust in His power by calling upon Him in our wants and in our distresses. Our very state and nature, our very absolute and complete dependence upon Him, leave us no choice, no option, no freedom of decision in the matter of acknowledging or not acknowledging God. There is no question of conferring a favor, of "consenting," of making a "concession," of feeling broad-minded or taking unusual credit, when we perform the duties of religion. We are bound to perform these duties! We *must* perform them!

Dear friends, we say it is a lamentable thing that a dog should turn and bite the hand that feeds it; or that the recipient of great favors should turn

against his benefactor; or that a friend should turn against his friend; or a child against his parents. But is it not far more lamentable that a creature should turn against his Creator? The Creator has given to the creature all that it possesses. The Creator is his greatest benefactor, his best friend. To the Creator, more even than to his parents, the creature owes life itself. And in addition, the Creator has bestowed the possibility of eternal life and of an everlasting home in heaven.

But from the beginning even until now, creatures have turned against their Creator. The commandment reads: "I am the Lord thy God. Thou shalt not have strange gods before Me!" But creatures have defied or rejected their true God, and have turned, instead, to strange gods. You remember how at the very dawn of creation, Lucifer rebelled. Forgetting that his own transcendent glory was a gift from God his Creator, jealous of the supremacy of God, seeking yet greater heights, Lucifer made pride and self his god, and cried: "I will not serve!" You remember also how the people of Israel became impatient while they waited forty days and forty nights for their prophet Moses to come down from Mt. Sinai and from his communion with God. Scripture tells us that "the people seeing that Moses delayed to come down from the mount, gathering together against Aaron said: Arise, make

us gods that may go before us!" (Exod. xxxii. 1.) And what happened? Collecting their gold and their precious ornaments, the best that they had, they fashioned from these a molten calf and adored it. Judas, as close to Christ we might say, as Lucifer had been to God in heaven, chose the god of avarice, the god of money, to Jesus the Son of the true God. The corrupt cities of Sodom and Gomorrha bowed down before the god of sex. It is said, too, that in revolutionary days certain people of France emptied the tabernacle of its Eucharistic God, placed on the altar the image of a lewd woman, and bowing down, likewise adored the lecherous god of unchastity.

But, you may be thinking, of what interest are these things to us? We are living in an age of progress, of enlightenment, of culture! We practice no idolatry, no polytheism, no pagan worship! We may have atheism, and materialism, and nudism, and the like, but at least we have no strange gods. Dear friends, would that it were so! But we are all idolaters! We are all polytheists! We are all pagans! For we have all our own strange gods! In order to understand why this is so we must understand first what we mean by the term "God." If, by the term "God" we mean a Being or a Power that absorbs our primary interest, to which we give first consideration, that is our most important con-

cern in life, that occupies our attention, our allegiance, our service above everything else, that we prefer before everything else in the world, that means more to us than everything else, then indeed we have many strange gods! Then indeed we *are* idolaters! We *are* polytheists! We *are* pagans!

First and most important among these strange gods is the god of self. The cult of self is the most widespread, the most popular, the strongest philosophy in the world today. It means that whatever pleases us, whatever attracts us, we must have, and at any cost. Self must be gratified, served, worshiped! Self must have first consideration and every consideration — conscience notwithstanding, right and wrong notwithstanding, the sufferings or the rights of other people notwithstanding, God's commandments notwithstanding, the civil, the natural, the divine law notwithstanding, eternity and God Himself notwithstanding! Self is God! Men and women adore, love, serve, and offer sacrifices to self. Self is placed upon an altar and is made to say: "I am the Lord thy God! Thou shalt have no other god like unto me!"

The god of self is the greatest of the strange gods in the world today. But this god has conceived and has brought forth two other strange gods. These are money and pleasure. Think of the sacrifices laid on the altar of the glittering god of money: the in-

numerable petty thefts, dishonesties, deceivings, lies, subterfuges, cheatings, misrepresentations! And these are called, not theft, but shrewdness; not dishonesty, but business! And what crimes, what outrages, what atrocities, are perpetrated in the name of big business! Sins crying to heaven for vengeance! Suffering, poverty, hunger, cold, sickness, heartbreak! Life's savings gone! Old age faced with hopelessness and helplessness! And why? Because of someone's lack of conscience! Because someone, somewhere, has dishonestly manipulated the funds of others! Because the god of *money* was preferred before the God of humanity! Big business in many quarters kneels down before the shining altar of the god of money and fleeces people of their rights; cheats the buyer, who is overcharged; defrauds the worker, who is underpaid; robs the poor, the widow, the orphan! Dishonest business lays as sacrifice upon the altar of this glittering god the distracted father of a family, in despair because he knows not how to feed and clothe and house and provide bare necessities for his wife and little children! Dishonest business drags the mother before this heartless god and sees her pinching, saving, scraping, worrying, growing prematurely old because she has not sufficient for her children or for herself, while someone else is growing rich on ill-gotten gains! This cold god of

money receives in sacrifice even the little children and robs them of the very joy of enjoying childhood. Their faces are pale and pinched, their eyes feverishly bright from hunger and want, their little bodies undernourished, their health undermined! And many of them are driven to crime in order to provide for themselves, or their parents, or their brothers and sisters! Money surely is god! Men commit perjury, arson, robbery, murder, any crime, for money! Women prostitute themselves for money! People would sell their souls for money! Like Judas, they would betray their very God, if they could do so, for money!

And pleasure is god! We do not refer to legitimate pleasure. "God hath made this world so fair!"* It is a beautiful and an enjoyable place. God has given to man capacities for pleasure. And He intends that man should enjoy both the world and his legitimate pleasures. But there are many people who live *only* for pleasure! They are like the Israelites of old when they fashioned their golden calf. Scripture says of them: "The people sat down to eat and drink and they rose up to play" (Exod. xxxii. 6). So it is with many people today. Pleasure is paramount. Nothing else matters. They have no other interest in living. And with their pleasures, neither God nor man must interfere!

Foremost among illegitimate pleasures is sex.

*James Montgomery, *The Earth Full of God's Goodness*.

Self is god. Money is god! Sex is god! And on the slimy, putrid, stench-exhaling altar of sex, what sacrifices are laid! What shameless, unmentionable, beastlike sacrifices are offered! And who are the votaries? Who are the worshipers that grovel in the filth before that reeking shrine? Are they only the crude, the uncouth, the rough, the ignorant, the poor, the lowly? No! But they are also the cultured, the polished, the refined, the educated, the smooth men and women of society! There in that filth you will find, groveling side by side, the well-groomed man of affairs and the toiling laborer, the demure and much bechaperoned maiden and the charwoman, the débutante and the derelict, the self-righteous leader of the élite and the lowly outcast of society. All are begrimed with the same sensual soot!

And there are some who are called human beings, but who are, rather, beasts in human form. These drag to that altar even little children to defile them! Men and women with no conscience, no respect for the purest and most delicately lovely thing in this world — the sweet scent of the child-heart that knows no sin! But these fiends, in order to gratify the god of sex, drag that child-heart into the knowledge of sin and filthiness! Pure boyhood, maidenhood, youth! These, too, are brought to the same lascivious altar of the lustful god of sex. These, too, are soiled and spoiled.

Dear friends, do you recall the words that used to be spoken by the judge when he passed sentence of death upon a criminal? Do you remember how he read these fearful words: "And you shall be hanged by the neck until you are dead. And may God have mercy on your soul!" May God have mercy on the soul of that man or that woman who first leads an innocent person into a knowledge of impurity, or into a career of unchaste sin! May God have mercy!

Does it not seem that the whole world is bowing down in worship of this god of sex? What is it that you read in popular books and magazines? What is it that you see and hear in the theaters? What is it that dictates no little of the style of dress? What is it that is often the "hit" at parties and social gatherings? What is it that goes on in many business and professional offices? What is it that lurks along secluded roads in parked automobiles? What is it that is daringly open in dance halls, and is not ashamed in apartments and living rooms? What is it that steals away the wife from husband, the husband from wife, that multiplies divorces, that wrecks homes, that increases immorality, that shames youth, that disgraces old age? What is it that taints all humanity? It is the worship, widespread, defiant, and increasing, of this obscene god of sex! Oh, we may not indeed, like the people of France in revolutionary days, have taken out of

the tabernacle our Eucharistic God and placed on the altar the image of a lewd woman. But we have our lewdness, we have our unchastity, we have our bodily pleasures, we have our monstrous god of sex that strides triumphant over every convention, that tramples down every sense of decency, that smashes all moral ideals, that flaunts his bawdy challenge in the very face of God Himself! For this strange god actually rides astride the altars of humanity, claiming the bestial obedience, the filthy service, the shameless allegiance of men and women. This strange god has replaced the true God! Self is god! Money is god! Pleasure is god! And sex is god!

And yet the commandment reads: "I am the Lord thy God. Thou shalt not have strange gods before Me!" "Yes!" replies mankind, "Thou art the Lord my God — aye, and a 'jealous God!' But I will have strange gods before Thee! I will have myself, my every indulgence of self, my every want, appetite, desire, whim, completely satisfied! I will have my money, my dishonest money, my ill-gotten gains! I will have my pleasure, my round of pleasure! I will have my forbidden sexual indulgence, sexual crime, sexual atrocity! I will have them! And not God nor man will gainsay me! What though, inexorably, the commandment calls: 'I am the Lord thy God. Thou shalt not have strange gods before Me!'" (Deut. v. 6, 7.)

My friends, who, or what, are your strange gods? Remember, anything that you prefer before God, or put in the place of God, or that means more to you than God, becomes "god" to you. Is self your god? Do you place yourself, your comfort, your convenience before God by refusing to adore Him in Mass on Sundays, by refusing to go to confession and Holy Communion, by refusing to remove from your soul the stain of insult and sin, by refusing even to think of God, by living as though there were no God — except yourself? Have you perhaps been deifying yourself? Is money your god? Do you lose sight of every restraining law, both human and divine, when there is a question of money? Is the almighty dollar at once your religion and your god? Do you live year after year absorbed in your pleasures, as though death were the end, instead of the beginning of real life? Is sex your god? Do you sacrifice every ideal, every good instinct, every moral teaching, every commandment of God, to sex? Must you have your sexual pleasures at *any* cost? Are you perhaps not only a devotee, but also a slave to the god of self, or money, or pleasure, or of sex?

"I am the Lord thy God . . . a jealous God!" reads the commandment. "Thou shalt not have strange gods before Me!" Lucifer had his strange god. He deified himself. And his sin transformed him into a devil. His sin occasioned the creation of

hell. The Israelites, adoring the molten calf, had a strange god. They deified pleasure. And in one day, at God's command, three and twenty thousand were slain by the sword. Judas had a strange god. He deified money. And of the fate of Judas we hesitate even to conjecture. The people of Sodom and Gomorrha had a strange god. They deified illegitimate sexual pleasure. And those two cities and all the guilty people in them were burned to ashes.

Who, and what, are your strange gods? For everybody, at one time or at another, has built unto himself a secret shrine where he goes to offer forbidden worship on the altar of some strange god. Is it self? Is it money? Is it pleasure? Is it sex? And if it is any of these, what has the worship of your strange god done for you? You remember the idolatrous people of Israel. They gave the best that they had, in gold and ornaments and talents, to the fashioning of their golden calf. So we also give the best that we have to the worship of our strange gods. We give our time. We give our talents. Perhaps we give our money. We give our peace of mind. We give our peace of conscience. We give our very hope of happiness and of saving our souls. We give all. We receive nothing — unless a disgraceful, dishonest, passing advantage, and the condemnation by God for our guilt. "They have provoked Me," He says in the Scripture, "with that which was no god, and have angered Me with their vanities!"

(Deut. xxxii. 21.) And again: "Revenge is Mine, and I will repay them in due time" (Deut. xxxii. 35). "A fire is kindled in My wrath, and shall burn even to the lowest hell!" (Deut. xxxii. 22.) "For they shall be confounded for the idols to which they have sacrificed!" (Isa. i. 29.) "Thus saith the Lord," we read again, "you have left Me, and I have left you."

Dear friends, may I warn you with Scriptural words inspired by God Himself: "Beware lest perhaps your heart be deceived, and you depart from the Lord, and serve strange gods and adore them" (Deut. xi. 16). Is there, buried deep down in your heart perhaps, a secret shrine where you have erected an altar to a strange god? If there is, if there is anything in your life that is taking you away from the worship and service of the true God, go into that shrine, tear down that altar, smash that idol! "Overthrow their altars!" says the Scripture, "Break down their statues, burn their groves with fire, break their idols in pieces!" (Deut. xii. 3.) And dear friends, the first blow is a good confession!

Ah, but you say: "I cannot! I cannot tear down that shrine! I cannot smash that idol! I cannot *give up!* I cannot *do without!*" My dear friends, you *can!* You *can* — if you want to! You can come and kneel at the Eucharistic shrine of the true God. You can remember that He is the God of Love and of

Loveliness and of Mercy, who made you, who loves you, who planned heaven for you, who came on earth and suffered and died for you, who is here forever on His altar waiting for you! Kneeling at His shrine, remembering all of this, you can ask for the courage that you need to rule yourself. You can ask for the faith that you need to acknowledge Him. You can ask for the vision that you need to see out and beyond and around those allurements that cloud your view of the eternal destiny that stretches away before you after death. You *can* do these things if you want to! You *can* tear down your old shrines! You *can* smash those idols. You *can* know and love and serve and worship the true God! And — you must! Or lose your soul in hell forever! If fear of damnation will not force you, then will not the love and the mercy and the kindness of your God persuade you? Love is stronger than fear, mightier than force, lovelier than all the earthly pleasures in this world. And, says the Scripture: “God *is* Love!” (I John iv. 8.)

Dear friends, once more, and for the last time, I address you in the words of God’s prophet: “Behold I set forth in your sight this day a blessing and a curse. A blessing if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God. . . . A curse if you obey not the commandments . . . but revolt . . . and walk after strange gods . . . !” (Deut. xi. 26–28.)

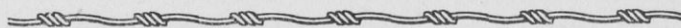
The first part of the book is devoted to a general history of the world, from the beginning of time to the present day. The author discusses the various stages of human civilization, from the earliest times to the modern era. He traces the development of the human race, from the first appearance of man on earth to the present day. He also discusses the various religions and philosophies that have shaped human thought and culture.

The second part of the book is devoted to a detailed history of the British Empire. The author discusses the rise and fall of the British Empire, from its beginnings in the 16th century to its decline in the 20th century. He traces the expansion of the British Empire across the world, from its first colonies in North America to its vast empire in the East. He also discusses the various factors that led to the decline of the British Empire, such as the rise of other world powers and the economic challenges of the 20th century.

The third part of the book is devoted to a detailed history of the United States. The author discusses the founding of the United States, from the early settlement of the eastern coast to the declaration of independence in 1776. He traces the development of the United States as a nation, from its early years as a collection of states to its emergence as a world power in the 19th century. He also discusses the various challenges that the United States has faced throughout its history, such as the Civil War and the Great Depression.

The fourth part of the book is devoted to a detailed history of the world in the 20th century. The author discusses the major events of the 20th century, such as the two world wars, the Cold War, and the rise of the superpowers. He also discusses the various social and cultural movements that have shaped the world in the 20th century, such as the civil rights movement and the environmental movement.

The fifth part of the book is devoted to a detailed history of the future. The author discusses the various theories and predictions about the future of the world, from the optimistic view that the world will continue to progress to the pessimistic view that the world will be destroyed by nuclear war or environmental catastrophe. He also discusses the various factors that will shape the future of the world, such as technological advances and global climate change.

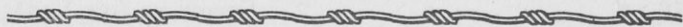


SALVATION



The Message of This Sermon

Your most important work in this life is to save your soul. A whole eternity of misery or of happiness depends upon how this work is done. You have but one trial period. Your working time is short. Do not neglect this "one necessary thing."



SALVATION

"Thou art careful, and art troubled, about many things: But one thing is necessary" (Luke x. 41, 42).



Dear friends, a story that can have great significance for all of us is told by the poet Shakespeare. According to the story, Tarquin, a tyrannical king in ancient Rome, had been informed of the great beauty and the still greater virtue of the wife of one of his noblemen. An evil design was thereupon formed in the mind of Tarquin the king. He planned to break down the fidelity of the wife and to rob her, by force if necessary, of the virtue for which she was so renowned. Seizing upon an opportune time when the husband was absent at a distant encampment, Tarquin paid a visit to the castle of the noble lady. She, little suspecting the king's base motives, received and entertained him with royal hospitality. And Tarquin, face to face with her, and discovering that her beauty far surpassed any description that he had heard, became completely blinded by his passion. Losing sight of every

law of God and man, the king was still more evilly determined to carry out his wicked purpose. Therefore, after everyone in the castle had retired to rest, Tarquin arose. It was now, as Shakespeare describes it, "the dead of night, when heavy sleep had closed up mortal eyes," and all "pure thoughts are dead and still, while lust and murder wake to stain and kill." Cautiously, Tarquin made his stealthy way along the dark corridors of the castle to the room where his victim lay sleeping. And then, in the midst of his course, he stopped. The conscience of the king had begun to smite him hard. And on his lips, Shakespeare places these words:

"What win I if I gain the thing I seek?

A dream, a breath, a froth of fleeting joy.

Who buys a minute's mirth to wail a week?

Or sells eternity to get a toy?"*

Dear friends, should we not in many instances say to ourselves the selfsame words? "What win I if I gain the thing I seek? A dream, a breath, a froth of fleeting joy! Who buys a minute's mirth to wail a week? Or sells eternity to get a toy?" The thing that we seek may be a pleasure or a gain that is forbidden. Or it may be a pleasure or a gain that is not forbidden. But at best, forbidden or not forbidden, sinful or innocent, the pleasures and the gains of this life are hardly more real than a dream,

**The Rape of Lucrece*. Historically, it was not a king, but the son of a Tarquinian king, Sextus, who was guilty of the crime herein related.

hardly more lasting than a breath, hardly more substantial than flimsy froth, which is blown away by the wind. There is only one thing that is truly real and lasting and substantial, and that is our destiny. There is only one pleasure that will never disappoint us, and that is heaven. There is only one gain that is eventually worth working for, and that is the salvation of our souls. "Thou art careful and art troubled," says our Divine Lord, "about many things: But one thing is necessary" (Luke x. 41, 42). And this one thing is the attainment of our destiny in heaven through the salvation of our souls.

If, instead of dwelling upon these thoughts, I were to tell you now how you could make more money, or increase your pleasures, or preserve your health, or keep safe your home and family, you would listen with keenest interest. You would not fail to follow every suggestion and to heed every warning. And rightly so! For all these are of capital importance to you. Do not forget, however, that the problem that I am raising is also of capital importance. It is the most critically, tragically important problem of your whole life. Upon the solution of this problem depend eternal consequences. It is the one problem that you *must* successfully solve. "Thou art careful, and art troubled, about many things: But one thing is necessary."

There is the problem — the attainment of the one necessary thing, the salvation of your soul. And this, the salvation of your soul, is the most important work you have to do in this life.

And why is it the most important? In the first place, God has made you primarily for this work. Reflect for a moment on the reason why you are living. Why did God create you? Did God have need of you, or of any creature? Why did God, who had no need of any creature, make those laws by which mankind is brought out of nothing and into existence? You know the reply. God made man to know Him and love Him and serve Him in this life, and to be happy with Him in the next. God made you, as St. Augustine says, for Himself. God has destined you for heaven. Therefore your most important work in life is to strive to attain your God-given destiny. Your most important work in life is to save your soul. So important is this work of salvation that we see God, as it were, stretching to the utmost the powers of His infinite genius in order to assist man. A whole universe — heaven and earth and even God Himself — are placed at the service of man. He is made only a little less than the angels and placed over all the works of God's hands. And when the work of salvation became impossible to man because of original sin, the Son of God came to the rescue and made it possible once

more. Not only that, but the Son of God established a Church and sacraments in order to aid man with this, his most important work. From without, man is continually reminded of this work by God's voice speaking through the Church. From within, he is continually stimulated by his God-given conscience, and assisted by God's grace obtainable through the sacraments. In a word, every great act of God in His relations with humankind points to the same conclusion, namely, that man is made by God primarily in order to achieve the one thing necessary, to save his soul, to attain his destiny in heaven with God. Man was created by God to do this work. He was redeemed by God to do this work. He can find no other satisfactory reason for making his weary life worth living unless it be in the accomplishment of this work.

Furthermore, dear friends, the work of saving your soul is the most important work you have to do in this life because a whole eternity of happiness or of misery depends upon it. You know that after death only two things remain. These are heaven and hell. Everything else passes away except these two. At death, you pass on to an eternity of happiness in heaven, or to an eternity of misery in hell. One or the other will be your destiny. The reason why you are living now is to determine which one it will be. If you save your soul and win heaven,

you win everything and forever. If you lose your soul, then, even though you may gain everything else in this world, you lose everything, and you lose it forever. You are now free to choose either heaven or hell. You must choose one or the other. Surely, with a whole eternity of happiness or misery hanging in the balance, it is evident that the one necessary thing for you to do is to attain heaven. Surely it is evident that the most important work you have to do in this life is to save your soul.

The story of the last moments of the great English statesman and martyr, Sir Thomas More, illustrates the importance of making the proper choice between an eternity of happiness and an eternity of misery. It is said that when Sir Thomas came out of his dungeon on the way to lay his head on the executioner's block, his wife whom he dearly loved was permitted to speak with him. And she, heartbroken and beside herself with grief at the prospect of losing her husband, begged him to do the one thing that would save his life. She begged him to make some formal statement, even though he did not mean the words in his heart, by which he would renounce his religion. And in order to persuade him, she reminded him of her own great love, picturing for him the years of happiness that might yet be spent in his own home and in the bosom of his family. She drew for him also the glorious future

that would follow his return to high office and to his former power and prestige at the court and in the realm. "And how long," asked Sir Thomas, "do you think I shall live to enjoy this happiness and these honors?" "You will live," she replied, "at least twenty years more!" "Twenty years!" responded Sir Thomas. "Twenty years of earthly pleasure in exchange for an eternity of misery in hell!"

Dear friends, you are thinking, no doubt, that only a fool would make a bargain like that. Only a fool would exchange twenty years of earthly pleasure for an eternity of misery in hell. But dear friends, how many fools are there in the world who do make that bargain! How many Catholics are there who are willing to risk an exchange, not of twenty years, but even of twenty minutes of forbidden earthly pleasure for an eternity of misery! Are you, perchance, making a bargain like that right now? Are you risking a whole eternity because you refuse to give up the pleasure of certain sins, or because you must have certain dishonest or unjust advantages? Are you living now as though your most important work in life were the solution of your present problems or the enjoyment of present happiness? Are you living now as though this life were the only real life, and as though there were no death, no God, no eternal life, and no soul to be

saved? If you are, then these words of St. Paul may have reference to you: "Because that, when they knew God, they have not glorified Him as God . . . and their foolish heart was darkened. For professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. . . . Being filled with all iniquity, fornication, avarice . . . hateful to God, who, having known the justice of God, did not understand that they who do such things are worthy of death" (Rom. i. 21 ff.). "Know you not," St. Paul says again, "that the unjust shall not possess the kingdom of God? Do not err: neither fornicators, . . . nor adulterers, . . . nor thieves, . . . nor drunkards, . . . nor extortioners, shall possess the kingdom of God" (I Cor. vi. 9, 10).

Again, the work of saving your soul is the most important work of your whole life, because no other work that you may do is either lasting or completely satisfactory. You may be the most successful person in the whole world. You may labor and toil all your life long and amass great wealth. You may build a happy home and enjoy all the friendship and love that can come into one person's life. You may be admired, respected, well known, and even famous. But how long does it last? And with what hardship and worry perhaps are these things maintained? In so pitifully short a time, and just when you are getting ready to settle down and en-

joy these things, come sickness and death. And then you leave it all — friends, love, money, reputation, power, office, home, family, everything — at the side of your grave. You did a noble and a great work, perhaps, in your lifetime. But in doing it, did you forget all about that other work, all about your destiny, all about your eternity, all about the happiness in heaven for which God created and redeemed you? Were you so careful and troubled about these things that you neglected the one necessary thing — the salvation of your soul? Now, as you are leaving everything else behind, and are on your way through death, you can see the meaning of the words of the Son of God: What shall it profit? “What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark viii. 36, 37.) Looking back upon life from the other side of the grave, what do you think of it all — the labor, the worry, the success, the money, the pleasures, the happinesses of life? Do you catch perhaps the echo of a wise man’s words: “When I turned myself to all the works which my hands had wrought, and to the labors wherein I had labored in vain, I saw in all things vanity, and vexation of mind, and that nothing was lasting under the sun” (Eccles. ii. 11). Are you, as you look back at fleeting life from the other side

of the grave, and as you look forward to eternal life — are you realizing that only one thing was necessary? Are you realizing that your most important work while on earth was to save your soul, and to achieve an eternity of happiness?

Dear friends, in none of this do we mean to imply that we should neglect the ordinary duties of life, or that we do wrong in seeking the legitimate pleasures that life affords. But we do mean that in our concentration on these things, we should not forget the one necessary thing. All these things are good, and necessary. But they are only temporarily necessary. We should not live for them alone. We should not so work for them as though this were the only work we had to accomplish. But we should make them part of, and incidental to, the one great and most important work of all — the work for which God has made us, the work on which depends a whole eternity of happiness, the work of saving our souls.

And there is no one else who can do this most important work of your whole life except your own self. Much is done for you in this life by God and by other people. But this work of saving your soul must be done by yourself, with God's help. As St. Augustine says, God, who made you without yourself, will not redeem you without yourself, that is, without your co-operation. You may hire a sten-

ographer, or a clerk, or a servant to work for you. But you cannot hire or secure anyone to do this work. The work of saving your soul must be done by you, and by you alone, aided by God. On the other hand, it may be that you spend most of your life working for other people. In this matter of saving your soul you work for yourself alone. No one else except you can do this work.

Furthermore, you have only one opportunity to do this work. If you fail to do it properly, there is no remedy. You cannot try over again. You live on earth only once. When you leave this earth, you will never come back. When you die, your trial-time is over, your working time is ended, your lot is decided forever and ever. You have but one chance to do successfully the work of saving your soul. It is literally the chance of a lifetime, for you may work at it all during your life. But it is only one chance. Do you remember how this fact is brought out in the Gospel story about the rich man and Lazarus the beggar? It came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into heaven. And the rich man also died, and he was buried in hell. And lifting up his eyes when he was in torment, the rich man saw Paradise afar off, and Lazarus the beggar in heavenly glory. And he cried: "Have mercy on me! Send Lazarus that he may dip but the tip of his finger in water, to cool my

tongue. For I am tormented in this flame." And the reply came to him: "Remember that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime, and Lazarus evil things. But now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. Besides, between heaven and you, there is fixed a great chaos; so that they who would pass from hence to you, cannot; nor from thence come hither" (Luke xvi. 26). The rich man had his one opportunity to do the most important work of his whole life — the work of saving his soul — and he failed to do it. There was no second opportunity. No second trial was allowed. Dear friends, you, too, have only one opportunity to do this work, one trial-time, one working period, one chance of a lifetime. If you fail, there is no remedy. There is no trying over again. You fail forever!

Nor do you know how long you will be living in order to do this work of saving your soul. It is a work that must be done *now*, while you are still on earth. But how long will you be left? How much time remains to you? You have from now until you die. From now until the time of your death your eternal future is uncertain. But you can make it what you will. You can save your soul, or you can lose it. It depends entirely upon you, aided by God's grace. At the moment of death, however, your state is fixed irrevocably! At the moment of death you will have succeeded forever, or you will have failed

forever, in achieving the one necessary thing, in doing the most important work of your life. How much time have you left in order to do this work? Days and months and years are speeding by. Probably most of your lifetime is over even now. At any moment you may die. At any moment your working time may be ended. At any moment the eternal die may be cast for you. *Now*, therefore, is the time to be doing the most important work of your life! *Now*, not later on, but *now*, is the time to succeed with the work for which God has made you and redeemed you, the work of saving your soul. You are sure of *now*. You know nothing of *later on*.

Dear friends, what are you doing about this work? What are you going to do about it? Are you going to be so careful and troubled about other things that you will forget this one necessary thing? Are you going to allow the cares and worries and the burdens of this life, or the pleasures and the gains and the happinesses of this life to trip you? Are you going to live as though the solution of these problems were the most important work you have to do. Are you going to forget that these, important and necessary though they may be, are only temporarily important and temporarily necessary? Are you going to forget that the good things of life that mean so much to you, and for which you strive so hard, are not the only work, nor the most important

work of life? And that these are given by God primarily to aid and comfort you while you do the real work of life, while you strive for the one, eternally necessary thing? Are you going to forget all of this and confound present fleeting advantage with future eternal happiness? Are you going to exchange a few years of pleasure here for an eternity of misery hereafter? Are you going to be discouraged, perhaps, because life is hard, because the struggle against sin is never-ending, because the work of saving your soul is so wearisome? It is true, of course, that "the glories of this world, and its concupiscences, all shall pass away." But just as the glories shall pass, just as the good things of life are fleeting, so also the sorrows shall pass; so also are the burdens and the struggles of life equally fleeting. Nothing on this earth or in this life lasts long.

"What is wealth?" the king would say,

"Even this shall pass away.

Pleasure comes, but not to stay;

Even this shall pass away.

Pain is hard to bear," he cried,

"But with patience, day by day,

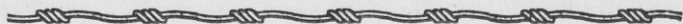
Even this shall pass away."*

*Theodore Tilton, *All Things Shall Pass Away*.

Yes, dear friends, everything on this earth and in this life passes away. Only heaven and hell remain. But we can look forward to heaven. "For we know," says St. Paul, "if our earthly house of this habitation be dissolved, that we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in heaven" (II Cor. v. 1). And we can attain heaven surely, if we realize that the most important work we have to do in this life is to save our souls. As to the other things that attract or afflict us, whether they be good or bad, innocent or sinful, lawful or unlawful, we can say even as King Tarquin of old: "What win I if I gain the thing I seek? A dream, a breath, a froth of fleeting joy! Who buys a minute's mirth to wail a week? Or sells eternity to get a toy?" Dear friends, the prayer of one who had been careful and troubled about many things and who learned that only one thing was necessary, the prayer of a man who spent his best years working only for the gains and the pleasures of this earth and who learned that his most important work in life was to save his soul, the prayer of the great St. Augustine should be our prayer also: "In thy mercy, O Lord, my God, tell me what Thou art to me! Say to my soul: I am thy salvation! So speak that I may hear. Behold, the ears of my heart are before Thee, Lord. Open them, and say to my soul:

I am thy salvation. I will hasten after that voice and I will clasp Thee to myself. Do not hide Thy Face away from me. Let me die, lest I die, that I may see it!"†

†*Confessions*, Book 1, Chap. v.

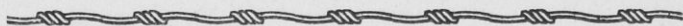


DEATH



The Message of This Sermon

Death is coming surely and quickly for all. Death is the beginning of real life, either in heaven or in hell. It is folly not to think of death, and worse folly not to prepare for it. A good life will lessen the fear of death, enabling us even to welcome it as the passing of the last barrier to heaven.



DEATH

"Therefore, thus saith the Lord: Behold I will send thee away from off the face of the earth: this year thou shalt die . . ." (Jer. xxviii. 16).



When the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Juda were at war against each other, the captains of the army of Israel were gathered in the house of Jehu. And a messenger from the prophet Eliseus came to the assembled captains and said: "I have a word to thee, O prince" (IV Kings ix. 5). And Jehu, puzzled like the others because they did not know to which one the messenger spoke, said: "Unto whom of us all?" (*Ibid.*) Dear friends, in our own midst the ancient kingdoms of God and of Satan are at war with each other. And you, assembled here tonight in the house of God, may be regarded as captains and princes in this conflict — captains of your own souls, princes of your own destinies. And to you I come tonight, as it were, a messenger from God. And I say to you: "I have a word to thee, O prince." Immediately you ask me: "Unto whom of us all?" I reply that I know not to whom among

you the message comes. But it is spoken in the words of Jeremias the prophet. This is the message: "Therefore, thus saith the Lord: Behold I will send thee away from off the face of the earth: this year thou shalt die . . ." (Jer. xxviii. 16).

Dear friends, if you were making a journey and ahead of you there lay a dangerous bridge, would you be annoyed to receive a warning of the danger? Would you prefer to hear nothing about the possibility of losing your life on that bridge lest gloom be cast upon your journey, or lest you become disturbed and worried, or be compelled perhaps to change your route? Would you not rather greatly appreciate such a warning? For then you could make certain of crossing the bridge in safety, or you could choose if necessary a different route to your destination. Tonight I am warning you of a dangerous bridge that lies ahead on your journey through life. This warning is not given for the purpose of disturbing or worrying or unduly frightening anyone, but only in order to remind you that you make certain of safely crossing this bridge; or that you choose if necessary a better route to your destination. The bridge is death. You cross it on your way to eternity. You *must* cross this bridge. And it leads to heaven or to hell!

Dear friends, you have often been riding through the countryside, possibly in the glorious glow of the

setting sun, when you have been suddenly faced with a view of a beautiful cemetery. For a moment, perhaps, you have been startled at the sight. All the handsome monuments, white and gray, large and small, row after row, stand out so prominently against the soft green background. From a distance the cemetery looks almost like a city. In very truth, it is a city, the city of the dead, the city of "death, where a house is appointed to everyone that liveth" (Job xxx. 23). All the world lives in that city, or will live there soon. Everyone who is not there now is on his way there. You are on your way there. And they, the dead who have already entered the "house that is appointed," call back to us in the words of Scripture, singing the song of the city of the dead: "For thine also shall be so: yesterday for me and today for thee!" (Ecclus. xxxviii. 23.) Beautifully, a poet has sung the same sad song:

"The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave
Await alike the inevitable hour —
The paths of glory lead but to the grave."

And death is not only coming for all of us; it is coming fast! "For yet a little while," reminds St. Paul, "and a very little while, and He that is to come will come, and will not delay" (Heb. x. 37). Dear friends, the bridge of death that crosses to

eternity is close, very close, and is drawing closer all the time. No sooner are we born than we begin to die. Every day, every night, every step, every breath, every heartbeat is one less of the number allotted to us. Each brings us so much closer to death. Death is nearer now than when I began to speak. It will be closer still when I shall have finished speaking. You have often seen a little child blowing a soap bubble from a toy. The larger the bubble grows the nearer it is to bursting. Likewise, the larger our life becomes, the more filled with success or failure, pleasure or pain, joy or sorrow, the nearer it is to the end. Yes, often have we watched the little children at play. But how seldom have we realized that when these children shall be grown up and shall be as old as we are now, we shall be dead! We shall be gone and forgotten and never seen in this world again!

“While man is growing, life is in decrease;
And cradles rock us nearer to the tomb.
Our birth is nothing but our death begun!”*

Indeed, our situation is not unlike that of lambs and sheep that are herded in the yard of a slaughterhouse. We see them — healthy, gamboling, frisking, enjoying full and plenty. But we pity them. For we know that in a few hours they will pass

*Edward Young, *Night Thoughts*, lines 715 f.

through a gate and thence to machines that will ruthlessly slaughter them all. So also we who are now perhaps healthy and happy, enjoying life, and having full and plenty must soon pass through the gate of death. We, too, must come in a comparatively few hours to the end of our playing and our pleasures and our lives.

Have you ever heard on a still calm night a sudden long-drawn cry, or the sound of a distant bell? You listen. You are certain that the sound was there. But even while you are trying to convince yourself, it is gone. So it is with life, even with the longest life. It is lived and gone almost before we are aware. Life, it has been written, passes away "like a shadow; and like a messenger that runneth on; and as a ship that passeth through the waves, whereof, when it is gone by, the trace cannot be found, nor the path of its keel in the waters. Or as when a bird flieth through the air, of the passage of which no mark can be found . . . or as when an arrow is shot at its mark, the divided air presently cometh together again, so that the passage thereof is not known; so we also, being born, forthwith cease to be." Such is life, hardly begun before it is time to die! The sad life — like a long-drawn, weary sigh between the nothing we set out from and the eternity to which we go! The happy life — like a smile that is perhaps just breaking into joy-

ous laughter, when a cold specter suddenly chills it into the staring mask of death! "A moment's halt, a momentary taste of being from the well amid the waste! And lo!"* The phantom caravan of life has passed beyond earth's last horizon and is lost in the mysterious distance of eternity!

Yes, dear friends, death is coming surely to all of us, and even in normal lives it is coming fast. But if death should come abnormally, then it is coming faster still. How many are there who awake in the morning and work, plan, laugh, struggle, and are happy, and who are dead before night! How many who retiring at night, look forward to the next day's working, planning, laughing, struggling, and happiness, and who never work, never plan, never laugh, never strive, never speak again! For during the night they, too, have journeyed to the great city of the dead, "where a house is appointed for everyone that liveth" (Job xxx. 23). "Behold now," says St. James, "you that say: Today or tomorrow we shall go into such a city, and there we will spend a year, and will traffic, and make our gain. Whereas, you know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is a vapor that appeareth for a little while, and afterwards shall vanish away" (James iv. 13-15).

One of the strangest and most regrettable of all

* The *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayam.

the strange and regrettable things concerning death is that we fail to realize that death is coming to ourselves. We know that everyone else must die. But do we realize that *we* must die, sooner or later, and soon at the latest? Do you, for instance, realize that your body will lie in that middle aisle, that Mass and prayers will be offered for *you*, that holy water will be sprinkled on *your* coffin, that you will then be carried away to the city of the dead, that *you* will be in that coffin that is slowly lowered into a grave? People will be sorrowful as they return from the cemetery. They will speak of you lovingly and with tears. Ah, but time mellows all sorrows! And human nature is strange! Soon they will forget, even as you have forgotten your own dear dead. Soon they will have difficulty in recalling even your anniversary. Soon the few who love you will also be dead. And then no one will think of you. No one will speak of you. No one will even remember you. You will be dead and buried and gone and forgotten forever! Nothing will be left, except your mute voice as it joins a chorus that sings to a passing world the song of the city of the dead: "For thine also shall be so! Yesterday for me, and today for thee!" (Ecclus. xxxviii. 23.)

Dear friends, may we remind you once more that in this consideration of death it is not our purpose to disturb, nor to worry, nor to frighten. We desire

simply to warn you that at the end of life you must die, you must cross a bridge that spans the chasm between this world and the next, and you must cross it en route either to heaven or to hell. Could you at this moment cross that bridge with safety? Can you with safety continue on your present route to that bridge? Should you by reason of sin detour and take another route? Are you certain that your present route is leading you to a happy eternity? Have you, as guides that safely point the way through life and death, any reassuring signs? Have you peace of conscience? Are you fulfilling your religious obligations? Have you confessed your sins? Do you receive the sacraments regularly? Is there at this moment any sin, or any repetition of sin, that endangers your crossing of the bridge of death? Remember, you may die at *any* moment!

And as you die, so will you be forever! As the tree falls so shall it lie! As you die, so will you be forever — either saved or lost. You who are sitting before me now — not everyone else, but you — will at some future time be in heaven or in hell, and you will be there forever! Which shall it be? It depends entirely upon yourself, upon how you die, upon how you cross the bridge. Remember, too, that once you have crossed you can never come back. Once you have crossed you will be where you are forever — either saved or lost. “Forget it not,”

says the Scripture, "for there is no returning" (Ecclus. xxxviii. 22).

There was once a man of whom you all have heard, who failed to take things like this to heart. He was the rich, self-satisfied man described by our Lord in the Gospel. "Soul," he said to himself, "thou hast much goods laid up for many years. Take thy rest. Eat, drink, make good cheer!" (Luke xii. 19.) Then he heard God's voice: "Thou fool; This night do they require thy soul of thee!" (Luke xii. 20.) Is this a warning, perhaps, for someone in this church? It is a warning for everyone to be prepared for death. Do not waste the precious days or months or years that may be left to you. Time passed is passed forever. It will never come back. It can never be lived over again. And there may be very, very little time left. Therefore, with St. John you should say: "I must work the works of Him that sent me whilst it is day: the night cometh when no man can work" (John ix. 4).

If you are not now ready to die, do not delay your preparation. Do not in the name of God put off your preparation until you are actually dying! Only one successful deathbed repentance is recorded in the life of Christ. The good thief on the cross was saved at the last moment. There may have been others. But only one instance is recorded. Furthermore, you may not, and you probably will

not, have opportunity for a last-minute repentance. God Himself has promised death to us stealthfully, unexpectedly, suddenly. "For yourselves know perfectly," says St. Paul, "that the day of the Lord shall so come as a thief in the night" (Thess. v. 2). We read also: "Watch ye therefore, for you know not when the Lord cometh . . . lest coming on a sudden, He find thee sleeping" (Mark xiii. 25). Or do you seriously think that in five minutes on your deathbed you can properly prepare for death, that you can then do a work for which God has given you a whole lifetime, that you can then arrange the business of a whole eternity? This is an affront to God, who has made you for Himself, and who suffered and died in order that you might more surely attain your destiny and your happiness with Him in heaven. Yet you would put off even the consideration of eternity until the very last moment! This is offering to your God the "shreds and tatters" of a wasted life! This is the very height of ingratitude, of folly, and of daring presumption!

And when you are actually dying, in what condition will you be to do the work of preparing properly for a whole eternity? Your strength will be exhausted, your mind distracted, your brain wearied by the pain and the strain of sickness and by the heaviness of approaching death. Is this the time you choose to return to God, the time to do the

work of a lifetime, the time to solve the problem of your destiny? Remember, dear friends, the words of Scripture: "God is not mocked!" (Gal. vi. 7.) Do not think that you can play the game of life just as you please while you are living and then, at the very last moment, finesse your way into heaven. "God is not mocked," says the Scripture. And again we read: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. x. 31).

But there are more cheerful thoughts that we can suggest about death. After all, death is the gateway to real life. Death brings our loved ones back to us forever. In the hour that our Saviour died upon the cross, death, which had been our greatest sorrow, became the channel for our greatest blessings. In itself, death is the gruesome specter that haunts and ruins every life. It is man's last and inexorable and complete defeat. It is the parting with everything, the parting with friends, the parting with love, and their parting with us. It is the fearful, hopeless, hazardous ending with precious life. And death is niggardly and cruel. It leaves after it only a bitter memory, strewn round with the wreckage of love and hope and happiness — only sorrow and tears, broken hearts, loneliness, emptiness, futility!

But death, like life, is "not what it seems." From the cross of Christ a strange glory has fallen upon

the grave, a strange smile passes over the face of the dead, a strange joy is awakened in our own sad hearts. For on the cross of Christ death itself has died! The grave is *not* the end! The parting is *not* forever! For the just there is no death! For the just, to die is to begin to live forever! For the just, death is but the gateway to real life! For the child of God, journeying wearily through this world, death is but the glad return to a loving Father and to an eternal, happy home in heaven!

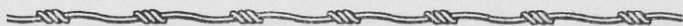
It is the defeat of death upon the cross of Christ that enables us to say with Ecclesiasticus: "Weep but a little for the dead, for he is at rest!" (xxii. 11.) And with St. Paul: "Be not sorrowful, even as others who have no hope. For if we believe Jesus died and rose again, even so, them who have slept through Jesus will God bring with Him" (I Thess. iv. 12, 13). And with St. John: "I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. From henceforth . . . they may rest from their labors; for their works follow them" (Apoc. xiv. 13). It is the defeat of death upon the cross of Christ that enables the dying soul to see in death not only the sword of justice, but also the smile of divine love; that enables the dying soul, even as the gaunt, gruesome specter is reaching out its cold hand, to say with Isaias: "Lo! This is our God! We have waited for

Him! This is the Lord! . . . We shall rejoice . . . in His salvation!" (Isa. xxv. 9.) It is the defeat of death upon the cross of Christ that takes the sting and the victory out of death, and transforms that cruel, haunting, spectral thing into an angel of blessing. For now, when we shall be dying, we too may say, even as our dying God said on the cross: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit" (Luke xxiii. 46). Can you not see how a good life can enable you to welcome death, and even to envy the dead?

"Life's like a cage, we beat the bars,
We bruise our breasts, we struggle vainly.
Up to the glory of the stars
We strain with flutterings ungainly.
And then God opens wide the door!
The wondrous wings are arched for flying —
We poise, we part, we sing, we soar!
Light! Freedom! Love! Fools call it — dying!"

Dear friends, has relentless death stolen from you some loved one and left you alone, and disconsolate, and heartbroken? Think not only of your own grief, but of their happiness. Knowing that they are in their heavenly home, "where death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow" (Apoc. xxi. 4), and that they are happier now than even you could make them, would you bring them

back again? Are you not feeling sorry for yourself, when you should be glad because of their eternal joy? This is not death! It is not the end! For them it is the beginning of real life! They only sleep! They are at rest! They wait, at home with our Heavenly Father, to meet us! Only this delay in our own death separates us from them! But we are on the way! We are on the way to join them! Death is coming surely and it is coming fast! For a messenger of God has come to us assembled here tonight, even as the captains of the army of Israel were assembled of old. And to us all, captains of our own souls, princes of our own destinies, the message says "I have a word to thee, O prince . . . Thus saith the Lord: Behold I will send thee away off the face of the earth; this year thou shalt die!" (IV Kings ix. 5; Jer. xxviii. 16.) You know not to whom the message comes, and inquiring, you ask: "Unto whom of us all?" (IV Kings ix. 5.) Dear friends, unto whom indeed? If it should be to *you*, are you ready? To someone here tonight, these words of Jeremias are a prophecy: "Therefore, thus saith the Lord: This year thou shalt die!" If the prophecy is meant for you, if you are going to die this year, are you ready?

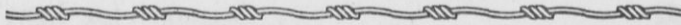


*THE LAST
JUDGMENT*



The Message of This Sermon

Judgment is an experience that we necessarily undergo. It is folly to shut out the thought of this experience simply in order to avoid fear or worry. Only the unrepentant sinner has to fear judgment. For the just it is the door that opens to eternal happiness.



THE LAST JUDGMENT

“Watch ye, therefore, praying at all times, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that are to come, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke xxi. 36).



My dear friends, the wording of the text I have just quoted is not only significant. It is also ominous. The words seem to suggest danger and the hazard of calamity. “That ye may be accounted worthy to *escape* all these things that are to come!” Worthy to *escape*! The word *escape* is employed when people have been threatened with danger, or hedged around by forces or circumstances that might have brought ruin. We *escape* from accident. We *escape* from destruction. We *escape* from death.

But what are “all these things that are to come”? Concerning what hazards are we warned in these words of the Son of God: “Watch . . . praying at all times, that you may be accounted worthy to escape”? Brethren, these words were spoken by Christ at the conclusion of His sermon on the last judgment. That is why they are so ominously sig-

nificant. Moreover, that is why these words are all-important. Let us listen to them again! "Watch ye, therefore, praying at all times, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that are to come, and to stand before the Son of Man."

My dear friends, very often those whom people call wise in this world are the most unwise, and even the most foolish. We ourselves believe, no doubt, that we are among the wise. And yet, we do the unwisest things. We are guilty at times of utter folly. For instance, because we are wise we never forget that debt that must be paid, that operation that must be undergone, that difficult business that must be done. These problems are important. They must be prepared for. And we never stop working at them and thinking out means for their solution. But — *the* most important problem of our whole life, the one critically, tragically, eternally important problem that involves our welfare, our destiny, our happiness *forever* is scarcely even remembered. This is the problem that is bound up with death, which is the end of all our present problems; and with judgment, which is the beginning of an everlasting and an unchangeable solution of all our problems. But of this problem, critically, tragically, eternally important, we scarcely even think! Is it not true that those whom people call the wise in this world are often the most unwise and the most

foolish? Wisdom that cares nothing for, or if it does care, never tries to *solve* the problem of life, the solution which leads to heaven or to hell, is assuredly the worst kind of folly. Lest we ourselves become guilty of this folly, we have recalled tonight the warning message of the Son of God: "Watch ye, therefore, praying at all times, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that are to come, and to stand before the Son of Man" (*Supra*). In other words, "Watch ye, praying at all times," that you may be able to survive the last judgment.

Dear friends, many people do not like to think of "these things that are to come." They do not like to think of death and judgment and eternity. They do not like voluntarily to think of anything that is disturbing, that arouses fear, that causes worry, that ruffles, or that threatens their composure. This attitude recalls that well-known and peculiar fact concerning the bird known as the ostrich. The ostrich, as you know, cannot fly, but it can run incredibly fast. When it is pursued the ostrich makes its escape by running. And when the danger is so close that running away is useless, the ostrich stops and buries its head deep in the desert sand. Then, because the danger is no longer in sight, the ostrich thinks that it is gone. If a human being were to do that, would you not call it an utterly unreasonable

procedure? Would you not call it the very utmost in folly? But are we not doing the selfsame foolish thing when we bury our thoughts out of sight of the spiritual hazards and eternal dangers that confront us? Are we not most unreasonable when, in order to have a false sense of peace, we shut out all consideration of the terrific, final crisis that we must eventually face; when we shut out thoughts of "all these things that are to come" — thoughts of what is going to happen after death and on the last day?

My dear friends, during two thousand years the Catholic Church has been studying human nature and humanity; during two thousand years she has been teaching humanity the way properly to solve life's greatest problem. Assisted by the experience of all those centuries, and also by the guidance and the inspiration of God Himself, this great teacher certainly knows how to teach, certainly knows what to teach, certainly knows what is good for us at times to think about. Therefore, frequently in the course of each year, the Church places before us the thought of what is going to happen on the last day. And Jesus Christ, who is God, and who came on earth specifically to show us the way to the heavenly paradise that He won back for us on the cross — He, our God and Saviour, the Divine Teacher and Lover of humanity, was at great pains

not only to *recall*, but even to *describe* what is going to happen on the last day!

Therefore, we may say that Jesus Christ Himself, in touch with us all in His holy temple tonight, is suggesting through His Church and through His representative that we take time out of life's strenuous contest, time to realize that this contest is only a preliminary and that the *great* crisis is yet to come; time to think over the problem of life, and of what is going to happen — to *us* — on the last day. Listen again to His words: "Watch ye, therefore, praying at all times, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that are to come, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke xxi. 36).

But is it possible that we could forget these things — so terrible that the Gospel describes men at their coming as "withering away for fear and expectation of what shall come upon the whole world" (Luke xxi. 26); so terrible that St. John says that "in these days men shall seek death, and shall not find it," and that "they shall desire to die, and death shall fly from them" (Apoc. ix. 6); so terrible that these words of the prophet Zacharias well describe the effect that the coming of the last judgment will have upon fear-stricken humanity: "The flesh of everyone shall consume away while they

stand upon their feet; and their eyes shall consume away in their sockets; and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth" (Zach. xiv. 12).

My dear friends, have you ever tried to imagine what the last day will be like? Permit me to give you a description of it taken from the words of the Gospel itself:

"There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, by reason of the confusion of the sea and of the waves; men withering away for fear and expectation of what shall come upon the whole world. For the sun shall be darkened; and the moon shall not give her light; and the stars shall fall down from heaven; and the powers of heaven shall be moved. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn. And they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with much power and majesty. And then He shall send His angels with a trumpet and a great voice; and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven. But when these things begin to come to pass, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is at hand" (Luke xxi. 25 ff.; Matt. xxiv. 29 ff.; Mark xiii. 24 ff.).

Suppose that in your own lifetime these things

were to come to pass. Can you imagine the scene? All at once, perhaps, there falls upon the astonished world a sudden, awful stillness. Nature simply seems to stop. And then is heard rising through the air a strange whirring noise. Everyone is looking about; they know not what is wrong. Birds and beasts scamper wildly. And the whirring swells into a shriek and a roar and a crash! It is the "confusion of the winds and of the sea." And through the midst of it, while men cover their eyes, a series of blinding flashes of light! It is the agony of an expiring sun! And darkness, like a pall, begins to settle upon the world; while cold, clutching *fear* begins to grip the hearts of terrified mankind. . . . And what is it now that horrified people behold stalking through the shadows? The graves are giving up their dead! But hark! High above the rattle and roar of a crumbling universe, piercing deep down in the very marrow of men's bones, freezing their fear-shrunken hearts — the BLARE OF A TRUMPET!! Round about the four corners of the earth it sounds, summoning all men to judgment!

Now is come to pass the prophesy of St. John; now the sun is become black; the moon seems as blood; the stars fall from the heavens and crash down upon the earth; the heavens disappear from sight; mountains and valleys are moved from their

places. And men? Men — the kings and leaders and great ones of the earth, the poor and lowly and despised ones — all *flee* to the dens and the rocks. And to the mountains they cry out: "Fall upon us!" And to the rocks: "Hide us!" Why? Because now is come the day of wrath; now are the powers of the heavens moved; now appears in the heavens the *sign*, the *cross*, of the Son of Man! And seated on a cloud, in great power and majesty, behold the Son of God, as He comes to judge the living and the dead! St. John in foretelling this event says: "I saw a great white throne, and one sitting upon it, from whose face the earth and heaven fled away; and there was no place found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing in the presence of the throne, and the books were opened; and another book was opened which is the book of life; and the dead were judged by those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Apoc. xx. 11, 12).

Ah, but my friends, it is impossible to describe the indescribable! Simply realize at least this much: one after another our friends and relations are quickly descending into the tomb. There, in silence and corruption, their bodies await the trumpet call of the angels. For most of them, perhaps, the time cannot come too quickly. Soon, we too must join them. A moment! And the trumpet

sounds! And we ourselves are with them, standing before the judgment seat of God. And then what will take place?

Suppose that I were to choose one of you now to stand upon a public platform. You are standing there. Watching you now is your father and your mother, your brother, your sister, your wife, your husband, your children, your friends, everyone that knows you and loves you and admires you. They are watching you now. Behold, the books are opened, and they see *what* you are! They see those thoughts of jealousy, of anger, of meanness; they see all those lustful desires; they see those impure, filthy, deliberate imaginings that you, the admired, the loved one, so shamefully indulge. My friends, could you endure these disclosures?

And that is not all! You stand there, and every wrong word that you have spoken comes forth: every unkind word, every mean, low lie, every vile, foul, shameless expression, every suggestive utterance! Now the whole world knows of it. And what are your feelings?

And that is not all! You stand there — and every sinful action that you have ever done is seen. You were all alone. No one knew. Everything was hidden when you yielded to that temptation; and now, you stand there, and *everyone* knows just what you have done! My friends, you too would

cry out to the mountains: "Hide me!" and to the rocks: "Fall upon me!"

And that is not all! You stand there — and every act against your neighbor in temporal goods, every poor family that your avarice has fed upon, has robbed and made miserable; every poor widow and orphan whose heart and soul you have wrung for a few pennies; every life's work that your ambition has wrecked — all these *cry out* against you! Every injury also to your neighbor in spiritual goods; every sin that you have caused by your bad example, by your scandal, by your permission, by your command, by your provocation, by your connivance, by your solicitation, by your entreaty, by your *force*, physical or moral — these too, most horribly of all, are accusing you now.

And that is not all! You stand there — overwhelmed with this shame. And now begin to arise the long-forgotten scenes of your early youth, scenes in which propriety was the least consideration. Also, every sin regarding religion, every irreverence in the holy place, every omission of an essential duty, every confession that was a downright lie to God, every Communion that was desecration of the sacred Body and Blood, every grace of God that was squandered, every opportunity for good that was wasted, every prayer that was neglected — all these condemn you!

And that is not all! You stand there, pleading perhaps for mercy. And now that innocent soul that *you*, by your part in its sin, have caused to be damned, comes and demands of a just God *your* soul for the same punishment! And then, down from the great white throne comes the Omnipotent Judge Himself. He comes down to you — shows you His wounded Sacred Heart that throbbed with infinite love for you, shows you His cross, shows you His pierced hands and feet and His thorn-crowned head, shows you His scourged Body, red with the blood that purchased your soul, and says to you: "Where is My purchase? What have you done with the soul for which I died?"

And that is not all! NOW comes the SENTENCE! "Depart from Me ye cursed into everlasting fire!" (Matt. xxv. 41.) The wise man, who had buried his thoughts out of sight of the dangers of death and judgment and eternity, who lived and laughed and played in a false sense of peace, has gone to hell forever!

My dear friends, do these thoughts and this picture upset you? They need not do so, if your conscience is clear. There is only one man, there is only one woman, who needs to fear death and judgment. That is the man, or the woman, who is living in deliberate, serious, unrepented sin. Sins of the past that have been properly confessed and forgiven

need never worry us. Though they were as scarlet, and as numerous as the sands in the seashore, they need never worry us. If they appear on Judgment Day against us, it will be only to glorify us and to glorify our Saviour, through whose grace we have repented for them. There is only one man and one woman who needs to worry about death and judgment — the man, or the woman, who is *now* living in deliberate, serious, unrepented sin.

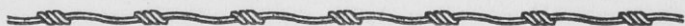
Indeed, we may even look forward with happiness to death and judgment. Listen to St. Peter: "What manner of people ought you to be in holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of our Lord, by which the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with the burning heat?" (II Pet. ii. 11, 12.) Yes, says St. Peter, "looking for," and "hastening" that day, because, as he immediately adds: "according to His promise," the promise of our gentle, loving Saviour, "we look for new heavens, and a new earth," in other words, a new and a renewed existence, "in which justice dwelleth" — in which at last we shall be forever happy. We look, as St. John says after he, too, had spoken of the Last Judgment, for "the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven"; and for the "great voice from the throne saying: Behold the tabernacle of God with men, and He will dwell with

them . . . and will wipe away all tears from their eyes: and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow, . . . for the former things are passed away" (Apoc. xxi. 2-4). Isn't that a consummation, a destiny, to be devoutly wished for rather than feared?

The thought of death and judgment may have its terrors; but electricity, the ocean, the sky, have terrors, too. Yet men, by proper understanding and manipulation, are escaping the terrors and reaping only the advantages. So too we can eliminate the dangers in death and judgment and make these simply the last steps we take toward our "new Jerusalem," our eternal home in heaven where we shall dwell in reunion with our loved ones, in the company of our God and Mary and the angels and saints forever! That is why the Gospel says: "When these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption is at hand" (Luke xxi. 28).

One time St. Paul was talking with a certain important Roman official who was a pagan, and whose name was Felix. And the Apostle was trying to persuade this proud, powerful Roman to give up his wrongdoings and to repent of his sins. What arguments do you suppose St. Paul employed? As it is written in the Acts of the Apostles, xxiv. 25, St. Paul "treated of the judgment to come"; and

"Felix, being terrified," asked him to stop. "For this time," said the Roman, "go thy way; but when I have a convenient time, I will send for thee." My dear brethren, *we* must not do that! We must not put off this message, this grace, this *warning*, perhaps, from God to a "convenient" time. How often have we done that already! But no more! Those who need forgiveness are going to confession on next Saturday night because *now* is the acceptable time! Put it not off! Who can promise himself a "convenient time"? Who can promise himself any more time than simply *now*? The thought of judgment, the fear of "all those things that are to come" will aid you to make the two most profitable and wisest moves in this world; it will aid you to give up sin; and to lead, as you have always really intended to lead, a better life. This is the "fear of the Lord" that is "the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. i. 7). "In all thy works," then, "remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin" (Ecclus. vii. 40). Remember what is going to happen — to you — on the last day. If, at this moment, you were to die, would you deserve heaven? When God Himself advises and warns, is it not wise to heed? God says: "Watch ye, therefore, praying at all times, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that are to come, and to stand before the Son of God" (Luke xxi. 36). God has spoken. What will be your response?

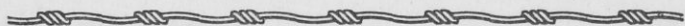


GOOD FRIDAY



GOOD FRIDAY

The world is full of people who are
not happy. They are sad, they are
lonely, they are alone. They are
looking for someone to love, to
share their lives with. They are
looking for a friend, a companion,
a partner. They are looking for
someone who will understand them,
who will care for them, who will
love them. They are looking for
someone who will be there for them
when they are in need, when they
are in pain, when they are in
trouble. They are looking for
someone who will be their rock,
their strength, their hope. They
are looking for someone who will
be their light, their joy, their
peace. They are looking for
someone who will be their home,
their shelter, their refuge. They
are looking for someone who will
be their everything. They are
looking for someone who will be
their good Friday.



GOOD FRIDAY

"Lord, it is good for us to be here!" (Matt. xvii. 4.)



Dear friends, we call your attention particularly to the words of our text: "Lord, it is good for us to be here!" These words suggest, not sorrow, but joy. And sorrow is the usual theme for Good Friday. The circumstances also in which the words were first uttered bespoke glory and power for our Saviour, and not the shame and defeat and suffering and death that we recall on each Good Friday. Nevertheless, as we begin our consideration of the passion and death of our Lord, the saddest scene that ever took place, we repeat the words: "Lord, it is good for us to be here!" These words were first spoken by the Apostle Peter on Mount Thabor when Jesus was gloriously transfigured, His divine face shining like the sun, His garments dazzling white as snow, and a Voice, the heavenly Voice of His Father calling Him "beloved." On Mount Calvary also, dear friends, we behold our Lord transfigured. But this transfiguration is one of ignominy, and wounds, and blood, and suffering,

and agonizing death. His Face in this transfiguration of Calvary is wan, disfigured with bruises, and covered with blood. His torn garments are crimson-stained. And a voice, the mocking, jeering voice of triumphant enemies is heard, a voice still echoing and re-echoing in His breaking heart the answer of the people to the question of Pilate: "What will you that I do to Him that is called Christ?" — a voice from His own creatures whom He loved and whom He had come to save, a voice that cried out madly to Pilate: "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" And yet, we who in reverent memory witness on each Good Friday these and many other sad things still say: "Lord, it is good for us to be here!"

And why, dear friends, is it good for us to be here in memory on Mount Calvary? Here is agonizing suffering! Here is a cross with its divine Victim nailed hands and feet! Here are cruel executioners with spears and hammers and nails! Here are mocking scribes and Pharisees hurling insult while our Saviour slowly dies! Here is a Mother broken-hearted, standing by His cross! Here is a rude multitude of pitiless people! Here are shame, injustice, ingratitude! Here are blood, groans, cursing, misery, and heartlessness! Here is death! Why, then, is it good for us to be here? Dear friends, it is because here, too, is Love! Here on Calvary is the Love of our infinite God! All of God's dealings with

humankind are motivated in His love. But here on Calvary is the convincing, overpowering, overwhelming climax of all the wonderful manifestations of that love.

We may see in Calvary the message of Redemption. We may see there the justice of God in respect to atonement for sin. We may see there the holiness of God vindicated in the sacrifice of His divine Son. But tonight we are going to try to see in Calvary the greatest, grandest, most consoling thing of all, the love of God for His creatures, who, having loved His own, loved them to the end. That is why, even as we witness the sad passion and death of our loving Saviour, we say, with joy in our hearts: "Lord, it is good for us to be here!"

And how much does our loving God love us? Is there any created being who can give an adequate answer to that question? Is there any man, any saint, any angel who can do so? Dear friends, only God Himself can tell us how much He loves us. When God created man it was because of His love, and in order that man might share in the happiness of heaven. And when that happiness was lost because of the first sin of the first man, God might have left us adrift — adrift, as it were, on a sea of misery — hopeless, suffering, deprived forever of our glorious destiny of eternal happiness. How much does God love us? He did not leave us adrift.

He planned to redeem us. He planned in His love to make heaven and happiness again possible for us.

And how did God work out that Redemption? Did He send a prophet, a saint, or one of His ministering angels? God might have done this. But no! Because God so loved us, He came on earth Himself, in the person of His divine Son. How much does God love us? God came Himself to offer the sacrifice for our Redemption. Just as a loving mother whose little child is sick chooses to nurse the child herself until it is well, so God, whose earthly children were sick unto spiritual death, chose to nurse them back to spiritual life Himself, because He so loved them.

And how did God come upon earth? Was it as some glorious spirit, radiating sublime magnificence, or as an almighty ruler with sway over nations, or as a personage of power and majesty and incomparable honor? Ah, my friends, how much does God love us? Behold Him coming upon earth not only as man, not only as a poor man, but even as a little, helpless baby! God came to us in the manner that might appeal to us most, as a little, loving child. He smiles at us from His Virgin Mother's knee. His little arms are outstretched to us as if bidding us to come and to love Him. His little heart, the heart of the God-man, is throbbing with infinite love for us. For God came on earth, a

loving God, to win both our salvation and our love.

Dear friends, when, among all the countless proofs of God's love for us, we stop on Good Friday to consider the last, astounding, most climactic proof of all, do we not of right cry out the rapturous words of the Apostle: "Lord, it is good for us to be here!" But many people have formed a mistaken conclusion concerning the climax of God's proof of His love as this is seen in the passion and death of our Saviour. When they behold Jesus suffering so much in performing the sacrifice for our Redemption, they suppose that because of the greatness of the work, or of the evil of sin, all this suffering was necessary. They forget that not even one of the terrible sufferings that Jesus endured was necessary in order to accomplish our Redemption. One single sigh, one tear, one moment of humiliation on the part of Jesus would have been sufficient to redeem the world. For every act of Jesus was the act of God. And every act of God has infinite merit. Therefore, not one of the many and terrible sufferings endured by Jesus in His passion and death was necessary. But Jesus, who loved us, chose to suffer not as little as He could, but as much and even more than would be humanly possible. Jesus chose to make His sufferings proportionate not to the necessities of the work of Redemption, but proportionate to His love. His love was infinite. There-

fore He made His sufferings limitless. He made no measure for His sufferings. He placed no restrictions on how much He would be willing to endure. And He did this in order to leave in our minds no possibility of doubt as to the extent of His love and of His desire to win our love in return. It was as if He had said within Himself: "I will go to the very limit in the suffering connected with the sacrifice of redeeming mankind. Then they cannot doubt My love for them. Then they will surely love Me in return."

Dear friends, no sermon for Good Friday would be complete without a reference to the actual suffering that our Saviour endured for love of us. Indeed, His whole life from birth to death was a life of suffering. The Garden of Olives, the betrayal by Judas, the tribunals of Annas, Caiphas, and Herod, the night in the guardroom, the court of Pilate, the scourging, the crowning with thorns, the way of the cross, Calvary, and the Crucifixion were only the last bitter ending of the role of suffering that Jesus had played ever since His baby eyes first opened and beheld His Virgin Mother. He was born in a stable. He knew hunger and thirst and cold and hardship and homelessness and labor and toil and want. He was misunderstood, ridiculed, reviled, persecuted. Often He was forced to save Himself by miracles from the pursuit of His enemies. His friends whom

He had helped most and loved most turned against Him or fled from Him. One of these, with a kiss, betrayed Him in Gethsemani. Because our Saviour was God as well as man He suffered more, and not less, as many imagine. Kneeling distraught in Gethsemani, Jesus as God knew all things. He knew the future. He knew how useless His sufferings and His love would be for so many of His creatures. He knew how many myriads of times they would forget His sufferings and spurn His love by deliberate sin. And therefore His heart, because of its measureless, limitless, infinite love, began to break by reason of the rejection of His love. In Gethsemani Jesus suffered an agony not of death, but of what is worse than the agony of death — the agony of the death-blow to love. Only those who have loved deeply, with all the power of their whole being, and have had their love spurned or hurt, can partially understand what Jesus the divine Lover of mankind suffered in the Garden of Olives. Only they can partially understand the agony that shook His sacred body with convulsive sobs, that tore through His heart and soul, that sent the drops, not of perspiration, but of His heart's blood through all the pores of His body. "And His sweat," says St. Luke in describing the agony in the Garden, "became as drops of blood, trickling down upon the ground" (Luke xxii. 44). There in Gethsemani, dear friends,

on the night before Jesus died, was a crucifixion not of the body, but of the soul of our Saviour, who loved with an infinite love, and who longed, but in vain, for the love of His creatures.

So agonizingly bitter was the suffering caused by the rejection of His love, which our Lord foresaw in the Garden, that as man He seemed to quail before it. St. Mark tells us that He "fell flat upon the ground" and prayed God that "if it might be, the hour might pass from Him" (Mark xiv. 35). "Father!" He cried out, "All things are possible to Thee! Remove this chalice from Me! But," Jesus then added, "not what I will, but what Thou wilt!" (Mark xiv. 36.) How much does God love us, dear friends? Only He Himself can answer that. And in the person of Jesus His Son He has answered it with His life and His death, with the crucifixion of His soul in Gethsemani and the crucifixion of His body on Calvary. Is it not, then, good for us to be here on Good Friday to behold once more these proofs of the infinite love of our God?

In the darkness of Gethsemani the hour for the suffering and the death of our Saviour had struck. Judas, His friend whom He loved and one of the chosen twelve, came with a great multitude carrying swords and staves, sent by the chief priests and the scribes and the ancients. And Judas betrayed His Master to them with a kiss, betrayed Him with

the most intimate token of dearest friendship! St. Mark tells us that Judas said: "Hail Rabbi! And he kissed Him!" (Mark xiv. 45.) At that traitorous kiss how the Sacred Heart of Jesus must have bled! How bitter was this beginning of His passion! How that kiss of betrayal that began it all must have scourged the soul of Jesus even more cruelly than later on the lashes of Pilate's soldiers scourged His body! And how our own selfish sins, which were present to the divine mind of Jesus in His passion, like the kiss of Judas, also scourged Him! For each of these sins, like the Judas kiss, implies refusal of service, rejection of His love, and preference against Him of some paltry gain or passing pleasure. Oh, we should not too harshly condemn the sin of Judas! He betrayed God's love but once. But we, time after time perhaps, have gone madly after our thirty pieces of silver!

And dear friends, in this consideration of the passion and death of our Saviour, we must not lose sight of the fact that He who suffered in the person of Jesus was the Almighty God of heaven and earth. He could, therefore, have struck His tormentors all dead! He could have saved Himself the shame and the torture and the agony! But He did not do so! Even in Gethsemani, when the soldiers stepped forward to arrest Jesus, the power of the God-head was manifested. At the very sound of His voice,

relates St. John, "they went backward, and fell to the ground" (John xviii. 6). Not until our Saviour permitted, could they arise and take Him and lead Him, their God, bound with ropes, to the mock trials before Annas and Caiphas the high priest.

In the court of Caiphas were assembled the scribes and ancients, seeking evidence against Jesus that they might put Him to death. And finding none, some bore false witness against Him; and their testimony did not agree. To all their charges Jesus would answer nothing. But when Caiphas said to Him: "Art Thou the Christ, the Son of the blessed God?" Jesus answered: "I am." "You have heard the blasphemy," cried Caiphas, who in mock piety tore his garments. "What think you? Who all condemned Jesus to be guilty of death" (Mark xiv. 55-64).

After that Jesus was detained for the remainder of the night in the guardroom while they awaited the morning in order to seek from Pilate the official condemnation to death. For Jesus this was a night of torture. Imagine Him during the hours before dawn, bound with ropes, and at the mercy of His jibing enemies. This man had said that He was God! They laughed at that! And they found in it sport to while away the time. Covering His face, they struck Him brutally while He was thus blindfolded, and said: "Prophecy unto us, O Christ, who

is he that struck Thee?" (Matt. xxvii. 68.) And they spat in His face — spat in the face of Him who was their very God! Can you imagine shame and humiliation that is worse than this? But Jesus patiently endured it all. How much does God love us, dear friends? Behold Him, in the person of Jesus, on that night in the guardroom, bound, blindfolded, buffeted, His own creatures spitting in His face, while He for love of us endured it all. Surely then, it is good for us to be here on Good Friday, beholding once more in reverent memory this almost incredible proof of the infinite love of our God!

When morning finally came and Jesus had been brought to trial before Pilate, the Roman governor could find no cause for condemning our Saviour. Pilate sent Him to Herod, who likewise could find no charge against Jesus that was worthy of death. Pilate, therefore, desired to release Jesus. According to the Gospel narrative, it was the custom to release to the people one prisoner on that particular day of each year. Pilate had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. He said therefore to the people: "Whom will you that I release to you, Barabbas, or Jesus that is called Christ? . . . But they said: Barabbas. . . . What then," rejoined Pilate, "shall I do with Jesus? . . . They say all: Let Him be crucified!" The governor asked them: "Why? What evil hath He done? But they cried

out the more, saying: Let Him be crucified!" (Matt. xxvii. 17-23.)

Pilate, however, instead of condemning Jesus to death, ordered Him to be scourged. He may have thought perhaps that the cruelty and the torture of this fearful Roman punishment would move the leaders of the people to pity, and cause them to relent in their clamoring for the death of our Saviour. We are told that the Roman scourging was so unbelievably cruel that at the fifth blow the skin was cut. At the thirteenth the flesh was laid open. At the thirtieth the whole back was flayed. The scourging of our Saviour began. Strong, cruel, Roman soldiers took turns with the lashes one after the other until Jesus stood literally in a pool of His own blood. In later days, when the martyrs were scourged, affixed to the leather scourges were lead and spikes and sharp bones. These curled around the naked body of the victim and lacerated and tore not only the back but also the face and chest and whole body. Often the scourging of criminals who were condemned to die was so severe that it was called the intermediate death. In many instances it must have been worse than death itself. How much does God love us? Behold Him, in the person of Jesus, stripped of His clothing, His hands tied, His back bent as He stands bound to a column or stake, and enduring patiently this terrible scourging for love of us. And

remember that not one of these sufferings was necessary in order to effect our Redemption!

The scourging finished, the soldiers gathered together the whole band before our Lord. Over His wounded, scourged body, and in mockery of His claim to Kingship, they placed a purple or scarlet robe. For a crown of royalty they platted sharp thorns and pressed them deep into His head. In His hand, for a mock scepter, they forced Him to hold a reed. Then they made sport of Him. Bowing the knee before this forlorn Figure, they cried: "Hail! King of the Jews!" (John xix. 3.) And again they spat upon Him. Snatching the reed from His hand they smote His head, driving still deeper the agonizing thorns.

Pilate came then and took Jesus, and in this condition presented Him to the sight of the people. Still bleeding from the wounds of the scourging, dressed in the mock-royal robe, the thorn-crown still upon His bleeding head, the reed for scepter in His hand, our Saviour stood before them. And Pilate, presenting Him thus, said: "Behold the Man!" (John xix. 5.) But when the chief priests and people had seen Him they cried out: "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" (*Ibid.* 6.) Pilate, however, was still anxious to release our Saviour. Once more he spoke to the people: "Behold your King!" (*Ibid.* 14.) "But they cried out: Away with Him! Away with Him! Crucify Him!" (*Ibid.* 15.) And the wa-

vering Pilate then delivered Jesus to be crucified.

Dear friends, hovering somewhere near during this ordeal so terrible for her divine Son was Mary His Mother. She could hear the loud cries of hate and of condemnation. And she knew that soon, walking in a sad procession of death, her Son would pass by. Along the way that led through the city to Calvary Mary waited. It was now about eleven o'clock on the first Good Friday morning. Soon there came to the waiting Mother the sounds of a moving, muttering multitude. And then appeared the procession of death! Rabble, Pharisees, scribes, priests, ancients, soldiers, the crowd of the cruel, the curious, the pitying — all came passing by. And Mary waited. Then came the two thieves, each carrying his cross. And finally, her Son! Oh, but what a transfiguration has taken place! Was this her Son, her Boy, so strong, so straight, so beautiful! His body was not strong nor straight now, but bent over, and bleeding anew from the exertion of carrying the heavy cross. His face, once beautiful, was now pale and drawn and lined and disfigured from spittle and blows. The piercing thorn-crown was still upon His head, sending crimson moisture through His matted hair. His feet were torn and cut, and His step unsteady and faltering. Her Son! Why did it have to be so! He had done naught but good! Wherever He went He had brought blessing and happiness and relief. He had cured the blind

and the deaf and the lame and the sick. Heart-broken parents, even after their children were dead, had appealed to Him and He had brought their children back to life. Little children trusted Him and loved Him. He had done naught but good! Why did it have to be so!

Even while Mary is thinking these thoughts, Jesus has stopped. From beneath the cross He is looking at her. His pain-filled eyes speak to her of His love, and of His compassion, too, for her present suffering. And Simeon's prophecy is being fulfilled. Deeper and deeper into Mary's breaking heart the sword of sorrow is piercing. The procession moves pitilessly on, and with it, Mary's Son and our Saviour, bending lower and more wearily under the cross, staggering at times, falling, lashed to His feet again — on and on and on, driven by blows and curses, jeered at by priests and people and soldiery, on and on through the streets of the Holy City to Calvary and to death.

Slowly Mary His Mother follows after. At Calvary a sudden, ominous silence falls upon the shouting, jibing crowd. About the crosses, an air of bustle, a sharp command, and then a sickening thud, and another and another! The nails! They are being driven mercilessly into the hands and feet of our Lord, fastening Him to the cross! How much does God love us? Listen on Calvary in that fearful silence while the nails are being driven through the

flesh and sinew and bone of our Saviour's hands and feet. Hear the knock, knock, knock of the hammer! Does it not tell you how much God loves you? Even unto this, even unto agony, even unto the crucifixion and to death God in the person of Jesus proved His infinite love for us! And the sound of those nails being driven into the wood of the cross is knocking not only at the court of heaven pleading for mercy on all mankind; it is knocking also at the heart of each human being; it is knocking at your heart and mine, pleading the love of our Saviour, pleading for a return of that love. The arms of Jesus are now wide-stretched, nailed and transfixed wide upon the cross, as though symbolically extended in gesture of the same pleading of Jesus for the love of His creatures. Soon the cross is upraised! And soon our Saviour hangs dying for love of us between two thieves!

And when the nails were being driven He had prayed: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!" (Luke xxiii. 34.) Who except God Himself, dear friends, could have spoken thus under those circumstances? How much does God love us? Come closer to the cross! Stand with Mary His Mother! Look up at Jesus who is dying for love of us! And remember that not one of these sufferings was necessary for our Redemption. Remember that Jesus voluntarily chose to suffer them in order

to prove beyond the possibility of a doubt the extent of His love, and in order to win our love for Him in return.

But the reviling crowd about the cross of Jesus — laughs! The Gospel says that “they that passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying: Vah! . . . if Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross!” (Matt. xxvii. 40.) “He saved others! Himself He cannot save!” (*Ibid.* 42.) And while they derided Him, Jesus hung in indescribable suffering, in pain from the nails in His hands and feet, in pain from the wounds of the scourging, in pain from the crown of thorns, in pain from fever and thirst and weakness and weariness, in pain from the aching in His Sacred Heart — an aching that told Him that for so many of His beloved creatures all His suffering and all His untold love would be in vain. Once more, as in Gethsemani, the people and the sins of the world are present to our Saviour’s divine mind. From the cross He sees them all. He sees you and me and our sins that we commit now, but that were present to Him then, adding to His torment by their rejection of His love. But, dear friends, if our sins were all present to Jesus in His passion and death, so also were our good works present to Him. So also were our acts of love for Him, our acts of faith, our hours of prayer, our sorrow for our sins — so also were these all present to

Him to comfort Him during these terrible hours. For Jesus was God. And for God there is no time. Everything is present to God, and not past or future. Is it not then good for us to be here in memory with Jesus on Mount Calvary? Is it not consoling to know that the good deeds we perform now were present to Jesus in the time of His suffering to comfort Him? And all the good deeds that we shall do, all the sacrifices, hardships, sufferings that we shall in the future endure for love of Jesus were present to Him on the cross. That is why, for love of our Saviour who so loved us, we should be willing to perform good deeds, willing to keep His law, willing to avoid sin, willing at any cost to be loyal to Him, who was so loyal to us.

Slowly, the weary, agonizing three hours on Calvary drag by. From the cross our Saviour forgave the Good Thief and promised him Paradise. And thus it is ever and always. God's mercy, God's providence, God's love is always overshadowing us. Times there are when we call it into question. Ah, but this is because we forget at those times how much God loves us — even us! Listen to these beautiful lines:

“Alack, thou knowest not
How little worthy of any love thou art!
Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee
Save Me, save only Me?”

All that I took from thee I did but take
Not for thy harms
But just that thou might'st seek it in My
arms!
All that thy child's mistake
Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at
Home!
Rise! Clasp my Hand! And come!*

When sorrow tempts us to doubt God, we should think of this. Appearances may be all against us. It may seem as though we must sink into the very depths of hopelessness and even into despair. But suppose that the Good Thief had given in to appearances! Why should he not have taken it for granted that this forlorn, abandoned, defeated, dying Man could never help him? And suppose that he had taken it for granted. Suppose that the thief had not prayed! Dear friends, after we have seen our God in the person of Jesus hanging on a cross for love of us, we *cannot* doubt Him!

Before our Saviour died, He gave His Mother and St. John to each other's care. Then, in the extremity of His suffering and agony as the victim for sin, Jesus cried out, as it were, for help from His eternal Father: "My God! My God! Why hast Thou forsaken Me!" (Matt. xxvii. 46.) Forsaken

**The Hound of Heaven*, Francis Thompson.

by man, typifying sin, for which He was now the victim, and which meant rejection of God, becoming as St. Paul says (Gal. iii. 13; II Cor. v. 21) a "*curse*" for us, becoming "*sin*" for us, dying in shame and torture between two thieves! Do you ask, dear friends, how much God loves us? Come! Oh, come on Good Friday to Calvary and witness the answer to this question! No wonder the astounded sun paled! No wonder that even at mid-day in Palestine, darkness, like nature's pall of mourning, settled upon the world! No wonder the startled dead came stalking forth from their tombs! No wonder the affrighted earth quaked, and the veil of the Temple was rent! No wonder the hearts of men on Calvary quailed, while they struck their breasts and cried out in the deepening shadows: "Indeed this was the Son of God!" (Mark. xv. 39.)

And when Jesus from the cross had said: "I thirst!" (John xix. 28), how little they had understood! They gave Him vinegar to drink, but He would not drink. They did not know that His thirst was for the love of His creatures, whom He Himself loved infinitely, and having loved, loved even unto the end. And at the end, His Sacred Heart broken because so many were to spurn His love, Jesus, crying with a loud voice, bowed down His head and gave up the ghost. At the end, Jesus died not from the torture and the agony, but from

a broken heart. The blood and water that issued from His side when the spear was thrust attest most eloquently and most sadly to this fact. Jesus our Saviour died at last from a broken heart! How much does God love us, dear friends? Look at your crucifix and learn the answer! And is it good for us to be here? Is it good for us to behold in memory this last, astounding, climactic proof of God's love on Calvary? He Himself has said: "Greater love than this no man hath, than that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John xv. 13).

Dear friends, let us return to the words of our text: "Lord, it is good for us to be here!" It is good for us to be here because in reverent memory we have witnessed on Mount Calvary in the passion and death of our Saviour the last, final, convincing, most consoling proof of God's love. It is not sufficient, however, merely to endeavor to understand how much Jesus suffered for love of us. Judas understood this, Pilate understood it, the executioners understood it far better than we. But they completely lost the wonderful significance of it all. We must not lose its significance. We must know always that the great lesson of Calvary is the lesson of God's love. Standing in memory beside the cross of Jesus with Mary His Mother, and then looking upon our crucifix, how can we ever doubt that God loves us? If God does not love us, what was He do-

ing upon earth in the person of Jesus? If God does not love us, what was our Saviour doing on the cross, dying an agonizing death? If God does not love us, how can we answer these questions? And if God does not love us, what use is there in living longer, what hope is there in life, what hope will there be in death, what hope for all eternity?

But God does love us, dear friends, and with an infinite love. God does love us! And that is why we are going to appreciate and to accept and to return His love by preferring loyalty to Him to paltry gain and passing pleasure. No longer will the thirty pieces of silver make us traitors to our loving God! God does love us! And that is why we are going to be willing to carry our own cross through this life, knowing that even though the cross be heavy, even though it cause us to falter and to stagger and at times to fall beneath its weight, even though it lead to a Calvary and to a very crucifixion by way of suffering and sacrifice and hardship, it leads also to Jesus our Saviour, it leads also to heaven and to the eternal happiness that God in His infinite love has prepared for us, it leads also to the time when we ourselves, gloriously transfigured after death, shall cry out at the vision of God and the possession of heaven forever even as the enraptured Apostle cried out on Mount Thabor: "Lord, it is good for us to be here!"

